

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Dravidianism: Theorizing Identity, Religion, Culture, and Society in Tamil Reformist Thought

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2mq92100>

### Author

Sibley, Collin Michael

### Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

Dravidianism: Theorizing Identity, Religion, Culture, and Society in Modern Tamil

Reformist Thought

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Religious Studies

by

Collin Michael Sibley

Committee in charge:

Professor William Elison, Chair

Professor Mary Hancock

Professor Juan E. Campo

December 2018

The thesis of Collin Michael Sibley is approved.

---

Mary Hancock

---

Juan E. Campo

---

William Elison, Committee Chair

September 2018

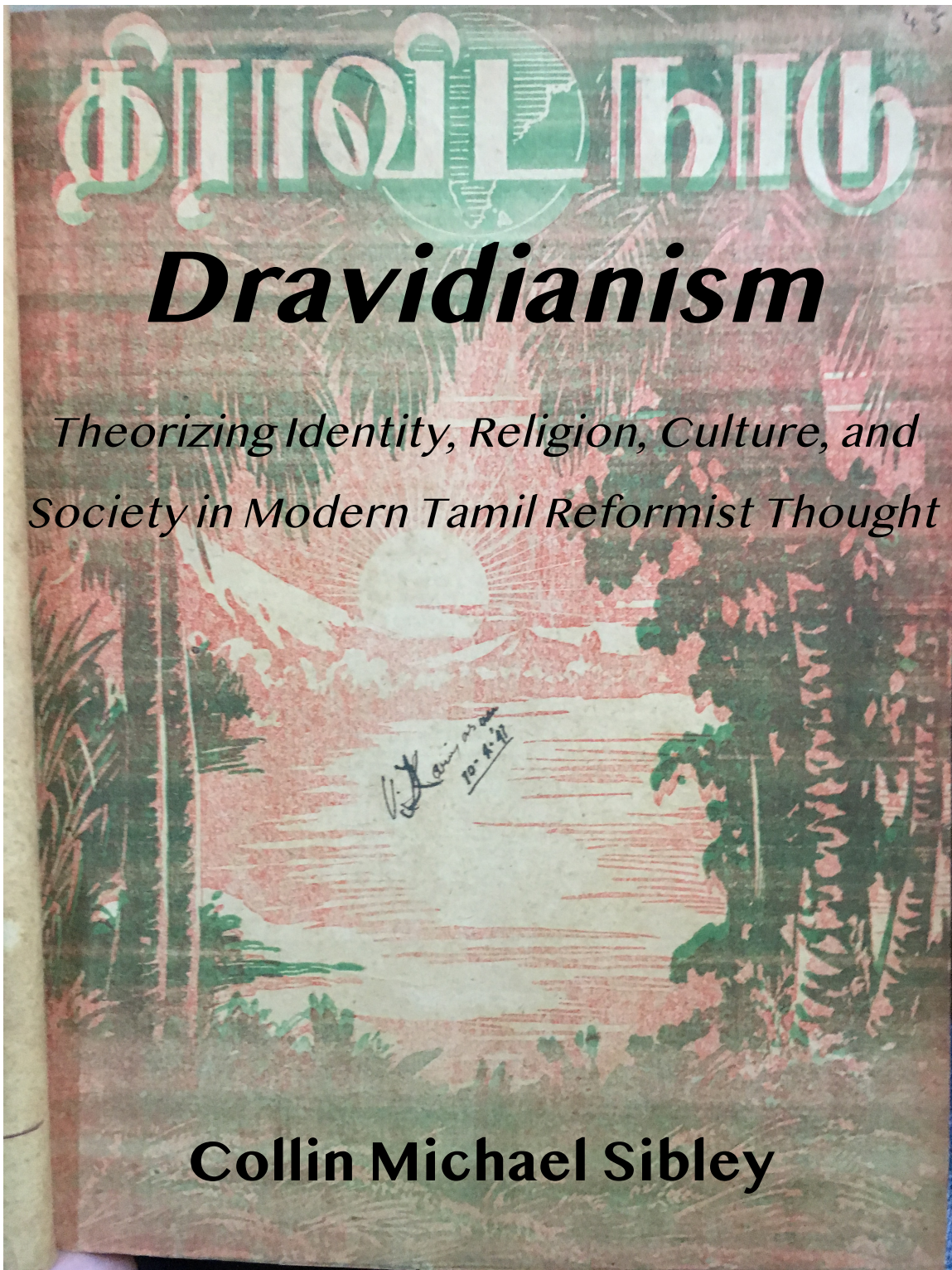
## ABSTRACT

Dravidianism: Theorizing Identity, Religion, Culture, and Society in Modern Tamil  
Reformist Thought

by

Collin Michael Sibley

Around the turn of the 20th Century, a distinctive set of social and cultural reformist movements emerged in the Tamil-speaking region of Madras Presidency, one of the major administrative divisions of British colonial India. These movements, which were affiliated with thinkers such as Iyothee Thass, Maraimalai Adigal, and "Periyar" E.V. Ramasamy, articulated their reformist ideologies through the lens of a shared historical narrative that told the story of the "Aryan" or "Brahmin" subversion of an ancient and enlightened "Dravidian" or Tamil society indigenous to the Tamil South. This thesis argues that individual discursive terms such as "caste", "religion", "Tamil", and "Brahmin" in the "Dravidianist" discourse of these movements cannot be understood in isolation from each other; rather, they all participate in a semantic field that coheres around the core narrative of ancient Dravidian history. This study connects this characteristic trait of Dravidianist thought to certain aspects of the intellectual and material context of colonial Madras Presidency.



## Introduction

In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Tamil-speaking intellectuals based in the Madras Presidency region of British colonial India became keenly interested in the civilizational history of the Tamil people. One of the most important causes for this explosion of interest in ancient Tamil civilization was the 1858 publication of a colonial philological treatise, *A comparative grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian family of languages*, written by the Protestant Scottish missionary Robert Caldwell. Caldwell's primary focus in this text is to argue that the four major languages of South India - Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam – descended from a common linguistic ancestor in ancient history. Caldwell's case for the existence of a Dravidian family of languages has since become canonical in modern linguistic science, but the considerable social and cultural significance of Caldwell's work in the Tamil country derives primarily from a subsidiary argument in Caldwell's text. Caldwell uses the findings from his comparative philological study to advance a broader argument about the history of ancient South Indian civilization. Previous colonial commentators had more or less universally dismissed the idea that civilized society existed in India prior to the introduction of Vedic culture at the hands of Aryan pastoralists entering the Subcontinent across its northwest border. Caldwell, combining the findings of his philological study with his observations of classical Tamil literature, argued that the common, non-Indo-Aryan ancestor of Tamil and the other Dravidian languages indicated the existence of a culturally accomplished, pre-Sanskritic society indigenous to the Tamil-speaking region of South India.

Since the publication of Caldwell's work, countless Tamil historians, politicians, literary scholars, social critics, and religious reformers have used Caldwell's vision of an indigenous and autonomous Tamil civilizational past as the foundation for a variety of cultural or social arguments. Some important historians and Indian nationalists granted esteem to the Dravidian Tamil past as a regional component of a single, unified history of the Indian nation.<sup>1</sup> In these schemes, the Sanskritic culture associated with the ancient Aryans retained its place as the basis for Indian national unity. However, a number of other Tamil thinkers and activists emphasized the historical distinctiveness of Dravidian Tamil culture and society from the Sanskritic culture of Aryan North India. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the emergence of a set of influential Tamil social and political movements that used a distinctive reading of Caldwell's historical narrative as the foundation for a variety of activist social projects. This particular discursive move generated a prodigious body of reformist social, religious, and cultural thought characterized by a shared set of ideological and symbolic structures and associations. This rich discursive formation, which I call "Dravidianism"<sup>2</sup>, is the subject of this thesis.

"Dravidianist" thought is best exemplified in the work of three brilliant Tamil reformist thinkers: Pandit Iyothee Thass<sup>3</sup> (1845-1914), the leader of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Tamil Buddhist movement that presented the Dalit<sup>4</sup> Paraiyar caste community as *Ādi Drāviḍas*, the indigenous "first Dravidians" of ancient Tamil society; Maraimalai Adigal (né Swami Vedachalam; 1876-1950), a prolific Saivite<sup>5</sup> intellectual and theologian who expounded a reading of the Tamil theological-ritual

school of Saiva Siddhanta as the original religion of ancient Tamil society and was a foundational figure in the Tamil linguistic purity movement; and “Periyar” E.V. Ramasamy (1879-1973), a dynamic and iconoclastic orator, thinker, and social organizer who expounded a radical ideology of anti-casteism, rationalist atheism, women’s rights, and economic leftism over the course of a nearly sixty-year-long activist career. A host of other significant intellectuals, organizers, activists, and politicians, such as Rettamalai Srinivasan<sup>6</sup>, T.M. Nair<sup>7</sup>, the Raja of Panagal<sup>8</sup>, Neelambikai Ammaiyar<sup>9</sup>, Moovalur Ramamritham Ammaiyar<sup>10</sup>, Kaivalyam Swamikal<sup>11</sup>, C.N. Annadurai<sup>12</sup>, and M. Karunanidhi<sup>13</sup>, made important ideological and organizational contributions to the Dravidianist school, either from within Thass, Adigal, and Periyar’s activist organizations, or as part of important electoral political parties such as the Justice Party and the early *Drāviḍa Mun̄netra Kaḷagam* (“Dravidian Progress Association”; abbreviated DMK).

All of these projects operated on the basic premise that the introduction of the hierarchical religious-social-cultural system of Brahminical Hinduism by self-interested interlopers from the Aryan North had subverted the fundamentally equitable and enlightened indigenous Dravidian civilization of the Tamil South. This relatively simple premise, filtered through Caldwell’s narrative of Dravidian civilizational history, generates a rich network of ideological and symbolic associations that informs every aspect of these activist movements’ ideologies and platforms. This network ties together a range of different dimensions of sociocultural identity such as caste, religion, and language, so that each term always



implicitly invokes the other terms of the network of the others and relies on the broader Dravidianist associative scheme for its full meaning.

I take this fundamental feature of Dravidianism to merit an important methodological consideration. Given the associative nature of Dravidianist thought, arriving at an accurate interpretation of terms like “Brahmin”, “Hindu”, and “nation” in Dravidianist discourse requires an understanding of the broader Dravidianist network of associations and symbologies in which these terms participate. Reading these terms without an eye towards the specific ideological context in which they are situated obscures the internal consistency of Dravidianist logic and can lead to major misrepresentations of the actual functions of individual discursive terms within a given Dravidianist argument. No dimension of Dravidianist ideology is more susceptible to this sort of misrepresentation than the discursive category of Tamil identity itself. As the symbolic center of Dravidianism, Tamil identity as constructed through Dravidianist discourse is a repository for all components of the Dravidianist activist vision. Stripped of their connection to the Dravidianist associative network, Dravidianist appeals to Tamil identity appear to be examples of simple ethnic nationalism. Indeed, the Dravidianist-inspired rhetoric associated with the two “Dravidian” parties that dominate modern Tamil Nadu politics – that is, the DMK and its electoral rival, the AIADMK (All-India *Aṇṇa Drāviḍa Muṇṇetṛa Kaḷagam*; “All-India Anna<sup>14</sup> Dravidian Progress Association”) – fall much closer to this type of cultural nationalism, since the Dravidian parties’ invocations of Tamil cultural identity have little to no impact on the parties’ essentially populist political

platforms. Dravidianist aspirations to nationalism or cultural reform, however, are founded on the connection between Tamil cultural identity and other dimensions of the idyllic ancient Tamil society. At the same time, the importance of Tamil ethnocultural identity in the Dravidianist associative network cannot be ignored. Both the Tamil language and the classics of Tamil literature are constitutive elements of the Dravidianist associative network, and the social goals of a given Dravidianist project are inseparable from the cultural symbolism with which they are invested.

Several events associated with the recent popular outcry in Tamil Nadu surrounding the bull-taming practice of *jallikaṭṭu* offers a terrific example of a number of features of Dravidianist social critique. On one hand, the outcry surrounding the *jallikaṭṭu* issue itself bears strong marks of the Dravidianist activist legacy. On the other hand, the specific response that the VCK, a Dravidianist Dalit political party, offered to the *jallikaṭṭu* issue provides a striking example of Dravidianist social critique at work. Before we enter a more detailed discussion of the formal structure of Dravidianist thought, we should first take a close look at this example as both a tangible picture of Dravidianist activism and a testament to the importance of understanding the topography of Dravidianist logic.

## **Jallikaṭṭu and Tamil Identity**

*Jallikaṭṭu* is traditionally practiced in rural Tamil Nadu as part of the festivities surrounding Pongal, a harvest festival that is one of the most important holidays on

the Tamil calendar. *Jallikaṭṭu* competitions are similar to American rodeos: one by one, contestants – physically fit young men typically hailing from the intermediate-caste Thevar and Kallar communities – chase down bulls released from pens and attempt to keep hold of them for a certain duration. Those who are successful are awarded prizes – traditionally, garlands of silver coins tied to the horns of the tamed bull (hence, the name *jallikaṭṭu*, which literally means “bull-tying”). Bulls are specially bred and raised for *jallikaṭṭu* competitions by well-to-do Thevar and Kallar landowners, who derive honor (Tamil *māṇam*) from offering up particularly strong and virile specimens.

In 2014, the Indian Supreme Court issued a ruling banning *jallikaṭṭu* on the grounds that the practice violated the Indian constitutional injunction against animal cruelty, a violation no doubt made more egregious by the involvement of cows, a prominent religious and cultural symbol in the Hindu nationalist symbology associated with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national government. The Supreme Court upheld its *jallikaṭṭu* ban in 2016, a decision that set off public demonstrations across Tamil Nadu – most notably the massive, weeklong protest at Chennai’s Marina Beach, which drew Tamilians from a wide range of occupational and social backgrounds including several Tamil celebrities. Other high-profile Tamil celebrities publically supported the *jallikaṭṭu* protests, and the agitations elicited a statewide outpouring of support on social media.

While the practice of *jallikaṭṭu* is most closely associated with rurally based Tamilians from the intermediate-caste Thevar and Kallar communities, the actual social and cultural position of the *jallikaṭṭu* tradition in Tamil society was largely immaterial to the participants and supporters of the Marina Beach protests. A large number of the protestors at Marina Beach were urban university students and young professionals, many of whom had never actually encountered *jallikaṭṭu* in person, let alone participated in it.<sup>15</sup> For the vast majority of people associated with the *jallikaṭṭu* protest movement, the Indian Supreme Court's ruling on the *jallikaṭṭu* issue was symbolic of a broader relationship between Tamil culture and the Indian national government. The characteristic feature of the *jallikaṭṭu* protest movement was its rhetorical focus on the affirmation and defense of Tamil cultural autonomy. Painted signs, chanted slogans, and protest memes denounced the *jallikaṭṭu* ban as a recent example of a longstanding campaign by a North Indian-dominated government to impose its cultural agenda on the Tamil South. It was on these grounds that the volatility of the *jallikaṭṭu* issue crossed a wide range of Tamil social boundaries, far outstripping the sociocultural importance of the *jallikaṭṭu* practice itself in contemporary Tamil society.

Dalit activists in Tamil Nadu, however, could not so easily disregard the social circumstances surrounding the *jallikaṭṭu* tradition. While Thevar and Kallar apologists dismissed Dalit grievances with the practice, a number of important Dalit public figures argued that the *jallikaṭṭu* tradition was discriminatory, demeaning, and economically burdensome to the Dalit communities in the village settings where

it was celebrated. Dalits were typically barred from participating as bull-tamers in *jallikaṭṭu* celebrations, despite in many cases being the ones primarily responsible for raising the bulls specially set aside for the practice. The relegation of this caretaker role to the Dalit community both reaffirmed Dalits' traditional role as menial agricultural laborers in village caste economy and limited Dalit opportunities for economic and social mobility.<sup>16</sup> Both of the two chief Dalit political parties of Tamil Nadu, namely the VCK (*Viḍudalai Chirūdaigaḷ Kaṭchi*; "Liberation Panthers Party") and *Pudiyā Tamīlagam* ("New Tamil Land"), spoke publically on the caste dimension of the *jallikaṭṭu* tradition in their official responses to the ban. The Ambedkarite-aligned *Pudiyā Tamīlagam* came out in support of the *jallikaṭṭu* ban, arguing that the casteist nature of the *jallikaṭṭu* practice took precedence over the regional concern for the preservation of Tamil cultural autonomy. K. Krishnaswamy, the leader of *Pudiyā Tamīlagam*, presented a series of arguments discrediting the notion that *jallikaṭṭu* was a practice representative of ancient Tamil cultural heritage.<sup>17</sup> However, the VCK, while echoing *Pudiyā Tamīlagam's* condemnation of the impact *jallikaṭṭu* had on village Dalit communities, took a public position in support of the Marina Beach protests. Instead of calling for the ban of *jallikaṭṭu* outright, Tholkappiyan Thirumavalavan<sup>18</sup>, the ideological leader and public face of the VCK, argued that Tamilians themselves should reform *jallikaṭṭu* to make it a caste-free practice.<sup>19</sup>

The VCK has strong credentials as an anti-caste activist organization. The VCK began as an organization known as the *Dalit Panther Iyakkam*, which advocated violence as

a means of defense against caste atrocities directed against the Dalit community.<sup>20</sup> Although the VCK softened its militancy and made a formal entry into Tamil electoral politics some twenty years ago, the party has maintained a substantial organizational focus on social activism and has continued to expound a radical Dalit liberationist political ideology. It was this organizational reputation as a radical anti-caste activist group that Thirumavalavan and the VCK put on the line by endorsing the protests against the national *jallikattu* ban. The VCK's endorsement becomes even more poignant in light of the fact that the Thevar and Kallar communities traditionally associated with *jallikattu* are among the chief perpetrators of casteist violence against Dalit populations across rural Tamil Nadu, and these incidences of violence are a consistent focus of VCK party activism.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, while the stakes of the VCK's endorsement appear high, the VCK's reputation did not substantially suffer in Tamil Dalit intellectual and activist circles from the position it took on the protests.<sup>22</sup> To an observer unacquainted with the VCK and the broader social and political landscape of Tamil Nadu, both the VCK's stance on the *jallikattu* protests and the lack of any enduring backlash against the VCK among Tamil Dalit activists might seem incomprehensible. Why did the VCK, a party chiefly comprised of and supported by Dalit Tamilians and associated with a radical platform of caste reform, publically endorse the Marina Beach protests despite recognizing *jallikattu's* imbrication in a system of socioeconomic caste oppression? What stake did the VCK have in saving *jallikattu*?

Since the VCK is indeed an electoral political party, we cannot dismiss the idea that contingent political interests played a role in the VCK's deliberation process. The VCK's shift from pure social activism to activist electoral politics has brought with it the attendant electoral considerations of voter banks and political constituencies.<sup>23</sup> As a minority party in the coalition-driven Tamil political landscape, the VCK's political influence is tied to the voter base it can deliver to broader political alliances, rather than the seats – if any – that it wins in state legislature. As the size and regional spread of the *jallikaṭṭu* protests indicated, action on the *jallikaṭṭu* issue appeals to a constituency far broader than the VCK's base with the Dalit communities of northern Tamil Nadu, and so the potential political motivations of the VCK's move are clear. Outside of this appeal to the electoral mainstream, *jallikaṭṭu* also perhaps presented the VCK with a bridge to the specific, Backwards Caste communities generally associated with *jallikaṭṭu*, the electorally significant Thevar and Kallar *jāti* communities. Given the regular strains that Thirumavalavan and the VCK's agitations against caste atrocities place on the party's relationship with these communities – again, since it is communities of the Thevar and Kallars' general social position that are the principal perpetrators of caste violence in contemporary Tamil Nadu – defending *jallikaṭṭu* as a traditional element of Tamil culture presents an opportunity to temper Thevar and Kallar antagonism towards the VCK and its political candidates without softening the core of the VCK's anti-caste activism.

Naturally, we cannot dismiss these political interests out of hand as irrelevant to the VCK's position on the *jallikaṭṭu* issue. However, understanding the VCK's position solely through the lens of these political considerations disregards an important component of the VCK's anti-caste ideology – a component that makes the VCK's position on *jallikaṭṭu* consistent with its broader Dalit liberationist ideology. I believe that the fidelity of the VCK's position on *jallikaṭṭu* to the party's broader anti-caste platform is an important reason why the VCK's stance on *jallikaṭṭu* did not suffer wider condemnation from Tamil anti-caste activists. The VCK's particular brand of Dalit liberationist ideology is representative of the Dravidianist school of social activism. This distinct orientation leads the VCK to define and contextualize the identity of the Tamil Dalit community and its social and political obligations in a way that is not always commensurable with the pan-Indian Ambedkarite approach reflected in *Pudiyā Tamilāgam*'s political platform.

Classical Ambedkarite thought understands the institution of hierarchical caste as a transethnic, pan-South Asian social structure paradigmatically (although not necessarily prohibitively) associated with the texts and rituals of Brahmanical Hinduism. Through the classical Ambedkarite lens, Dalit communities from across India share a common social and political identity by merit of the oppression and degradation they experience as the direct result of their attributed identity in this paradigmatically Brahmanical and Hindu transregional system. Hence, the Marathi and Hindi word “*dalit*”, which means “scattered” or “fractured”, stands as a marker for a “fractured” transethnic and pan-Indian peoplehood – one with its own



distinctive social and cultural history<sup>24</sup> and common political future within the Indian nation. Dr. Ambedkar himself spent his long and distinguished career as a political thinker and activist working to set the legal and intellectual foundation for India's Dalits to inhabit this collective social-cultural identity and consolidate their political power on the national stage. Ambedkar's famous agitation for the establishment of a separate Dalit electorate in national Indian elections reflects his understanding that Dalit social identity yields a discrete set of policy interests generalizable to the national political process. Thus, Ambedkar takes Dalit identity, constituted principally as a Brahmanical ritual position tied to a distinctive, transregional experience of caste oppression<sup>25</sup>, to be able to bridge the gaps between other, potentially competing identity claims that internally differentiate the Dalit community. The most apparent of these competing identity claims are the numerous ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and regional identities consolidated under the flag of the Indian nation. Modern Ambedkarite political ideology operates under the assumption that these dimensions of identity do not play a major constitutive role in the political and social policies that best serve the national Dalit community. If anything, mainstream Ambedkarite politics understands deference to regional or ethnic considerations in matters of Dalit activist policy to run counter to Dalit political interests, since such deference segments the political unity of the national Dalit community and alienates pro-Dalit activism from the foundational Ambedkarite understanding of Dalit identity as a socioreligious position within the paradigmatically Brahmanical South Asian social structure of hierarchical caste. In the case of the *jallikaṭṭu* issue, this means that giving special consideration to

*jallikaṭṭu*'s cultural position as a Tamil folk tradition only serves to hinder the broader Ambedkarite project of radical social reform, which stands equally to benefit Tamil Dalit communities and the other ethnic Dalit communities scattered across India.

The VCK, like all modern Dalit activist groups, draws deeply from Dr. Ambedkar's thought and the Ambedkarite political paradigm. As a self-professed Ambedkarite movement (even if a heterodox one), the VCK shares other Dalit activist parties' paramount ideological concern for securing the political empowerment and social dignity of Dalit communities. Obviously, the VCK's self-presentation as a Dalit and Ambedkarite political party reflects its endorsement of Ambedkar's foundational assumption that Dalit identity can serve as a basis for mass political mobilization. However, the VCK diverges from the classic Ambedkarite position in its estimation of the role that ethnocultural identity plays in the struggle for Dalit liberation. While the Ambedkarite position seeks to transcend the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and regional boundaries that separate India's Dalit communities, Thirumavalavan and the VCK instead emphasize the cultural distinctiveness of the Tamil land. The VCK does not present this focus on Tamil cultural autonomy as a self-standing cultural project that supplements its radical Ambedkarite social and political platform. Rather, Thirumavalavan and the VCK understand the defense of native Tamil culture to be a component feature of the Dalit liberation project itself.

The Tamil Dalit poet-activist Meena Kandasamy has translated and compiled two brief but incredibly rich compilations of Thirumavalavan's speeches and writings<sup>26</sup>, and these compilations contain a number of illuminating passages outlining the VCK's characteristic approach to Dalit liberation politics. An excerpt in one of these volumes, taken from a speech Thirumavalavan delivered at a VCK party function in Madurai on Ambedkar's birthday, provides an explicit and powerful statement of the VCK's rejection of a pan-Indianist approach to Ambedkarite politics and points us to the specific conception that connects the Dalit cause to Tamil culture in the VCK's thought:

I am duty bound to say this to those who do business on the name of Revolutionary Ambedkar: Dalit politics is not beyond Tamil. Dalit politics is not beyond individual linguistic identity. Dalit politics is not joining hands with Hindutva forces and making a scene. Dalit politics lies in retrieving our identity, the identity of the sons of the soil. It is only if you understand this truth, [that] you will know why we integrate Tamil and liberation of the Dalits.<sup>27</sup>

In this brief excerpt, Thirumavalavan presents identity as the chief dimension of the Dalit political struggle. Both the means and goal of Thirumavalavan's project of Dalit liberation are reflected in the process of retrieving Dalits' fundamental identity as "the sons of the soil". Tamil linguistic identity here features as an essential dimension of Dalit identity that goes unrecognized in the pan-Indianist, Ambedkarite model of Dalit politics. Thirumavalavan's rhetorical illustration of the severity of this error as "joining hands with Hindutva forces and making a scene" alludes to the implication of linguistic identity in the VCK's struggle against a broader ideological complex. In contemporary discourse, the term "Hindutva" principally denotes an ideology of Hindu nationalism that takes the cultural and

intellectual forms associated with the orthodox, Brahmanical Hindu tradition as the foundation of a common Indian peoplehood and advocates for the institutionalization of these forms in the cultural policies taken by the Indian national government. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was the ruling party of the national government for both the original 2014 Supreme Court *jallikattu* ban and the 2016 decision that sparked the Marina Beach protests, associates itself with this ideology. Without a doubt, the VCK's use of the term "Hindutva" is in one sense intended to operate as a critique of this Hindu nationalist political agenda. However, like the mainstream Ambedkarite school, the VCK also posits a deeper link between the institution of hierarchical caste and the Hindu religion itself. In the VCK's discourse, "Hindutva" comes primarily to stand for the Brahmanical Hindu religious-ideological system that the VCK identifies as the ultimate root of caste oppression. The VCK departs from the Ambedkarite understanding of Hindutva by situating this religious-ideological system within a narrative of Tamil sociocultural history. In another speech in Kandasamy's compilation, Thirumavalavan summarizes this narrative:

In those days [i.e., in the days of the great dynasties of classical Tamil history], the Tamilians were the rulers. All the Chera, Chola, and Pandya kings were Tamilians. But no one can deny that these Chera, Chola, and Pandya kings abetted the designs and conspiracy of the Aryans to divide Tamil society, to defeat it. Listening to the advice of the Aryans, the kings of those times developed and patronized religion. They changed the social structures. Having captivated the rulers, they used the Tamilians themselves and crippled Tamil social organization. Using the Tamil rulers, they firmly established such casteist structures. Gradually they made the Tamilians into Hindus. They made them forget that they were Tamilians. That is why today the Tamilians feel greater pride in saying that they are Hindus than in saying that they are Tamilians. The historical truth is that Tamilians are not Hindus. So, if the Tamilians have to revive themselves and have a revival, a renaissance, the first thing is for them to realize that they are not Hindus. It is only when such a mindset is acquired that the Tamilian shall renounce caste; he shall cut away the remaining domination; he shall tear away the bonds, the handcuffs over his hands,

over his brains. Living his life as a Hindu, a Tamilian can never destroy caste. Remaining a Hindu, he can never destroy Aryanism and Brahminism. He cannot defeat Hindutva. So, we need to do the work of making each and every Tamilian realize and feel he or she is a Tamilian.”<sup>28</sup>

Through its connection with this narrative, the VCK’s project of protecting and retrieving Tamil cultural identity becomes socially complex and far-reaching. Thirumavalavan presents the social ideology of caste that the “Aryans” of this historical narrative bring into the Tamil land as fundamentally distinct from the social life of pre-Hindu Tamil society. By re-establishing Tamil society’s connection with its original, non-Hindu roots, the VCK hopes to lead Tamilians to reject the Hindu socioreligious structures that simultaneously perpetuate caste oppression and distort the native cultural identity of the Tamil people.

In the same way that this narrative connects the structure of caste oppression to an origin outside of the pre-Hindu Tamil social sphere, this narrative presents Tamil cultural identity as engaged in a fundamental antagonism with Brahmanical Hindu ideology. Authentic Tamil identity becomes defined in part through its wholesale rejection of this ideological system. Indeed, Thirumavalavan’s many impassioned orations exhorting the defense of the Tamil language make note of the debasement that Tamil faces at the hands of Hindutva and its proponents. In a third speech in Kandasamy’s compilation, Thirumavalavan asks his audience to consider the cultural implications of Hindu Tamilians’ endorsement of Brahminical Hindu religious authority:

So when can Tamilians unite? When they realized that they are not Hindus, only then shall they be united. Tamilians who live as Hindus can at no point of time be

integrated as Tamilians. It merely means that unknown to themselves they accept the leadership of the Brahmins. From where did the Sankaracharya [an ultraconservative religious authority based at a religious endowment in the northern Tamil temple city of Chidambaram] get the guts to say that Tamil is a *neecha baasha* (language of the low)- though he is eating the salt of this land and living in the protection of its people? Because of whose grace did it come? It came from the 'low' Tamilians who believe themselves to be Hindus. Otherwise can the Sankaracharya roam on this land, after having said that Tamil is a *neecha baasha*? Can he state that the consecration of a temple cannot be performed in Tamil?<sup>29</sup>

Thirumavalavan and the VCK understand the Brahminical debasement of the Tamil language and culture to have its severest effect on the Tamil Dalit community, which is the community most victimized by the Hindu ideological system that seeks to demean and subvert native Tamil cultural identity. It is thus the Dalit community that stands to benefit the most from the uprooting of Hindutva and Brahmanical Hindu ideology from the Tamil land. As a result of its historical exclusion from caste Hindu society, the Dalit community also maintains the strongest connection among all Tamilians with the indigenous roots of Tamil cultural identity. Thirumavalavan declares, for example, that the *chēri*, the Tamil Dalit caste colony<sup>30</sup>, is the place where the least Sanskritized Tamil is spoken<sup>31</sup> and where the pre-Hindu religious attitudes of Tamil society are most apparent.<sup>32</sup> As such, "*chēri makka!*" ("colony people"), one of Thirumavalavan's favorite terms for the Dalit community,<sup>33</sup> is a multisemic label that simultaneously invokes the ghettoization and socioeconomic oppression of the Dalit community and the cultural identity of the Dalit colony as a refuge for the sociocultural forms of indigenous Tamil civilization.

## The Dravidianist Historical Narrative

Thirumavalavan's public statements of VCK ideology make it clear that the VCK understands the struggle for Dalit liberation in Tamil Nadu as a conflict between the indigenous sociocultural system of the Tamil land and the Brahminical system of Hindutva that foreign, "Aryan" influence introduced to native Tamil society. The respective identities of these systems as native and non-native to the Tamil country are able to stand in for a number of other specific antagonisms between the two systems. The term "*chēri makka!*" in Thirumavalavan's rhetoric indexes multiple dimensions of Tamil Dalit identity, including caste, culture, language, and economic position<sup>34</sup>. It is this characteristic of the VCK's ideology of caste liberation that I have singled out as the defining element of the Dravidianist genre of social criticism. Dravidianist thought situates contemporary Tamil society in relation to a discrete narrative of ancient South Indian civilizational history that derives in large part from Caldwell's account in his *Comparative grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian family of languages*. Through this narrative, numerous social mores, cultural forms, religious teachings, and demographic identities come to represent the fundamental historical antagonism between the ancient, native society of the Tamil land and the Sanskritic social model associated with Brahmins and North India. The characteristically Dravidianist telling of this narrative, which is first advanced in the work of chiefly Vellala and Saiva scholars such as J.N. Nallaswami Pillai, P. Sundaram Pillai, runs as follows. The original inhabitants of South India were the architects of a great, classical civilization, which was founded on enlightened social values and

was possessed of exceptional cultural and intellectual refinement. This civilization was the home of the ancient Tamil language and the jewels of classical Tamil literature, the preeminent artifacts of this great society that survive to the present day. At some time in the ancient past, Aryan immigrants from northward lands began to trickle into South India, where they introduced the religious-ideological system of Brahminical Hinduism. The interlopers from the North cheated their way into a position of social and economic dominance over ancient Tamil society by presenting themselves as the Brahmin caste community at the top of the Brahmanical *varṇāśramadharmā* ritual social system, and forced the indigenes of South India into social and cultural servitude.

Christian missionaries stationed in the Tamil country had already advanced the argument that the Tamil land was heir to a distinctive non-Sanskritic cultural legacy more than a century prior to Caldwell's career<sup>35</sup>, but Caldwell's work is the first to bring this historical reading into dialogue with the colonial-Indological Aryan Invasion Theory, a reading of Indian civilizational history that had been a dominant consideration in European political and intellectual engagements with the peoples and cultural forms of the colonial territory of India since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. 19<sup>th</sup>-Century recensions of the Aryan Invasion Theory combined philological evidence demonstrating the existence of an "Indo-European" language family with Indological readings of ancient Sanskrit-language Vedic literature to argue that a light-skinned, nomadic, Sanskrit-speaking, "Aryan" people entered the Indian Subcontinent from the north or the northwest and laid down the roots of all



forms of civilizational greatness and high culture found in Indian history. In the process of migrating into the Subcontinent, the ancient Aryans subjugated or displaced the dark-skinned, savage, culturally bereft indigenous population of India. While Caldwell maintained the division that the Aryan Invasion Theory drew between the Aryan civilization and the native peoples of India, he challenged the Aryan Invasion Theory's narrative of Indian cultural history. Caldwell argued, in line with earlier missionary appraisals of the Tamil literary-cultural tradition, that the society of the ancient Dravidian South demonstrated a high degree of cultural and civilizational refinement that owed little or nothing to the influence of the Sanskritic, Aryan society of the North. Caldwell thus transformed the colonial and Indological presumption that Aryan society was the sole representative of high culture in the Indian Subcontinent into a narrative of Indian cultural history that allowed for civilizational pluralism and implied a history of civilizational competition.

## **The Dravidianist Symbolic Network**

I have chosen the label "Dravidianism" to reflect Dravidianist movements' common foundation in Caldwell's account of ancient South Indian civilizational history.

Dravidianist discourse weaves a web of social, cultural, and religious associations (see Appendix 2) around the Dravidian society of Caldwell's narrative and its opposite in the Aryan, Sanskritic society of the North. Social equity, classical Tamil literature, enlightened religious attitudes, a productive and equitable economic order, and the non-Brahmin caste communities of the Tamil land are among the features associated with the civilization of the ancient Tamil land. In turn, Sanskritic

civilization is characterized by what Dravidianist thought understands as the exact opposite of each of these features: namely, Brahmin social and economic dominance, the Sanskrit language, superstitious and corrupt religious texts and practices, Brahmin economic freeloading and extortion, and the Brahmin caste community itself. Because the specific characteristics of the indigenous Tamil and Brahmanical civilizations all point to the fundamental antagonism between these two ancient peoples, referring to any given feature of either civilization not only invokes its ideological and civilizational opposite, but also alludes to the other dimensions that distinguish the two civilizations. Hence, for example, since Dravidianist discourse understands the classical Tamil literary tradition as a defining feature of ancient Tamil civilization, classical Tamil literature becomes representative of the equitable social, economic, and religious values of classical Tamil society, as well as the non-Brahmin communities of the Tamil land who are that society's present-day descendants. Similarly, Dravidianism takes classical Tamil literature to be fundamentally opposed to the orthodox Hindu *varṇāśramadharmā* system, śāstric Sanskrit literature, the Brahmin community, and so on.

The terms of individual Dravidianist projects determine which of these dimensions become the primary reflections of the absolute division between Dravidian and Aryan civilization. At any point a Dravidianist project is free to invoke any dimension of this civilizational divide in service of another. Therefore, for example, although Periyar's thought generally places little importance on the linguistic distinction between Tamil and Sanskrit, Periyar also is free to cite the Sanskrit

linguistic origins of given theological terms (such as *ātmā* [Sk. ātman] and *mōṭcham* [Sk. *mokṣa*]) to forward the notion that Hindu religion is an Aryan import to the Dravidian land.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in a short text entitled *Vēḷāḷar Nāgarigam*, Maraimalai Adigal is able to transfer his principally intellectual and theological focus on ancient Tamil civilization to a discrete economic order: the enlightened Saiva values of ancient Tamil civilization become the result of a productive, sedentary, agricultural society disrupted by the invasion of uncouth and violent nomadic Aryans from the north.

It is evident from the sorts of characteristics associated with the Tamil/Dravidian and Aryan/Brahmin civilizations in Dravidianist discourse that Dravidianism does not approach the ancient civilizational history of the Tamil land on neutral ground. The Dravidianist telling of Caldwell's narrative is characterized by its investment of Caldwell's history with a morally laden project of social reform. Dravidianist thinkers understand the Aryan/Brahmin conquest of indigenous Tamil society as the root cause of a bevy of social ills facing the descendants of this native, Tamil-speaking society in the present day. Dravidianist activist projects hold that the present-day descendants of the great indigenous civilization of South India must reconnect with the glory of their past in order to be relieved of the burden imposed on them by the structures of Aryan/Brahmin domination. Dravidianist projects advance their readings of the cultural and social norms of classical, indigenous Tamil society as the premier remedy to the ills facing these contemporary descendants of the original inhabitants of the Tamil country. This reformist

component of the Dravidianist narrative adds a strong moral charge to the qualities associated with the two opposed civilizations of Caldwell's civilizational history. To be sure, a degree of moral valence was already present in Caldwell's work, given that the missionary project was well served by discrediting Brahmanical Hinduism, which was the source of the most organized and comprehensive resistance to Christian missionization. However, while Caldwell's work is ultimately a scholarly one, and the majority of Caldwell's argument speaks to the technical concerns of colonial comparative philology, Dravidianist thought is fundamentally and inescapably activist<sup>37</sup> in nature. Dravidianist movements and thinkers are principally concerned with effecting social, cultural and/or political change to bring contemporary Tamil society in line with the values of ancient Tamil or Dravidian society. This moral charge derives in large part from the critical role that foundational Tamil scholars of Sangam literature such as U.V. Swaminatha<sup>38</sup>, C. Damodaram Pillai, and P. Sundaram Pillai played in incorporating Caldwell's narrative into a more developed articulation of the cultural distinctiveness of the Tamil classical tradition. However, it was through the Dravidianist conversion of this emotionally invested but principally intellectual narrative into a symbolic and ideological foundation for Dravidianist activism that these scholars' cultural reading of Tamil classical history became connected to a reading of present-day Tamil society.

Dravidianist movements and thinkers present readings of the core Dravidianist narrative of history that reflect the specific social and intellectual goals of their

projects. In doing so, Dravidianist movements distill the broad qualities associated with the society of the ancient Dravidians in the core Dravidianist narrative into specific characteristics. For example, while all Dravidianist discourse understands ancient Tamil civilization to embody a rational and enlightened approach to religion, the specific form that these values take varies drastically among the major projects of Dravidianist social criticism. Iyothee Thass identified these rational and enlightened values as the egalitarian ethical values of Buddhism, which he took to directly contradict the hierarchical and self-serving logic of the Brahmanical *varṇāśramadharmā* system that underwrites the oppression of the Dalit communities of the Tamil country. Maraimalai Adigal in turn found these values in a reformed, monotheist brand of Saivism that cast aside superstitious and fanciful Sanskritic Hindu texts and rituals in favor of the elegant and grounded texts of the Tamil Saiva tradition. Periyar described the enlightened and rational religious values of the ancient Dravidians as a brand of atheist rationalism not yet corrupted by the Hindu religious culture introduced by self-interested Brahmins to deceive, domesticate, and despoil native Dravidian society. Each of these formulations reflects the Dravidianist activist project in which it is situated.

To some extent, Dravidianist movements are also responsible for determining which caste communities in the contemporary Tamil country are the chief heirs of the Dravidian civilizational legacy. All Dravidianist movements implicate the entire non-Brahmin community of the Tamil land in their reform projects, but Dravidianist movements also often slip into lending particular focus to the historical role of a

more narrowly defined caste group in the establishment of the historical character of Dravidian civilization. The particular caste communities that Dravidianist thinkers and movements select for this focus are to a large extent reflective of the thinkers' own caste positionalities. We have already seen Thirumavalavan and the VCK establish Dalits as the quintessential "sons of the soil" of the Tamil land, although the VCK simultaneously presents its platform as a defense against the cultural, political, and social degradation of the entire Tamil land at the hands of Hindutva and Brahminism. While Thass understood his Dravidianist project to represent the interests of the entire Tamil "Untouchable" community – and in a broader sense, to effect the regeneration of Tamil society as a whole – Thass also spoke of his own Paraiyar *jāti* community in particular as the descendants of the moral and religious leaders of ancient Tamil Buddhist society. Indeed, Thass's movement appealed primarily to the urban-based Paraiyar community over other Dalit *jāti* communities in Madras Presidency, most prominently the chiefly rural Arundhatiyar community. The Paraiyar community's access to cosmopolitan colonial urban centers allowed Paraiyars to benefit from economic and educational opportunities not available to agrarian Tamil Dalits, many of whom were trapped in exploitative labor relationships with caste-Hindu landowners,<sup>39</sup> and these educational and economic opportunities provided members of the Paraiyar community with the requisite literacy to engage with Thass's elevated and primarily written religious discourse.<sup>40</sup> Adigal's *Velālar Nāgarigam* presents the agriculturalist Vellalar *jāti* as the community responsible for the cultural majesty and ethics of non-violence that animated classical Tamil civilization. While the

association of the Vellalar community with classical Tamil civilization predates Adigal's work and in part reflects Vellalars' history of social influence in the Tamil country<sup>41</sup>, it is also true that Adigal's father was of Vellalar caste<sup>42</sup>, as were several of the important religious influences of Adigal's earlier life<sup>43</sup> and much of the support base of his religious reform movement. Vellalars such as the literary historian P. Sundaram Pillai were the principal early developers of a Dravidianist literary history centered in the classics of Sangam literature, and the special association between the Vellalar community and high Tamil civilization - which was already present in Sangam literature<sup>44</sup> - meant that Adigal's valorization of Tamil classicism worked to the especial benefit of the Vellalar community.<sup>45</sup> The non-Brahmin ideology associated with the Justice Party of early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Madras Presidency politics - an organization we will examine in more detail shortly - in a similar way principally reflected the interests of the Vellalar community and other privileged-caste non-Brahmin caste communities. While the Justice Party's advocacy for non-Brahmin interests was occasionally extended to incorporate Dalit interests, this move was never unanimously supported within the party and did not consistently find reflection in the Justice Party's policy platform. Periyar's thought disregards *jāti* entirely, instead focusing on the identity of all non-Brahmin Dravidians as Shudras (Sk. *śūdra*) in the Brahminical *varṇāśramadharmā* system. Periyar's exclusive focus on *varṇa* is well explained by his thought's focus on confronting and dismantling the Hindu ideological complex of Brahminism, but Periyar's understanding of Shudra identity as a blanket term applying to both the caste and casteless (i.e., Dalit) communities of the South may also in part reflect

Periyar's wealthy, intermediate-caste *jāti* background. To be sure, one of the characteristic features of Periyar's career was his advocacy for Dalit community rights: his first honorary title was "The Hero of Vaikom" in recognition of his agitation for the Dalit community of that city in modern-day Kerala<sup>46</sup>, and he consistently supported Dalit political enfranchisement in both his own organizations and in official government postings.<sup>47</sup> However, in a scattering of incidents during his career, most prominently exemplified in his refusal to support a bill outlawing the South Indian *devadasi* temple courtesan system that overwhelmingly affected women from the Dalit community<sup>48</sup>, Periyar seemed to subvert Dalit interests to a broader conception of Shudra political and social unity that did not always reflect the perspectives of Dalits in the movement.

## **Dravidianism and the Society of Madras Presidency**

While *jāti* identity plays a clear role in most Dravidianist social and intellectual projects, I have already made the contention that Dravidianist movements cannot be understood simply as caste movements. Rather, I take the influence of *jāti* identity on Dravidianist thought to be an important but not exclusive dimension of the material social environment that informed the construction of a simultaneously civilizational, linguistic, economic, racial, and caste-relevant Dravidianist genre of social critique. In a broader sense, while the Dravidianist telling of Caldwell's narrative is the basis for the cohesion of the associated characteristics of the Dravidianist genre of Tamil reformist thought, the features of the core Dravidianist



associative framework derive much of their character from the colonial historical social context in which Dravidianist thinkers and their supporters were situated. Some characterizations made in Protestant missionary literature, such as the association of Brahmanical Hinduism with self-interested and deceptive Brahmin priests and the opposition of Tamil religious literature to the pan-Indian Sanskritic textual tradition<sup>49</sup>, were already reflected to some extent in Caldwell's work and had a direct influence on the development of some of the features of the Dravidianist framework. The writings of George Uglow (G.U.) Pope, a Protestant missionary active after Caldwell's time who continues to be celebrated in modern Tamil Nadu as a legendary lover of the Tamil language<sup>50</sup>, advanced an elegant formulation of a preexisting missionary understanding of the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta religious tradition as the grounded opposite to the excessively abstract and fanciful Vedantic theology associated with South Indian Smārta Brahmin religious practice.<sup>51</sup> Maraimalai Adigal in particular cites Pope's writings in support of his Dravidianist religious reform project.<sup>52</sup> However, these conceptualizations were recast and placed alongside a range of new associations as Dravidianist thought abstracted symbolism from missionary discourse to speak on the social and cultural issues affecting late-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-Century colonial Tamil society.

The chief dimension in which Dravidianist thought reformulates the Protestant missionary orientation of Caldwell and others is in its translation of religious Protestantism to a broader rationalist and modernist sensibility characteristic of colonial intellectual discourse. In this sense, Dravidianist thought follows a pattern

typical of modernist reform movements across the colonial world, most notably the neo-Vedantic Hindu reform movements associated with figures such as Swami Vivekananda and the modernist Islamic movements and thinkers both within India (e.g., Syed Ahmed Khan and his Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh) and elsewhere in the colonized Muslim world. Colonial-era Dravidianist thought relies heavily on a range of characteristically modern assumptions and valuations shared by many of these movements. Among the most important of these characteristically modern traits in Dravidianist thought are the appeal to knowledge produced by the disciplines of colonial science – notably archaeology and literary criticism, in addition, obviously, to the discipline of philology in which Caldwell participated – the valuation of material and technological accomplishment, the appeal to rational principles of social organization and administrative rule, and the opposition of intellectual rationalism to a fraught concept of religious-magical superstition. It is no coincidence that the seminal thinkers of Dravidianist thought were active readers of English-language literature and demonstrated some degree of affinity for English and European high culture. Studies of Periyar’s thought – including histories from within Periyar’s own movement<sup>53</sup> – universally cite the famous English philosopher Bertrand Russell’s rationalist atheism as a foundational influence of Periyar’s own atheist philosophy. Periyar held a general admiration for the rational basis of European thought and held the English language in high esteem for the ease with which it communicated scientific and technical information. Maraimalai Adigal poured a veritable fortune into his personal library of English-language works of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, and recorded his responses to these works in detail

in his personal diaries, which he kept in English.<sup>54</sup> Adigal was consistently effusive in his praise for the English intellectual tradition, and engaged in personal correspondence with several European thinkers he particularly admired.<sup>55</sup>

To a large extent, the Dravidianist thought of the colonial era sought to bring Tamil society into accord with European visions of modernity. Colonial-era Dravidianist thought also drew a connection between European modernity and the explicitly political and administrative dimension of British colonial power. All major colonial-era Dravidianist thinkers praised British colonial rule as consistent with the modernist social values through which the British colonial authority derived its ideological justification. It would be a mistake, however, to understand this Dravidianist endorsement of the colonial rule as a passive and uncritical acceptance of the British colonialist project. While it is undeniable that key Dravidianist thinkers had a deep personal respect for European thought and artistic culture, Dravidianism primarily appealed to colonial power and the European intellectual and cultural conventions associated with it as an instrument to achieve a variety of material and social goals. In a direct sense, colonial legal and administrative intervention could be brought to bear on material instances of caste discrimination and other social injustices. Iyothee Thass's effusive praise for British colonial rule, for instance, was representative of a broader, principally urban Tamil Dalit understanding of both the British administration and Protestant missionary groups as liberators of the Dalit community from caste oppression, and this understanding derived directly from the urban Tamil Dalit community's experience of colonial

rule.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, even as the colonial government institutionalized and expanded the social reach of Brahminical practices of untouchability as part of its broader institutionalization of textual Brahminical social codes, the colonial administrative machine also largely disregarded the occupational or purity restrictions enforced in Tamil caste Hindu communities, which fact allowed Dalit communities a degree of social and economic mobility unavailable in pre-colonial Tamil society.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the colonial government was periodically receptive to legislating against discriminatory caste practices as part of a broader colonial project of social reform situated in an Enlightenment discourse of human rights and rational social order.<sup>58</sup>

To a considerable extent, all colonial-era Dravidianist movements shared Thass's favorable attitude towards the material conditions of colonial rule – although Periyar in particular was somewhat more reserved in this respect.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, all Dravidianist movements and thinkers after Thass (whose career occurred before the real emergence of Indian nationalism in Madras Presidency) agreed that the prospect of a politically united, independent Indian nation as advocated by the Indian National Congress was a far greater threat to Tamil society than British colonial rule. In the Dravidianist estimation, the withdrawal of colonial power from Madras Presidency would stand to remove the only potential counterbalance to the complete Brahmin dominance of Madras Presidency politics. In the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Brahmin population of Madras Presidency, which accounted for some 3% of the Presidency's overall population, held a decisive and often overwhelming majority of judicial, administrative, and legislative positions in the

colonial government.<sup>60</sup> This situation of Brahmin political dominance had stemmed from several processes in colonial Indian history. On one hand, Brahmins had a reputation among colonial authorities as capable administrative workers – at least compared to the broader Indian public – and colonial hiring practices reflected this bias.<sup>61</sup> To a certain extent, this bias resulted from a real social advantage that the Brahminical tradition of textual religious education gave Brahmin applicants in the process of adapting to the occupational requirements of primarily paper-based colonial bureaucracy. However, to a large extent Brahmin material dominance was also implicated in colonial administrators' reliance on Brahmins as both cultural and political interpreters in their engagement with Indian societies<sup>62</sup> and communities, a role that the Brahmin community enthusiastically embraced.<sup>63</sup>

Brahmin sociopolitical dominance in Madras Presidency thus went hand-in-hand with the place of privilege that colonial authorities and European Indologists granted the Brahmanical religious and intellectual system in both the material and cultural realms of colonial India.<sup>64</sup> This sociopolitical connection between Brahmin material, social, and economic power in colonial Madras Presidency meant that in addition to the legal and administrative benefits colonial rule presented to the Tamil non-Brahmin community (at least relative to Congress's India), European colonial modernism stood as a puissant alternative to the cultural-ideological system of Brahminism, which Dravidianist movements identified as the primary cause for the social and cultural ills afflicting the contemporary Tamil non-Brahmin community. Colonial power invested European cultural forms and modernist ideology with a

sociocultural currency intelligible both to Tamil and colonial audiences through material socioeconomic presence of European modernist cultural and intellectual sensibilities in colonial India. The European discourse of modernity was the same discourse that underwrote colonial administrative policy<sup>65</sup>; colonial intellectual and material engagement with Indian and Tamil culture, religion, and history; and indeed, the British colonial project itself. While Dravidianist movements' commendations of the material, sociopolitical benefits of British rule are largely reflected in the petitions they make to the colonial government for specific material concessions – Thass's praise of the colonial government's enlightened social attitudes reflects his long history petitioning the colonial government to grant administrative and legal rights to the Paraiyar community, just as Justice Party members' praise of British rule as even-handed and disinterested<sup>66</sup> reflects the Justice Party's campaign to secure electoral reservations for the non-Brahmin community in the Madras Presidency legislature – Dravidianists' affinity for European ideological and cultural modernism does not translate into meaningful material campaigns for the cultural Europeanization of Tamil society. That is to say, while Dravidianists often declared that Tamil society should imitate modern European society's scientism, rationalism, and contemporary artistic accomplishment, they did not extend this imperative to mount a campaign for Tamil society's adoption of European cultural forms. Dravidianism's engagement with European intellectual and cultural modernism is neither an assimilationist deference to English cultural superiority nor a pragmatic political strategy intended to win the favor of the British colonial government.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the vast majority of the

Dravidianist engagement with modernism, like the vast majority of Dravidianist thought in general, appears in Tamil-language Dravidianist publications obviously not intended for colonial consumption.

The primary and true audience of Dravidianist activism is the Tamil non-Brahmin public, and the ultimate goal of Dravidianist activism is to effect the reform of Tamil society from within. Dravidianist activism works not simply to resolve the material social and cultural injustices afflicting the Tamil land, but also to convince the Tamil, non-Brahmin community as a whole to reject the Aryan, Brahmanical ideological and cultural system at the root of these injustices. This rejection requires Tamilians to recognize Brahminism and Aryanism as fundamentally foreign to Tamil civilization. In a cultural sense, Tamilians must recognize that the Sanskrit literature and art associated with Brahminism – most especially Sanskrit-language Puranic mythology – is not characteristic of the Tamil civilizational legacy. In a social sense, Tamilians must understand that the enforcement of the Brahmanical caste hierarchy in contemporary Tamil society – whether at the hands of Brahmins or non-Brahmins – stems from Aryan-Brahmin influence and is incompatible with the social ethics of classical Tamil civilization. In a religious-theological sense, Tamilians must recognize Brahmanical Hinduism either as a fundamental distortion of original Dravidian religion or as a Brahminical-Aryan innovation altogether.<sup>68</sup> In a historical sense, Tamilians must discard the history of North Indian Brahmanical civilization as unconnected to the history of Tamil civilization outside of the Dravidianist narrative of Aryan-Brahmin invasion.

And so, if the characteristic Dravidianist retelling of Robert Caldwell's narrative of ancient Dravidian civilizational history is the ideological basis for the morally charged, dualistic character of Dravidianist thought; and if the sociopolitical context of colonial-era Madras Presidency, filtered to some extent through the specific caste positionalities of Dravidianist authors, is the primary source for the particular characteristics that come to be attributed to the Dravidianist associative network; then the concept of Tamil ethnic and civilizational identity becomes the chief battleground on which Dravidianist activist campaigns wage war against Aryanism, Brahminism, and Sanskritism. The diversity of specific characteristics that Dravidianist movements attribute to the broad qualities of ancient Tamil and Dravidian civilization is one of the primary sources of the important symbolic divergences among important Dravidianist ideological formulations. To be sure, there were many historical convergences among Dravidianist movements: Periyar, for example, reportedly had extensive contact and close personal ties with members of Iyothee Thass's movement, and Periyar's *Drāviḍar Kaḷagam* joined forces with Maraimalai Adigal's Saiva reformists to mount a united front against compulsory Hindi education in 1938's famous Anti-Hindi Agitation. However, Dravidianist movements have also had their share of run-ins over the specific terms of their reform projects. Periyar's Self-Respect Movement (*Suyamariyā dai Iyakkam*) and Adigal's Saiva followers had numerous and often vitriolic confrontations, which at one point had to be tempered by the exchange of personal letters of apology between Periyar and Adigal themselves.<sup>69</sup> The conflict that arose between the



followers of Periyar and Adigal can be understood as a disagreement over the specific religious character that should be associated with Tamil civilizational identity. The religious (or, in Periyar's case, irreligious) component of Periyar and Adigal's constructions of classical Tamil identity had implications not only on their readings of Tamil civilizational history, but also, given the characteristic Dravidianist association between the Dravidian past and the activist future, on the agendas they forwarded as means of restoring the indigenous Tamil identity of contemporary Tamil society.

### **Dravidianism, Tamil Nationalism, and Non-Brahmin Politics**

The prominence of Dravidianist ideology and rhetoric in Tamil political history has meant that Western scholarly engagements with Dravidianism and Dravidianist movements have paid special attention to Tamil political and organizational reckonings with Tamil identity and non-Brahmin politics, particularly as expressed through the evolution of Tamil political culture from the non-Brahmin politics of the Justice Party to the Tamil nationalist politics of the Dravidian parties. However, viewing Dravidianist ideas through an exclusively political lens misrepresents the character of Dravidianist ideology. As I have contended thus far in this paper, both non-Brahmin caste identity and Tamil ethnocultural identity are connected through the Dravidianist associative network to a range of other dimensions of social and cultural identity. Considering the outsize importance that Western scholarship has placed on political organizations and platforms associated ideologically or

organizationally with Dravidianist movements, it is prudent to discuss the relationship among non-Brahmin politics, Tamil nationalism, and classical Dravidianist thought.

In seeking to define or explain the rise of the “Dravidian” political paradigm and its associated rhetoric, historical studies commonly begin the substantive part of their discussions with the emergence of the South Indian Liberal Federation- much more commonly known as the “Justice Party” after the name of its English-language periodical- in colonial Madras Presidency politics. The Justice Party’s foundation in 1916 both crystallized and accelerated the emergence of a distinct political consciousness among a group of primarily privileged-caste, non-Brahmin notables who were dissatisfied with the disproportionate representation of the Brahmin caste community in regional colonial administration. Members of the Vellalar, Nair, Naidu, Reddi, and Chettiyar caste communities came to see their economic and political interests as opposed to those of the Brahmin community, and began to demand reservations for non-Brahmins in administrative government posts, educational institutions, and elected regional legislature. The issue of electoral reservations in particular became a major site of engagement between Justice Party officials, the British colonial government, and notable advocates of Brahmin interests, such as C.P. Ramaswami Iyer and Annie Besant, the famous leader of the Madras-based Home Rule Movement. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1918, which transferred authority in certain realms of regional administration from British officers to locally elected or appointed Indian officials, presented an obvious

danger to those sympathetic to the Justice Party's platform, since the withdrawal of British colonial power in these realms of administration yielded control to a regional government dominated by Brahmins at all levels. A long legislative struggle over the issue of communal reservations in the Madras Presidency legislature ensued, during which a delegation of Justice Party leaders led by Dr. T.M. Nair, one of the co-founders of the party, traveled to Britain to plead the case for proportional electoral representation directly to the British Parliament. Facilitated by the Indian National Congress's nationwide boycott of colonial government elections, the Justice Party prevailed in the 1920 Madras Presidency elections and proceeded to form a government that forwarded policies intended to defend the material and cultural<sup>70</sup> interests of the Presidency's privileged-caste non-Brahmin communities.

From the beginning, the politics of non-Brahminism associated with the Justice Party were situated firmly within the Dravidianist symbolic network. More than a decade before the principally privileged-caste non-Brahmin advocacy tradition emerged in the colonial center of Madras, several Dalit activist and religious reform groups had adopted the term "Dravidian" as an alternative marker of their caste community. The most important of these, naturally, was Iyothee Thass's construction of *Ādi Drāviḍa* identity through his Dalit Buddhist movement, although as early as 1886 a "*Drāviḍar Kaḷagam*" ("Dravidian Association"; unaffiliated with Periyar's later organization) was founded for Dalits in the Nilgiri Mountains.<sup>71</sup> More direct spiritual and organizational predecessors of the Justice Party's principally

privileged-caste non-Brahminism also made similar connections. Several days after two Madras-based, non-Brahmin lawyers founded 1909's Madras Non-Brahmin Association, a short-lived spiritual predecessor of the organization that would become the Justice Party, a letter was printed in the *Madras Mail* suggesting that since the non-Brahmins of South India were of Dravidian descent, the non-Brahmin uplift organization might more appropriately be called the "Madras Dravidian Association".<sup>72</sup> This name would appear again in 1912, when the Madras United League, an organization formed to advocate for non-Brahmins employed in government jobs, changed its name to the Madras Dravidian Association following a suggestion at the organization's first meeting.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the Tamil cultural dimensions of non-Brahmin caste identity in Dravidianist rhetoric are active in the Justice Party's usage of the term. Among the chief policy focuses of the Justice Party was its advocacy for the formal instruction of South Indian vernacular languages in both primary and secondary education. The Justice Party pushed for the foundation of a "Tamil university", which would minister to the regional educational needs of Tamilians, foremost among which was the philological study of the Tamil language and classical Tamil literature.<sup>74</sup> Justice Party affiliates proposed these policies in order to challenge the particular place of privilege afforded to Sanskrit in the curricula and faculty hiring practices of Madras Presidency's educational institutions. Unsurprisingly, Brahmins were the chief advocates for and beneficiaries of Sanskrit-language education, in reflection of both the ancient Brahminical tradition of Sanskrit-language instruction and the

numerous social and legal privileges that the Brahmin community enjoyed as a result of the British institutionalization of Sanskritic sociocultural norms.<sup>75</sup> While the material benefits of the Justice Party's campaign for vernacular-language instruction – namely, providing a counterbalance to Brahmin students' advantaged position in the study of Sanskrit and challenging the broader structure of Brahmin privilege in Madras Presidency – were obviously an integral element of the rationale behind the project, Justice Party members also framed the project of promoting Tamil and (to a lesser extent) other vernacular South Indian languages as a defense of non-Brahmin Dravidian cultural identity. Hence, Justice Party advocates spoke about the need to protect and preserve their linguistic and cultural heritage.<sup>76</sup> In short, the Justice Party's material project was intimately associated with an immaterial, culturally focused argument: the defense of Tamil and other Dravidian vernaculars was presented as an end in itself. The relationship between the two rhetorical framings of the Justice Party's argument is a prototypical example of the multi-sited network of Dravidianist associations, in that the two arguments were fully in concordance and more or less interchangeable. The defense of Tamil represented the defense of non-Brahmin interests, just as the defense of non-Brahmin interests essentially involved the defense of Tamil and Tamil-language education.

In addition to associating privileged non-Brahmin interests with the Dravidian racial-civilizational label, the Justice Party also to some extent embraced a characteristically Dravidianist rejection of the Brahminical *varṇa* system. While a

faction of Justice Party members led by the party's co-founder Theagaraya Chetti sought to advance privileged-caste non-Brahmin interests without disrupting Hindu orthodoxy or traditional caste hierarchy structures, another faction led by T.M. Nair, the other co-founder of the party, situated its reform project within a broader critique of caste and the practice of untouchability. This faction chiefly framed its critique of caste through the lens of Enlightenment-style modernity.<sup>77</sup> While T.M. Nair and other members did not generally emphasize a connection between Dravidian cultural identity and abolition of the *varṇāśrama* system – Periyar's Self-Respect Movement poached a massive segment of the Justice Party's base several years later with its own explicit argument to this effect – the Justice Party's association of caste reform with the rationalist sensibilities of European-style modernism is a characteristic feature of the Dravidianist paradigm.

In sum, the Justice Party's rhetoric and policy relied to a significant extent on a characteristically Dravidianist understanding of the "Dravidian" label and its association with both non-Brahmin caste identity and a claim to Tamil indigeneity. It is through this lens that we should evaluate the Justice Party's influence on subsequent political and rhetorical articulations of Dravidianism. To be sure, beginning a description of Dravidian politics with the emergence of the Justice Party certainly has historical merit in its own right. After all, Tamil Nadu's modern Dravidian political parties are direct organizational descendants of the original Justice Party through the *Drāviḍa Kaḷagam*. In a broader sense, the political priorities and policy focuses of the Justice Party, as well as the specific sociopolitical

issues to which they responded, set the tone for the specific brand of non-Brahmin Tamil nationalism at the center of Dravidian party rhetoric. However, identifying the Justice Party as the *original source* of the rhetoric of the Dravidian parties yields several inaccurate assumptions about Justice Party political ideology. Foremost among these missteps is the reduction of the ideology of the Justice Party and its descendants to a purely political and opportunist non-Brahminism in reflection of the Justice Party's most immediate and obvious policy focus: namely, securing the material welfare of principally privileged-caste non-Brahmins in Madras Presidency. The most extreme forms of this approach dismiss the importance of the Dravidianist ideological system altogether, instead viewing the emergence of non-Brahmin consciousness in Madras Presidency solely as the result of a set of discrete and immediate political interests associated with the privileged, non-Brahmin communities that formed the Justice Party's base. After all, one of the most important political events of the closing years of colonial rule over the Tamil country was 1938's agitation against the establishment of compulsory Hindi-language education in Madras Presidency, a principally cultural initiative. This event brought together Periyar's *Drāviḍar Kaḷagam*, Maraimalai Adigal's neo-Saiva *Taṇittamiḷ Iyakkam* ("Pure Tamil Movement"), and a number of academic figures sympathetic to the proto-Dravidianist readings of Tamil history associated with P. Sundaram Pillai and similar scholars. *Viḷudalai*, the official print outlet of the *Drāviḍar Kaḷagam*, printed editorials and cartoons from all of these factions that railed against the depredation of the Tamil language at the hands of then-Chief Minister "Rajaji" C. Rajagopalachari and the Indian National Congress. This incident

secured Rajaji's resignation and set the example for the massive 1965 Anti-Hindi Agitation that propelled the DMK to victory in Tamil Nadu elections and signaled the beginning of the Dravidian parties' dominance of Tamil state politics.

Just as the term "non-Brahmin" in Dravidianist ideology cannot be defined exclusively as a caste identity, Dravidianist defenses of Tamil linguistic and cultural autonomy cannot be reduced to a purely cultural agenda. Without a more thorough theorization of the ethnic-linguistic-civilizational dimension of the "Dravidian" label that underwrites Dravidianist social activism, protests against Hindi imposition in Tamil Nadu appear as isolated instances of regional linguistic chauvinism, rather than the product (if not exclusively, then at least principally) of more than four decades of Dravidianist social thought. As I have argued above, the social components of the Dravidianist engagement with Tamil identity distinguishes the Dravidianist approach from the strictly cultural Tamil nationalism embodied in the rhetoric of the Dravidian parties. Although there is an organizational continuity between classically Dravidianist organizations and the Dravidian parties, reading Dravidianist thought through the Dravidian parties' largely rhetorical cultural Tamil nationalism leads to a fatal misrepresentation of the discursive function of Tamil identity in Dravidianist thought.

The "Dravidian" label cited in the names of the two "Dravidian" parties of Tamil politics – i.e., the DMK and the AIADMK – most directly reflects the two parties'



common descent from the *Drāviḍar Kaḷagam* (“Dravidian Association”), a Dravidian nationalist social organization founded by Periyar out of the remains of the largely moribund Justice Party. While little of Periyar’s prototypically Dravidianist social agenda has been preserved in the Dravidian parties’ political platforms, which scholars generally describe as essentially populist rather than ideological<sup>78</sup>, the Dravidian parties deploy a rhetoric that draws deeply from Dravidianist symbolism. The early DMK propaganda machine, paradigmatically associated with the pro-Tamil symbolism of mainstream Tamil-language films such as *Parasakti* (1952)<sup>79</sup>, invoked a highly emotive brand of Tamil linguistic and cultural nationalism that fed into the DMK’s leading role in 1967’s famous statewide protests against the (subsequently reversed) establishment of Hindi as the sole official language of the Indian government.

Bernard Bate’s sterling 2009 study of the distinctive rhetoric associated with the Dravidian parties demonstrates the importance of the classical Tamil past in Dravidian politicians’ self-presentation as representatives of the Tamil cultural tradition. Bate argues that by employing markedly elevated and archaic language, Dravidian party orators attempt to set themselves above and apart from the rank and file of Tamil society. Following this line of argument, Bate links the speech patterns that Dravidian party orators and their supporters use to conventions associated with Tamil bhakti literature. Dravidian party orators’ attempts to evoke the Tamil classical past through elevated rhetoric stand in stark contrast to the rhetorical conventions associated with classical Dravidianist thought. Bate, echoing

other observers of Periyar's oratorical style, notes that Periyar delivered his speeches in a colloquial and folksy tone, which he punctuated with frequent rhetorical questions and abrasive and occasionally vulgar humor. The popular accessibility of Periyar's rhetorical style is somewhat extreme relative to other examples of Dravidianist oratory: Maraimalai Adigal's speeches and writings, for example, were largely inaccessible to uneducated audiences due to his use of occasionally obscure pure Tamil vocabulary. However, as a whole, the priority of Dravidianist oratory is to further Dravidianist thinkers' discrete social and cultural activist projects. We have seen this above in excerpts from Thirumavalavan's speeches on the defense of Tamil cultural identity. Rather than invoking the classical Tamil past symbolically as a marker of political legitimacy in the style of the Dravidian parties' political rhetoric, Dravidianist oratory invokes Tamil classicism as an index of the range of connected discursive terms and symbologies developed through the Dravidianist narrative of Tamil history. As we have seen above with the platform of Dalit liberation advanced by Thirumavalavan and the VCK, conceiving of Dravidianist politics as a merger of a social platform of caste reform with a platform of Tamil cultural nationalism obscures the intrinsic connection between these dimensions of Dravidianist activism.

### **Conclusion: Who are the Tamilians?**

My preeminent intellectual concern in this piece has been to label, describe, and explain what I have identified as an important ideological and symbolic structure in modern Tamil social discourse. In pursuing this task, I have consistently pushed

against framings of Dravidianist movements that fail to take into account all of the dimensions in which their ideologies and symbologies are resonant. Most importantly, I have contended that Tamil cultural identity plays a rich, multisemic role in Dravidianist ideology that indexes a range of dimensions of cultural and social identity.

Tamil identity continues to play a major role in Tamilians' engagement with Tamil and Indian society. The volatility of the *jallikaṭṭu* issue in Tamil Nadu is a testament to the continuing importance of a notion of Tamil cultural autonomy in a popular sense as well as in the important academic and political engagements with the idea in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tamil country. By centering Tamil identity in my analysis of Dravidianism, I hope to stimulate Western scholarship's engagement with Tamil identity as a social and political force in itself. English-language Western scholarship has an overwhelming tendency to understand Tamil Nadu through a pan-Indian lens and to connect elements of Tamil culture to referents in the broader Indian cultural and social past. Lost in the fray are the voices – loud voices – that present Tamil identity as something separate, something that deserves to be reckoned with on its own terms.

In addition to the prominence of discursive constructions of Tamil identity in Dravidianist thought, my concern with representing this Tamilian perspective is motivated by my personal encounters with Tamilian cultural self-perception. In numerous academic and casual conversations in both English and Tamil, I have

encountered Tamilians of all social and religious persuasions beckoning to the characteristic traits of Tamil identity, the things that make the Tamil tradition not only rich, but also unique. In defining Dravidianism on its own terms, I hope to push the Western academy to engage with the fact that Tamilians have a broad and strong concept of Tamil identity that stands on its own terms, and often stands in opposition to nationalist framings of Tamil cultural and political identity. This cannot accurately be defined as political nationalism or ethnic “sub-nationalism”, since many of the people declaring this identity make no direct political claims against the Indian nation. Rather, there is a concept circulating in Tamil society that the Tamil people have a distinctive identity as a people, an identity that is indexed through the Tamil language, Tamil classical literature, Tamil civilizational history, and Tamil religious expressions. My experience has always been that Tamilians of all social positions are always eager to talk about what it means to be Tamil, regardless of the directions their personal deliberations on Tamil identity take them. While I do not intend to present my readings of this experience as above scrutiny, without bias, or as the reflection of anyone’s deliberation but my own – my observations cohere with some of the most apparent traits of the Dravidianist subject matter I have covered in this paper. All Dravidianist thinkers are preoccupied with what it means to be authentically Tamil, and this preoccupation corresponds to a number of instances in history, both ancient and recent, when this preoccupation resulted in real historical articulations of Tamil cultural distinctiveness. To treat the Tamil land simply as a subdivision of India is to choose to ignore this Tamil history and this Tamil present.

## **Appendix One: A Note on Transliteration**

Transliterating Tamil presents a particular set of challenges. The formal convention in the Western academy is to use the transliteration scheme found in the Madras Tamil Lexicon, which provides a systematic, one-to-one correspondence between written Tamil and English (i.e., Latin) graphemes. However, while the precision of the Madras Tamil Lexicon is well suited for the needs of specialists acquainted with Tamil orthography, use of the system also has several important drawbacks. The academic system of Sanskrit transliteration on which the Madras Tamil Lexicon's system is based has, by merit of the phonetic structure of the Devanagari alphabet, a precise correlation to the proper pronunciation of any given Sanskrit word. Unlike Devanagari - and for that matter, all of the other major scripts used in South Asia - Tamil script does not mark its letters for voicing (i.e., the distinction between English "t" and "d"). While the correct pronunciation of a Tamil letter in a native Tamil word can be ascertained from its phonetic environment according to a short list of regular phonetic rules, a reader without Tamil-language experience often cannot use the purely orthographic Madras Tamil Lexicon scheme to correctly pronounce a given word.

Native Tamil speakers, on the other hand, abide by a somewhat consistent common-sense transliteration scheme that developed historically out of interactions between Tamilians and British colonial administrators. The features of this scheme are a lack of diacritics, general recognition of voicing distinctions (commonly excepting "th"),

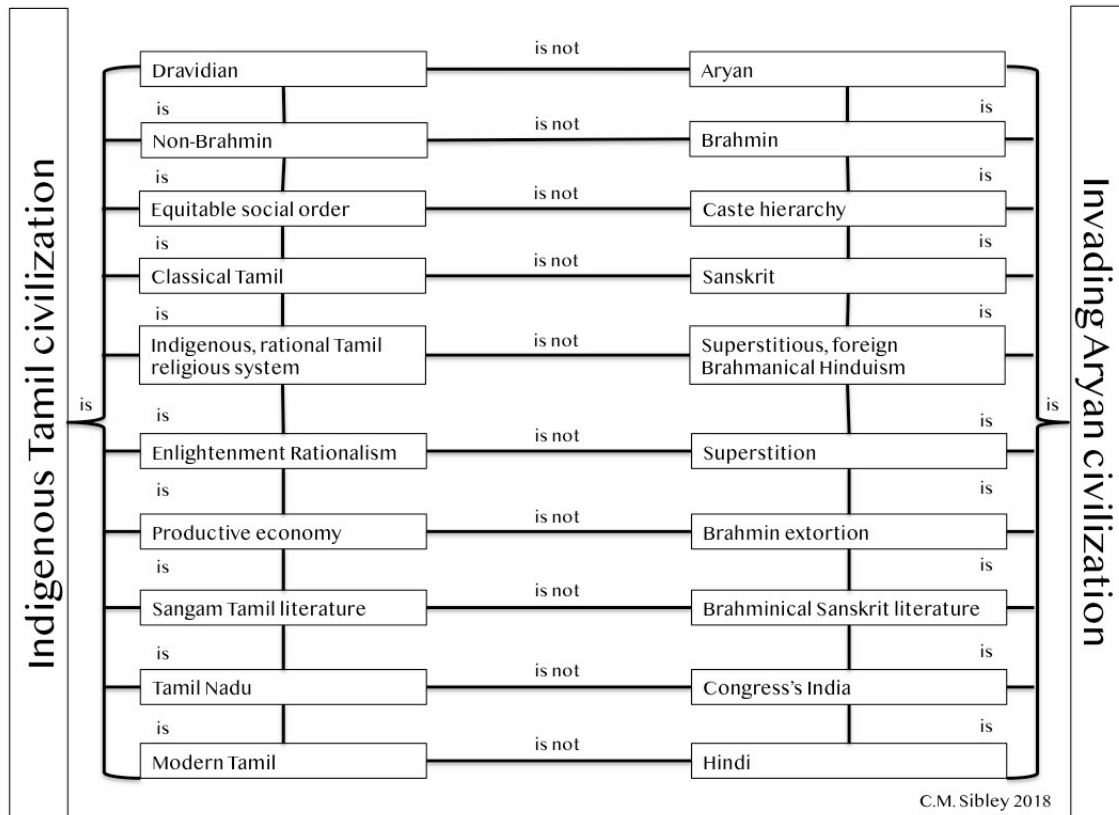
numerous digraphs (“th”, “zh”, “aa”, etc.), compression of several phonetically distinct Tamil letters (e.g., த/ட, ந/ன/ண/ங/ஞ) into single English equivalents (“t”, “n”, etc.), and frequent deference to Sanskrit or North Indian transliterations or pronunciations (“Ramaswamy” for ராமசாமி) when transliterating Sanskrit-derived proper nouns. This scheme presents the obvious advantage of already being in common use among Tamil speakers, and thus is the natural choice for non-academic works. However, this scheme cannot offer the orthographic precision required to deduce the Tamil spelling of a given word from its transliteration. Nor can it necessarily guarantee complete consistency in transliteration – observation of the distinction between long and short vowels, for example, is to an extent up to the discretion of the individual transliterator (e.g., “Lalitha” and “Lalithaa” for லலிதா). This scheme is thus not suitable for academic transliterations, save in cases like common proper names in which a certain transliteration has become standard (e.g. “Coimbatore” for கோயம்புத்தூர்).

In this work, I have used a hybrid system in which I use the diacritics of the Madras Tamil lexicon scheme while recognizing the voicing distinctions and other minor phonetic considerations (e.g., the pronunciation of ச as either “s” or “ch” depending on the word and phonetic environment) that individual Tamil letters do not distinguish. As a result, my hybrid system allows for the precise reconstruction of a given Tamil word from its transliteration while also giving the non-specialist, non-Tamil-speaking reader a rough guide to accurately pronouncing the word. My

hybrid system also to some extent bridges the gap between the Madras Tamil Lexicon scheme and the popular Tamilian transliteration scheme. In many cases, this hybrid system is able to provide orthographically precise transliterations that differ from their popular transliterations only in added diacritical marks (i.e., *Saṅgam* for Sangam) or not at all (*Sambandar* for Sambandar), versus the often very alien transliterations of the Madras Tamil Lexicon scheme (*caṅkam*, Campantar). Even in the cases when my scheme diverges from the popular scheme (*māṅgāy* for “maangai”, *māmbaḷam* for “maampazham”), my equivalent offers a reasonably accurate phonetic approximation usually recognizable to a non-specialist Tamil speaker.

I do, however, apologize for the deeply awkward *Dirāviḍa* that my system generates for திராவிட (“Dravidian”), which languishes in the uncanny valley between the Madras Tamil Lexicon and the commonsense Tamil system because of its deference to the Tamil orthographic convention of inserting vowels to prevent Sanskrit loanwords from beginning with two consecutive consonants. The standard pronunciation of the word and its commonsense Tamil transliteration both reflect the word’s (rather ironic) Sanskrit roots in the Sanskrit word *Drāviḍa*. Given the ultimate goal of my system to provide phonetic accuracy and readability to the non-specialist, I have transliterated திராவிட as “*Drāviḍa*” throughout.

## Appendix Two: Map of the Dravidianist Associative Network



This figure depicts the range of polar qualities attributed to the native Tamil and invading Aryan civilizations of the Dravidianist historical narrative. The labels given to each of these categories describe the general quality shared by different specific Dravidianist attributions: therefore, the “indigenous, rational Tamil religious system” is a Buddhist moral-philosophical ethic for Thass, a monotheistic and pure-Tamil Saivism for Adigal, a rationalist atheism for Periyar, and so on. Different Dravidianist projects will lend different degrees of emphasis to each of these categories. Note that the final two categories become salient later in Dravidianist history, and so are not necessarily present explicitly in earlier Dravidianist thought. I have included them on this chart because of the outsize importance they acquire in Dravidianist ideology and symbolism starting in the 1930s.



## Bibliography

Aloysius, G. *Religion as Emancipatory Identity: a Buddhist movement among the Tamils under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1998

Ambedkar, B.R. *The Annihilation of Caste*. London: Verso, 2014

Anandhi, S.

- (1991) "Women's Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948". *Social Scientist*, Vol, 19, No. 5/6 (May – June 1991), pp. 24-41
- (2005) "Sex and Sensibility in Tamil Politics". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 47 (Nov. 19-25, 2005), pp. 4876-4877

Barnett, Marguerite Ross. *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976

Bate, Bernard. *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009

BBC (bbc.com). Biswas, Soutik. "Why India bull-taming protest may not be just about bulls". 21 January 2017. Accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-38687248>, 10 September 2018

Chidambaram, M. "Cultural Entrepreneurs and Language Strategists: DMK in Tamil Nadu". *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July - Sep. 1987), pp. 418-427

Collins, Michael. "Writing Dalit assertion: early Dalit Panther politics and legal advocacy in 1980s Tamil Nadu". *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September 2017), p. 238-254

Contursi, Janet A. "Political Theology: Text and Practice in a Dalit Panther Community". *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (May 1993), pp. 320-339

Eenadu India (eenaduindia.com). "TN govt should ensure equality to all during Jallikattu: Thirumavalavan". 21 Jan 2017. Accessed at <http://www.eenaduindia.com/states/south/tamil-nadu/chennai-city/2017/01/21223334/TN-govt-should-ensure-equality-to-all-during-Jallikattu.vpf>, 4 July 2018

Forrester, Duncan B. "The Madras Anti-Hindi Agitation, 1965: Political Protest and its Effects on Language Policy in India". *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. ½ (Spring-Summer 1966), pp. 19-36

Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Kolkata: Samya, 2011

Gorringer, Hugo

- (2005) "You Build Your House, We'll Build Ours': The Attractions and Pitfalls of Dalit Identity Politics". *Social Identities*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (2005), pp. 653-672
- (2006) "Which is Violence? Reflections on Collective Violence and Dalit Movements in South India". *Social Movement Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2006), pp. 117-136
- (2007) "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu". *Journal of South Asian Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2007), pp. 51-73
- (2011) "Party Political Panthers: Hegemonic Tamil Politics and the Dalit Challenge". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Dec. 2011. Accessed November 30, 2017 at <http://samaj.revues.org/3224>
- (2016) "Dalit Parties and the Dilemmas of Democratization in Tamil Nadu". *Studies in Indian Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2016), pp. 49-62

Harriss, John. "Whatever Happened to Cultural Nationalism in Tamil Nadu? A Reading of Current Events and the Recent Literature on Tamil Politics". *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 97-117

Hardgrave, Robert

- (1965a) "The DMK and the Politics of Tamil Nationalism". *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 1964-1965), pp. 396-411
- (1965b) "The Riots in Tamilnad: Problems and Prospects of India's Language Crisis". *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (August 1965), pp. 399-407

Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar. "Is There a Tamil Race?" In *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995

*The Hindu* (thehindu.com). "VCK not for Dalits alone: Thirumavalavan" 6 February 2015. Accessed at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/vck-not-for-dalits-alone-thirumavalavan/article6863258.ece> , 4 July 2018

Irschick, Eugene. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969

Kailasapathy, K. "The Tamil Purist Movement: A Re-Evaluation". *Social Scientist*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (May 1979), p. 23-51

More, J. B. P.

- (1997) *The Political Evolution of Muslims in Tamilnadu and Madras, 1930-1947*. Chennai: Orient Longman, 1997

- (2004) *Muslim Identity, Print Culture, and the Dravidian Factor*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004

NDTV (ndtv.com). "What is Jallikattu? All You Need to Know About Tamil Nadu's Bull-Taming Tradition. 19 January 2017. Accessed at <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/what-is-jallikattu-1650547>, 10 September 2018

The News Minute (thenewsminute.com). Muralidharan, Kavitha. "Protests against SC/ST Act Dilution: Dalit activists angered by TN media's apathy". 25 April 2018. Accessed at <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/protests-against-scst-act-dilution-dalit-activists-angered-tn-medias-apathy-80182> , 4 July 2018

Pandian, Jacob. "Re-Ethnogenesis: The Quest for a Dravidian Identity among the Tamils of India". *Anthropos*, Vol. 93, No. 4/6 (1998), pp. 545-552

Pandian, M.S.S.

- (1991) "Parasakthi: Life and Times of a DMK Film". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 11/12 (Mar. 1991), pp. 759-761, 763, 765, 767, 769-770
- (1993) "'Denationalising' the Past: 'Nation' in E V Ramasamy's Political Discourse". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 42 (Oct. 16, 1993), pp. 2282-2287
- (1994) "Notes on the Transformation of 'Dravidian' Ideology: Tamilnadu, c. 1900-1940". *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, No. 5/6 (May - Jun., 1994), p. 84-104
- (1996) "Towards National-Popular: Notes on Self-Respecters' Tamil". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 51 (Dec. 21, 1996), pp. 3323-3329
- (2007) *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. Ranikhet, Uttarakhand: Permanent Black, 2007

Price, Pamela. "Revolution and Rank in Tamil Nationalism". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (May 1996), p. 359-383

Raman, Srilata. "Who Are the Velalas? Twentieth-Century Constructions and Contestations of Tamil Identity in Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950)". *Shared idioms, sacred symbols, and the articulation of identities in South Asia*, Pemberton, K., & Nijhawan, M. ed., p. 78-95. New York: Routledge, 2009

Ramaswamy, Sumathi

- "Daughters of Tamil: Language and Poetics of Womanhood in Tamilnad". *South Asia Research*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (May 1992)
- "En/gendering Language: The Poetics of Tamil Identity". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct. 1993), p. 683-725
- "Language of the People in the World of Gods: Ideologies of Tamil Before the Nation". *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb. 1996), pp. 66-92

- *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997

Ramaswamy, Vijaya. "Tamil Separatism and Cultural Negotiation: Gender Politics and Literature in Tamil Nadu". *Social Scientist*, Vol. 26, No. 5/6 (May – June 1998), pp. 61-83

Roberts, Nathaniel

- "Language, Violence, and the State: Writing Tamil Dalits". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Jan. 2010. Accessed at <http://samaj.revues.org/2952> on 30 Nov. 2017

Scroll.in

- Yamunan, Sruthisagar. "As jallikattu supporters grow more insistent, Dalit voices of protest against bull-taming emerge". 19 Jan. 2017. Accessed at <https://scroll.in/article/827037/as-clamour-to-permit-jallikattu-grows-louder-dalit-voices-of-protest-emerge-against-the-sport> , 4 July 2018
- Govindarajan, Vinita. "'We work in IT firms, deliver milk every morning': How Chennai jallikattu stir animated young people". 14 Jan. 2018. Accessed at <https://scroll.in/article/864404/we-work-in-it-firms-deliver-milk-every-morning-how-chennai-jallikattu-stir-changed-young-people> , 4 July 2018

Subramaniam, Narendra. "Ethnicity and Pluralism: An Exploration with Reference to Indian Cases". *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Dec. 1999), p. 715-744

Thirumaavalavan, Tholkappiyan

- *Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation*. Meena Kandasamy, ed. and trans. Kolkata: Samya, 2003
- *Uproot Hindutva: The Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panthers*. Meena Kandasamy, ed. and trans. Kolkata: Samya, 2004

Trautmann, Thomas R. *Languages & Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006

Vaithees, V. Ravi.

- (as Ravi Vaitheespara) "Maraimalai Atigal and the Genealogy of the Tamilian Creed". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vo. 44, No. 14 (Apr. 4-10, 2009), p. 45-51
- (2015) *Religion, Caste, and Nation in South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015

Venkatachalapathy, A.R.

- (1995) "Dravidian Movement and Saivites: 1927-1944". *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30. No. 14 (Apr. 8, 1995), p. 761-768

- (2006) *In Those Days There Was No Coffee: Writings in Cultural History*. New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006

Cover image: front page of *Draviḍa Nāḍu*, a journal run by C.N. Annadurai in the early years of the *Drāviḍa Mun̄netra Kaḷagam*. Photo by author.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> See Ramaswamy (1997), p. 46-62 for an informative discussion of the Indian nationalist engagement with the Tamil language and classical Tamil culture.

<sup>2</sup> This term occasionally appears in other specialist works, but there is not a scholarly consensus on its specific referent. See, for example, Ramaswamy (1997), who uses the term to refer to the social-political ideology associated with Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement, and Geetha & Rajadurai (2011), who use the term to refer to the basic idea of ancient Dravidian cultural autonomy at the heart of Caldwell's narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Tamil "Ayōttidāsar"

<sup>4</sup> I have used the term "Dalit" here (and throughout) in deference to the modern convention for describing the subaltern caste position that Thass alternately described as "Untouchable" and "Paraiyar", the latter reflecting the major Tamil Dalit *jāti* to which Thass himself belonged. The chief move of Thass's project, though, was to rearticulate these subaltern caste identities into the religious-civilizational-racial identity of *Ādi Drāviḍa* ("first Dravidian").

<sup>5</sup> In deference to the Tamil spelling and pure-Tamil pronunciation of the word, I have transliterated this word as "Saiva" rather than the Sanskrit-derived spelling "Śaiva" that is more common in religious studies literature. Considering Maraimalai Adigal's fervent advocacy for the adoption of a de-Sanskritized "pure Tamil" (*taṇittami*), which he understood as a natural outgrowth of his religious reform project, I think this is an appropriate deference to Adigal's sensibilities.

<sup>6</sup> One of Iyothē Thass's chief lieutenants, who was an important social organizer associated with the Dravida Mahajana Sabha

<sup>7</sup> The co-founder of the Justice Party whose contributions to non-Brahmin Tamil politics will be examined in more detail in a following section of this thesis

<sup>8</sup> An important and vocal Justice Party supporter who became an endorser of Periyar's Self-Respect Movement

<sup>9</sup> Maraimalai Adigal's daughter, who played a foundational (but often unrecognized) role in Adigal's Pure Tamil Movement and was an important cultural thinker and women's rights activist in her own right. "Ammaiyar" is an honorific title; Neelambikai has no familial relation to Ramamritham Ammaiya

<sup>10</sup> An important Dalit women's rights activist who spent a good portion of her career affiliated with the Self-Respect Movement before losing faith in the Movement

<sup>11</sup> An important Self-Respect ideologue who regularly contributed to Self-Respect journals

<sup>12</sup> A Dravidian nationalist politician and ideologue who was one of the founders of the *Drāviḍa Muṇṇetra Kaḷagam*.

<sup>13</sup> The face of the DMK from the early 1960s up until his death in August 2018, who in addition to serving multiple terms as chief minister of Tamil Nadu was also a renowned Tamil nationalist screenwriter and anti-Hindi agitator.

<sup>14</sup> *Aṇṇa* is the popular nickname for CN Annadurai, one of the founding figures of the DMK. Annadurai himself was no longer alive by the time that the ADMK broke ranks

---

with the DMK; his inclusion in the ADMK's name evokes a notion of the ADMK's return to the roots of Dravidian politics.

<sup>15</sup> Scroll.in (Govindarajan, 14 Jan. 2018)

<sup>16</sup> By using the past tense here, I intend to reflect the fact that I have been unable to locate sources describing the village *jallikaṭṭu* tradition in the time following the Marina Beach protests. It is unclear how – if at all – the tradition has changed as a result of its time in the Tamil public eye and the public criticism the tradition received from Dalit and anti-caste activists.

<sup>17</sup> Scroll.in (Yamunan, 19 Jan. 2017)

<sup>18</sup> Following Nathaniel Roberts's apt note [2010, p. 1 (footnote)], I have used the transliteration "Thirumavalavan" (for *Tirumāvalavan*), which is the spelling Thirumavalavan himself uses, over "Thirumaavalavan", which is the spelling Meena Kandasamy uses for her translated volumes

<sup>19</sup> Eenadu India (Jan. 2017)

<sup>20</sup> Gorringe (2016), p. 50

<sup>21</sup> The footnotes in Kandasamy's volumes contain a number of examples of Thevar violence against Dalits. See also

[<https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/india/India994-07.htm>] for a more thorough Human Rights Watch report on Thevar violence against the Devendra Kula Vellalar (Dalit) community.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the activists quoted in The News Minute (Muralidharan, 25 April 2018) for an example of the esteem in which Dalit activists hold Thirumavalavan

<sup>23</sup> Gorringe (2016) gives an account of the tensions within VCK ranks that have emerged around this shift in the organization's mission.

<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the confines of this project will not allow me to engage directly with Dr. Ambedkar's narrative of "Untouchable" history, which is perhaps slightly more attuned to racial divisions within South Asia than many successive Ambedkarite movements are. The most notable example of this in Ambedkar's thought is his contention that Dravidian peoples were the inhabitants of India prior to Aryan invasion. Per Aloysius (1996, p. 187), Ambedkar was in contact with the Tamil Buddhist communities associated with Iyothee Thass's Dravida Mahajana Sabha, and so it certainly seems feasible to assume some sort of dialogue between Ambedkar and Thass's supporters on the topic. However, it is also possible that Ambedkar arrived at this idea independently through his consumption of some of the same colonial-era histories that influenced Thass's formulation of *Ādi Drāviḍa* history.

<sup>25</sup> To a certain extent, Ambedkar and subsequent Ambedkarite activists and thinkers have sought to establish an identity for the Dalit community independent of their position in caste hierarchy. The above note references Ambedkar's project of writing Dalit civilizational history, which is one of the most common ways by which Dalit thinkers and activists have sought to generate such an identity. Nevertheless, these projects never seek to obscure the social oppression that the current Dalit community faces or to supplant that oppression as the justification for Dalit political unity.

<sup>26</sup> Thirumaavalavan, 2003 and 2004

---

<sup>27</sup> *Uproot Hindutva*, 151 (“Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism”)

<sup>28</sup> *Uproot Hindutva*, 131 (“We Will Worship Tamil! We Will Worship Through Tamil!”)

<sup>29</sup> *Uproot Hindutva*, 180 (“Bhakti Literature”)

<sup>30</sup> This is a common term for Dalit-caste ghettos in both English and Tamil (pronounced “*kāḷani*”) that does not denote a connection to British colonialism.

<sup>31</sup> cf., e.g., *Uproot Hindutva* 83 (“Eelam Means Tigers!”), where Thirumavalavan cites the word *sōru* for “cooked rice” (versus the Sanskrit-derived *sādam*) and 122 (“We Will Worship Tamil! We Will Worship Through Tamil!”), where he cites the word *kamukkam* for “secret” (versus the Sanskrit-derived *ragasiyam*)

<sup>32</sup> *Uproot Hindutva* 154 (“Only Caste-Annihilating Tamil Nationalism”)

<sup>33</sup> cite

<sup>34</sup> This becomes particularly evident in Thirumavalavan’s use of terms like *kuppam* (“slum”, “fisherman village”) that Thirumavalavan uses as synonyms of *chēri* [cf. *Uproot Hindutva*, 83]

<sup>35</sup> See the brief but illuminating discussion in Geetha and Rajadurai (105-109), which summarizes the work of several important missionary figures preceding Caldwell.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Periyar’s essay *Ātma, Mōtcham-Naragam* (“Ātmā, the Hell of Mokṣa”, Chennai: *Periyār Drāviḍar Kaḷagam*, 2007), which frames its argument through this linguistic reading. This is a rhetorical move Periyar makes with other Hindu theological terms (e.g., *karma*, *dharma*, *varṇa*) in a number of other speeches and essays.

<sup>37</sup> I use “activist” in the sense that all Dravidianist movements were principally occupied with effecting social or cultural change and created social organizations to further this change. My use of “activist” in this sense does not necessarily imply the politicization of these agendas or intend to speak on the actual social impact of Dravidianist activist projects.

<sup>38</sup> Commonly referred to in scholarly literature as “U.V. Swaminatha Iyer” in reflection of his Brahmin caste identity. Given that he is readily recognizable in the Tamil country without the use of his caste name, I have opted to exclude it. This also seems appropriate since he did not strongly affiliate himself with the dominant Brahmin cultural position of his time, which sought to emphasize an Aryan racial-civilizational history to the exclusion of the Dravidian Tamil tradition.

<sup>39</sup> Aloysius (p. 47)

<sup>40</sup> See Pandian (2007; p. 117-119) for a more thorough discussion of this point

<sup>41</sup> While the elevated position of the Vellalar community in Tamil history is common knowledge in Tamil studies, Aloysius (p. 39) provides an interesting discussion of the relationship between the Vellalar and Brahmin communities in premodern Tamil caste dynamics.

<sup>42</sup> Vaithees (2016; p. 65)

<sup>43</sup> See especially Vaithees (2016; p. 69-99)

<sup>44</sup> Hellman-Rajanayagam (p. 123-124)

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, a fair number of Tamil-language studies on the emergence of Dravidianist ideology have somewhat credibly understood it to have begun as a Vellalar-caste



---

movement. See Pandian (1994; p. 84) and Venkatachalapathy (1995; p. 761), who both cite this consensus.

<sup>46</sup> A major ecological reserve in Kerala is also named after Periyar in recognition of his advocacy at Vaikom.

<sup>47</sup> Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 344-351)

<sup>48</sup> Vijaya Ramaswamy (p. 69) covers the falling out between Periyar and Moovalur Ramamritham Ammaiyar, an important Dalit women's rights activist, that resulted in part from Periyar's refusal to endorse the bill.

<sup>49</sup> cf. Pandian (2007; p. 19-26)

<sup>50</sup> Chennai's Marina Beach – the same important local landmark where the *jallikaṭṭu* protests were centered – has a statue honoring Pope for his contributions to the study of Tamil.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Pope's preface to his translation of the *Tiruvāsagam* (*The Tiruvaçagam; or, Sacred Utterances of the Tamil Poet, Saint, and Sage Manikka-Vaçagar*; Oxford, 1900)

<sup>52</sup> Vaithees (2016; p. 187)

<sup>53</sup> The Periyar Memorial complex in Vepery, Chennai, which is the present-day home of the still-functioning *Drāviḍar Kaḷagam*, prominently displays this connection on memorial plaques, as well as in the titles of a number of materials shelved in its Periyar Book House. As of 2018, a Tamil translation of Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" was available for purchase in the Book House.

<sup>54</sup> Vaithees, (2016; p. 139-143)

<sup>55</sup> For example, Max Müller (Vaithees, 2016; p. 99). Adigal also called William James "a spiritual teacher of mine" (Vaithees; 2016, p. 141)

<sup>56</sup> see especially Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 77-86)

<sup>57</sup> again, see Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 77-86), although Aloysius makes note that the social conditions of late Vijayanagara rule had given a high degree of economic and social prosperity to Tamil Dalit communities that was undone by colonial social and economic policy (p. 33-34, 37-39)

<sup>58</sup> Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 51-54)

<sup>59</sup> This partly reflects the early part of Periyar's activist career as a member of the Indian National Congress, and certainly also reflects the run-ins Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement had with colonial power resulting from his adoption of a leftist economic platform in the early 1930s. Several Self-Respect journals were shut down by colonial authorities, and both Periyar and his brother were briefly imprisoned at different periods for their involvement with Self-Respect leftism.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, Brahmins filled 83.3% of sub-judge positions and 72.6% of district *munsif* positions in the Presidency (Irschick, p. 14). See also Pandian (2007; p. 68-69)

<sup>61</sup> See especially Pandian (2007; p. 77-84)

<sup>62</sup> To use "society" in the singular here is to assert a national social unity that was not present in pre-colonial India.

<sup>63</sup> cf. Dirks (2001; chapters 4-6) for a comprehensive discussion on this topic

<sup>64</sup> Pandian (2007; p. 72-77) offers a brilliant discussion of the linkage of Brahmin material and cultural power in colonial Madras Presidency

---

<sup>65</sup> Seen principally in the emergence of a Utilitarian, statistical philosophy of governance in British colonial territories. Bernard Cohn and Arjun Appadurai have been the chief scholars to historicize and theorize this concept.

<sup>66</sup> Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 76)

<sup>67</sup> I intend my argument here to speak in part to off-hand Indian nationalist readings of Dravidianism as European assimilationism. Such readings reflect a fundamental – and perhaps willful – ignorance of Dravidianist movements and their social context.

<sup>68</sup> Thass's push to rehabilitate Brahminical ritual as a feature of *Ādi Drāviḍa* Buddhism relies on his contention that Brahmins stole these rituals from the ancient Dravidian Buddhist community.

<sup>69</sup> Venkatachalapathy (1995; p. 762-763)

<sup>70</sup> An example of a less directly material policy focus of the Justice Party government was its introduction of the Hindu Religious Endowments Act, which put the finances of Hindu temples in the Presidency under the direct supervision of the Madras Presidency government. This move was made to counter what Justice Party members understood as Brahmin exploitation and defalcation in the religious realm. Cf. Geetha & Rajadurai (p. 200-207) for an illuminating discussion on this topic.

<sup>71</sup> Aloysius (p. 49)

<sup>72</sup> Arooran (p. 39-40)

<sup>73</sup> Arooran, 42

<sup>74</sup> cf. Arooran (p. 70-122), who describes this campaign in detail.

<sup>75</sup> The British colonial administration's deference to Brahminical textual norms has been amply established in contemporary scholarship on caste and colonial administration (see, for example, Dirks [2001]), and so I will simply gesture to it here rather than engaging in a more detailed discussion on the point.

<sup>76</sup> See for example, T.N. Sivagnanam Pillai's statement in Arooran (p. 90)

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Kandasamy Chetty's invocation of terms like "social justice" and "democracy" at the First Adi Dravida Conference (Geetha & Rajadurai; p. 189-191)

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Harriss (2002), Pinto (year), and Pandian (year).

<sup>79</sup> See Pandian (1991) for a breakdown of *Parasakti* as DMK propaganda and the response the film garnered from forces opposed to the DMK's platform.