BEYOND THE WARRING SECTS:
UNIVERSALISM, DISSENT, AND CANON IN TAMIL ŚAIVISM, CA. 1675-1994

by

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Abstract

Scholarship on the formation of modern Hindu universalism in colonial South Asia has tended to focus on the Western-gazing and nationalist discourses of acculturated elites. Less attention, however, has been paid to comparable developments within the regionally situated vernacular religious traditions. The present dissertation addresses this issue by considering how several distinctly vernacular Śaiva traditions in Tamil-speaking Southern India transformed through the impact of the colonial encounter. At the center of this transformation, which produced “Tamil Śaivism” as a monolithic Tamil religion, was a shift in the way in which these sectarian traditions articulated and contested specific interpretations of Śaiva theology and sacred textuality. Chapter One contextualizes the thesis’ arguments by focusing on the internally diverse character of early-modern Tamil Śaiva intellectual culture, and more especially on the phenomenon of pan-sectarianism in two contemporary eclectic Tamil Vīraśaiva treatises. The next three chapters explore how such pan-sectarian claims were placed under enormous pressure in the nineteenth century. Chapter Two examines a low-caste commentary on a classic of Tamil Advaita Vedānta that attempts to critique the orthodox religious establishment and reinscribe Śaivism as a monism. In Chapter Three I look at how the fiery Śaiva Siddhāntin Cōmacuntara Nāyakar responds to the perceived threat of Brahminical religion by consolidating a monolithic
account of Tamil Śaivism around the medieval poet-saint Tiruṉāṉacampantar. Chapter Four situates this consolidation within a more general fracturing of the Tamil religious public sphere in the late nineteenth century, which I elucidate by examining an emergent debate over the sectarian identity of a major early-modern poet. The final substantive chapter analyzes the postcolonial afterlife of Śaiva sectarianism as it is expressed in the recorded discourses of the twentieth-century monastic Cantiracēkarēntira Carasvati Cuvāmikāl. By investigating these diverse attempts to claim the right to speak for Tamil Śaivism, the thesis contributes to current scholarly debates about the emergence of modern South Asian religion, while also mapping out important but neglected aspects of South Indian religion and religious historiography.
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Notes on Transliteration and Translation

Tamil and Sanskrit words used in this dissertation have been transliterated according to the scheme employed in the University of Madras’ (1982) *Tamil Lexicon*. The names of towns and cities have been given without diacritics, except if they occur in a name; thus Tirupporur but Tiruppūrūr Citampara Cuvāmikāl.

There is good reason to transliterate the names of the sectarian traditions discussed in this dissertation according to their Tamil rather than their Sanskrit form, e.g. Caiva Cittāntam rather than Śaiva Siddhānta, Attuvita Vēṭāntam rather than Advaita Vedānta. Nevertheless, I utilize the Sanskritized forms here for two reasons. First, all of the traditions mentioned herein are linguistically of a hybrid nature, and it might generate confusion for some readers were I to repeatedly switch back and forth between Tamil and Sanskrit forms. Second, I have opted for the Sanskrit forms because these are more widely recognized outside the field of Tamil Studies.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
in loving memory of Rosalind Steinschneider
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Introduction

Vernacular Hindu Universalisms

The present study examines how several regionally rooted and distinctly vernacular Śaiva traditions in Tamil South India were transformed through the impact of the colonial encounter. This transformation can be understood, I will suggest, to have resulted in the consolidation of “Tamil Śaivism” as a monolithic Tamil religion in the late nineteenth century. I will also argue that this synthesis was neither unidirectional nor uncontested, but rather accompanied by a general fracturing of the vernacular religious public sphere into several locally defined neo-sectarian traditions and a post-sectarian neo-Vedānta. The dissertation thus seeks to chart the emergence of several distinct but mutually imbricated and characteristically vernacular forms of modern Hindu universalism in Southern India.

In attempting to trace this trajectory the thesis inevitably engages with the work of other scholars who have analyzed the formation of modern religion in Southern Asia. Two recent bodies of scholarship have provided particularly important methodological insights. The first highlights the relevance of precolonial forms of self-reflection and self-representation for the production of colonial religion. The second calls attention to the vernacular religious public sphere in colonial modernity.

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1 The terms “sect”, “sectarian”, “sectarianism”, “pan-sectarianism”, etc. are used often throughout this study. The application of the word “sect” to the Indian context is not without controversy, especially given the term’s connection to the history of Protestantism (McLeod 1978). See Michael (1992) for a discussion of the application of this term with respect to the Kannada Vīraśaivas, and Raman (2007: 180, n. 2) with reference to Śrīvaśnavism. Michaels ([1998] 2004: 319) suggests that, in the absence of a centralized ecclesiastical authority, the term “sect” should not be understood to denote “a split or excluded community, but rather an organized tradition, usually established by a founder, with ascetic practices.” It is for this reason that the Tamil word *camayam*, often translated as “sect”, may arguably be better rendered in certain contexts by the word “religion”, as in the case of *caman camayam* (“Jain religion”, “Jainism”). In this study, I interpret Tamil Śaivism to be a “current” (see below) of religious thought and practice within which can be distinguished several identifiable “streams”, including Vīraśaivism, Śaiva Siddhānta, and Smārtism. The latter may be considered as “sects” in Michaels’ sense, and always while bearing in mind the ambiguity referred to above. “Sectarianism” is here defined as the expression of an attachment to or partiality for a particular sectarian perspective or tradition. As we shall see, a tension between the affirmation of specific sectarian doctrine and the assertion of a pan-sectarian universality has long been central to Tamil Śaiva theological discourse. In emic terms, this tension is often registered in the space that separates the concepts *camayam* (here probably best rendered as “sect”) and *camayāṭṭam* (“that which is or has gone beyond the sects”).
In the wake of Edward Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*, many scholars of South Asia have come to interpret the colonial period as marking a radical transformation of precolonial traditions and a rupture with earlier modes of self-understanding. However, a growing consortium of scholars has contended that such “post-Orientalist” arguments are significantly weakened by their tendency to overlook the history of precolonial South Asia. Sheldon Pollock (1993), for instance, has suggested that interactions between knowledge and power long predate the arrival of Europeans to the subcontinent, and that it is therefore not possible to accurately gauge the nature of colonial change without adequately accounting for what came before it.² In a not dissimilar vein, Charles Hallisey (1995) cautions against overstating the impact of colonialism, which would itself be an ironic perpetuation of the very Eurocentrism that post-Orientalist scholarship seeks to critique. Turning Said’s thesis on its head, Hallisey suggests that scholars pay closer attention to the ways in which local traditions shaped Western perceptions of Southern Asian religion through a process of “intercultural mimesis”. Building on these arguments, Anne Blackburn (2001) decisively rejects post-Orientalist assumptions regarding an essentially “static” precolonial tradition that was replaced by the “constructions” of European scholars. In her analysis of changing literary practices among eighteenth-century Lankan Buddhist monastics, Blackburn makes the compelling claim that precolonial traditions possess inherent capacities for change, conflict, and self-reflection, capacities that in turn provide models and theoretical resources for subsequent religious reformulation (see also Ambalavanar 2006: esp. 314 ff.).

The observations of these scholars emphasize the ways in which the precolonial politics of representation establishes the initial hermeneutical conditions within which colonial knowledge in South Asia is produced. In the context of the present study, they draw our attention to precolonial articulations of Tamil Śaivism. As we shall see, Tamil Śaiva traditions have an extensive history, especially from the late precolonial period onward, of claiming the right to speak for Śaivism in universalist terms, even as they held onto specific and often highly idiosyncratic conceptions of scriptural canon. These traditions participated in the colonial-era

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² One of the ways in which Pollock has sought to address this issue in recent years is through the systematic study of early-modern Sanskrit knowledge systems. For a description of this project, including a list of collaborating scholars and links to working papers, see http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/. The relevance of this project for the present study is significantly lessened by the fact that it does not attempt to explore explicitly religious literature produced during the period with which it is concerned, i.e. 1550-1750.
debates that led to the production of a “Hindu” universalism in Southern India, as Śaiva intellectuals drew upon and recast earlier representations in an effort to colonize the newly emergent vernacular public sphere of the colonial period.

Of course, one of the most common post-Orientalist arguments is precisely that Hindu universalism or “Hinduism”, especially as it is enshrined in the ideology of neo-Vedānta, is an invention of the nineteenth century, one that owes more to the values of the European Enlightenment and the efforts of Orientalist scholars than it does to indigenous traditions (e.g. King 1999). This notion has been critiqued in recent years by studies that point to evidence of a coherent Hindu identity in precolonial times. Andrew Nicholson (2010), for instance, contends that such an identity emerged in the late medieval period when certain intellectuals writing in Sanskrit “began to treat as a single whole the diverse philosophical teachings of the Upaniṣads, epics, Purāṇas, and the schools known retrospectively as the ‘six systems’ (ṣaḍdarśana) of mainstream Hindu philosophy” (p. 2). Tracing this transition in the writings of the sixteenth-century polymath Vijñānabhikṣu and other contemporary philosophical and doxographical literature, Nicholson maintains that the Orientalists and Indian intellectuals who developed the concept of “Hinduism” in the nineteenth century drew upon these earlier formulations of religious unity.

I am in agreement with the spirit of this argument; however, the consensus position he finds in the writings of the Sanskrit intellectuals he examines is not, I would suggest, mirrored in comparable Tamil Śaiva literature. It is necessary, then, to theorize what is happening in the Tamil sources in the late precolonial period, and to trace how these sources are being appropriated and refashioned in colonial debates about the nature of Tamil religion. Ultimately, the distinctiveness of the Tamil case must alert us to look afresh and in greater detail to other lesser studied vernacular religious traditions in India in the same period. It must also show us

3 To mention but one instance of disjuncture, the eighteenth-century theologian Civaṅṇa Muṇjivar classifies the schools of Nyāya (tarukkam), Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta (referred to as ēkāyma vātam), Śāṅkhya, Yoga, and Vaiṣṇavism (pañcarāttira matam) as “external” or heterodox sects (pucar camayankal), identifying them as superior to atheism, Buddhism and Jainism (as Nicholson’s argument would predict), but still far inferior to the “internal” sects (akac camayankal) of Śaiva orthodoxy. Simply put, there appears to be an entirely different doxographical logic at work here than that which Nicholson elaborates in, e.g., Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Prasthānabheda.
that it is no longer sufficient to write the historiography of a single modern Hinduism, even from
the perspective of the longue durée. I will develop this line of argument in greater detail below.

Scholarship on the vernacular religious public sphere in colonial modernity is useful for
theorizing the role of vernacular religious traditions in the reformulation of Tamil Śaivism in
South India. Several studies have emphasized how “traditionalist” intellectuals situated within
specific regional contexts were central agents of socio-religious change during the nineteenth
century. These intellectuals made extensive use of the newly available vernacular press to
disseminate religious knowledge and propose necessary reforms that would ultimately shape the
values of the contemporary South Asian middle-classes. Thus Hatcher (1996) demonstrates how
the writings of the pandit-reformer Īśvarchandra Vidyāsāgar bring about a convergence of
indigenous and Western idioms within the “contact zone” (a term he borrows from Mary Louise
Pratt) of colonial Bengali. With respect to the Hindi belt, Dalmia ([1997] 2010) has theorized the
role of the traditionalist scholar in synthesizing the local and the foreign in her monumental
study of Bhāratendu Hariśchandra of Banaras. Dalmia emphasizes how such figures brought
about meaningful change even as they sought to revive the values of an ancient past (p. 15):

…Hindu tradition as it articulated itself in the nineteenth century, as any close scrutiny of
texts of the period testifies, formed itself in the very process of negotiating the
relationship to past idioms and classical texts in the light of present needs and claims, in
order to project itself as a coherent and even homogenous entity.

Hatcher and Dalmia complicate the standard scholarly paradigm for thinking about
colonial knowledge in terms of the unidirectional imposition or imitation of Western models.4
They suggest instead that religion in colonial South Asia is a necessarily plural phenomenon that
is always mediated in and through specific vernacular contexts.5 The present study contributes to
this rethinking of the formation of modern South Asian religion by focusing on several Tamil
religious traditions and their attempt to speak for and define Śaivism in South India during the
colonial period (and beyond). Nineteenth-century religious leaders associated with these
traditions published vast quantities of material in Tamil, most of which is still unexplored, in

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4 In this context see also Pinch (2003) and Wagoner (2003), whose work further emphasizes the indigenous
contributions to colonial modernity.

5 Recently, Hatcher and Dodson (2012) have employed the term “trans-colonial modernities” to further underscore
the ways in which modernity in colonial South Asia is continually renegotiated at the local level by traditional
scholars and others for a range of diverse projects.
which they debated the nature and interpretation of Śaiva theology and sacred textuality. These disputes were informed by a variety of factors, including the democratization of scriptural access, the emergence of modern Tamil literary criticism, contact with Christianity, and the exacerbation of specific caste and ethnic tensions. It will become clear that it was in the context of these debates that the boundaries between the present-day sectarian Śaiva communities in Tamil South India were worked out.

Although this study is focused on the dynamics of vernacular religious reform in Tamil South India during the colonial period, I would argue that its findings are relevant to the study of modern South Asian religions more broadly. In particular, it suggests that “modern Hinduism”, as a category of scholarly analysis, may need to be modified in order to accommodate the plural, locally situated, and irreducibly vernacular contexts within which the historicities of colonial and postcolonial religion are constituted (and continuously contested). It thus reveals the inadequacy of the historiography of a singular “modern Hinduism” that would trace its object within certain kinds of Western-gazing neo-Vedāntic discourses that emerge within a particular (typically elite, often North Indian or even more specifically Bengali) nationalist or proto-nationalist milieu.

The precise problematic to which I refer can be brought into sharper focus by briefly considering two works that have examined the formation of modern Hindu thought in some detail. The first of these is Wilhelm Halbfass’s (1988) classic study of the historical and hermeneutical conditions that have both enabled and hindered the possibility of a “dialogue” between European and Indian intellectual traditions. The main thrust of Halbfass’s argument is that the colonial encounter transformed the way in which Indian intellectuals understood themselves, engendering a “Westernization” of traditional Indian thought but also prompting a new kind of self-assertion in the form of a “claim to a comprehensive and harmonizing openness and universality” (p. 200). Admitting the extreme meticulousness with which Halbfass supports his argument, it is also clear that his account of the rise of contemporary Hindu discourse is preoccupied with a concern, one might even say anxiety, over the possibility of an authentic Indian response to the West in the context of a modernity that, in his view, has for all intents and purposes been created by that West. Consequently, he chooses to focus on Indian figures who are more or less directly in conversation with the West and whose writings explicitly adopt or can at
least be understood to prefigure a nationalist stance, e.g. Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Yet this conscious decision necessarily passes over a range of dialogues in colonial India that do not engage the West in such an immediate fashion, including those occurring within and between the various vernacular religious traditions. Indeed, neither “the vernacular” nor “the religious” are particularly important categories in Halbfass’s analysis. Would a consideration of these spheres of Indian society in the colonial era substantiate Halbfass’s diagnosis of modern Hinduism and confirm his suspicion, which he inherits from Husserl and Heidegger, regarding the “Europeanization of the earth”? Or would a different picture emerge entirely?  

The persistence of this tendency to chart the emergence of a single, Westernizing, nationalist modern Hinduism is evident in another more recent work by Jyotirmaya Sharma (2013) on Swami Vivekananda. Through a close reading of the recorded discourses of Vivekananda’s teacher Ramakrishna and of Vivekananda himself, Sharma demonstrates how the latter broke from the bhakti- and tantra-inspired teachings of his guru to reinterpret India’s identity in terms of a monolithic, Vedānticized, rational, and politically active religion. Since religion and nationalism are already inextricably linked in Vivekananda’s thought, contemporary Hindu nationalism cannot be said to represent a later misappropriation of his message. Rather, as Sharma succinctly puts it, “there is no distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva” (2013: xiv). Yet this equation of modern Hinduism with Hindu nationalism is not very helpful for understanding the Tamil-speaking South Indian context, where Hindu nationalist politics have historically wielded far less influence than in the North. Indeed, since at least the early twentieth century, the dominant form of Hinduism in the Tamil South, i.e. Śaivism, has been associated not with a Sanskritizing Hindu nationalism but rather an anti-Brahmin vernacular regionalism.

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6 Halbfass’s orientation in part stems from his engagement with the work of Paul Hacker, who analyzes modern Hindu traditions into “neo-Hinduism” and “surviving traditional Hinduism”. The latter category, which is much less interesting for Halbfass, is understood to have “preserved an essentially unbroken continuity with the tradition, and it builds upon this foundation, carries on what is already present in the tradition, even though additions are made and extrapolations occur” (Halbfass 1988: 220). For a critique of this category as used by Hacker see Dalmia ([1997] 2010: 6-7).

7 In the academic year 2012-2013 I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in a year-long colloquium at the University of Toronto dedicated to the study of Halbfass’s India and Europe. My thoughts on this work have benefited from the rich conversations generated by this colloquium, and I would particularly like to thank Christoph Emmrich, Reid Locklin, Srilata Raman, Ajay Rao, and Lee Schlesinger.
In order to make room for such diverse vernacular expressions of colonial and postcolonial religion, of which the Tamil Śaiva case is clearly just one example, it is necessary to go beyond a conception of modern Hindu universalism which sees it as a more or less singular phenomenon that is equatable with, or at least feeds into, religious nationalism. One way to do this would be to examine colonial discourses that attempt to transcend traditional sectarian boundaries and speak for religion but which do not necessarily advance a nationalist position. By this I have in mind, above all, the vernacular religious traditions. Taken seriously, that is, placed at the center rather than the periphery of scholarly analysis, these traditions compel scholarship to reconceive modern Hindu discourse as an essentially plural, locally defined phenomenon, to speak in terms of modern Hinduisms rather than modern Hinduism. Such a shift may, in the long run, prove to be a more effective way of deconstructing the ideology of homogeneity at the heart of modern Hindutva.

Ultimately, a consideration of how vernacular religious traditions participated in the creation of a modern Hindu universalism problematizes the notion that contemporary “religions” discourse is fundamentally the product of post-Enlightenment European Protestantism (see, e.g., Asad 1993; McCutcheon 1997; Fitzgerald 2000; Masuzawa 2005). This is not only because, as was mentioned earlier, these traditions have long had sophisticated ways of articulating universalist claims. It is also because these traditions endure and continue to evolve on the ground, as it were, in ways that are only indirectly mediated by, or which only obliquely intersect with, the “official” metanarratives of Western modernity. Rather than give way to the “detrimentalized” (Roy 2004: 38) global, these traditions coexist incommensurably alongside it as constellations of lived practices and regional religious affiliations.

Simply stated, the genealogies of modern Tamil Śaivism are far too complex and multidirectional to permit its analysis in terms of a colonial “construct”. In this study I have chosen to abandon this architectural metaphor for an environmental one, preferring to see Tamil Śaivism as something akin to a river. There are three reasons for suggesting this poetic conceit as a useful means for theorizing the changes examined here. First, like a river, Tamil Śaivism is something that is very real, at least to the adherents who have lived alongside its banks for the past millennium and a half, and who continue to do so today. Second, like a river, it is constantly moving, and is always already the product of a confluence of many different “streams” of poetry, theology, ritual, memory, pilgrimage, etc. Third, like a river, it is a scarce resource, the right to
speak for which has been intensely contested for centuries. How this mighty current was reengineered as it passed through the channels of a colonial modernity in Southern India is the focus of the current dissertation. 

**The Lost History of Tamil Śaivism**

The general context for the study of Tamil Śaivism in modernity comes to us primarily through the historiography of Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement. This scholarship has convincingly argued that several developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth century led to a dramatic reconceptualization of the nature of Tamil history and culture. Of particular importance was, one, the discovery of the Dravidian family of languages and the recognition that Tamil was not derived from Sanskrit \(^9\) and, two, the systematic collection, editing, and publishing of the oldest extant strata of literature in Tamil (i.e. the Caṅkam corpus). At the turn of the twentieth century, these events prompted a new theorization of the ancient Tamil past as an egalitarian utopia that was free from the influences of “Āryan” culture, which was identified with Brahmins, the Sanskrit language, and the caste system.

It was at this moment that Śaivism, as articulated in and through the Tamil language, was identified as the original religion of the “Dravidian” race. Many Śaivas belonging to the Vēḷāḷ caste (an elite caste in Tamil Nadu but nevertheless considered the lowest or śūdra caste in the traditional varṇa hierarchy recognized by the Brahmins) began to promote Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta as superior to Advaita Vedānta, which was the theology that enjoyed the widest acceptance among the region’s Brahmin communities. Insofar as this “revival” of Tamil Śaivism and Śaiva Siddhānta declared the authenticity of Tamil over Sanskrit and of the non-Brahmin over the Brahmin, it is generally recognized to have served as an important precursor to the later, more secular cultural politics of Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement (Irschick 1969; Nambi Arooran 1980; Ramaswamy 1997; Vaithees 2015).

Recent scholarship has further nuanced this picture by exploring how specific aspects of Tamil Śaiva religion were reformulated during the colonial period by a handful of key

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8 The ideas in this paragraph first emerged in conversation with Srilata Raman and Christoph Emmrich.

9 About which see Trautmann (2006).
intellectuals. For instance, it is now recognized that a distinctively modern, self-assertive Śaivism was first formulated in the first half of the nineteenth century by Āṟumuka Nāvalar (1822-1897) of Jaffna. As a youth Nāvalar was schooled by Wesleyan missionaries, whom he helped translate the Bible into Tamil. However, he later broke with the missionaries in order to defend Śaivism from their attacks, and spent much of the remainder of his life promoting what he understood to be the true teachings of the Śaiva Āgamas. As Hudson (1992a, 1992b) has shown, perhaps the most significant aspect of Nāvalar’s message was the novel way in which he communicated it: through extensive use of the vernacular press, a new manner of systematic religious preaching, and by opening schools devoted to the promotion of Vedic and Āgamic learning. It was through such means, as Ambalavanar (2005) argues in a recent dissertation, that Nāvalar attempted to create a “Caiva public” in colonial Jaffna. On the other side of the Palk Strait, the eclectic Śaiva poet Irāmalīṇka Aṭikaḷ (1823-1874) was propagating a millenarian Śaivism centered on the practice of compassion and charity toward all beings (Raman 2009a, 2014). Tracing the subsequent reception of this figure, both as a “secular” hero of the Self-Respect movement and as a model for a modern Tamil Śaivite religion, Raman further demonstrates how the very notion of Tamil sainthood underwent a dramatic transformation around the turn of the twentieth century (Raman 2002, forthcoming). An important intellectual of the next generation was Je. Em. Nallacāmip Pillai (1864-1920), who edited the widely influential Śaiva journal The Light of Truth or Siddhānta Deepika. Michael Bergunder ([2010] 2011) has recently maintained that Nallacāmi recast Śaiva Siddhānta as a universal religion in response to the rise of a Brahminical neo-Hinduism rooted in Advaita Vedānta. 10 Last, but certainly not least, mention must be made of Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ (1876-1950). Aṭikaḷ was a staunch supporter of Śaiva Siddhānta and a key figure in the history of Tamil nationalism. He is most well known today for having founded the Pure Tamil Movement, which sought to return Tamil to a supposed state of original purity by purging it of the Sanskritic influences that were thought to have corrupted the language over time. Aṭikaḷ was also one of the first figures to promote the idea of a utopic Dravidian civilization marked by distinctively “Tamil” values associated with the Śaiva Vēḻāḷārs (Raman 2009b, Vaithees 2015).

10 I discuss this argument in the conclusion to Chapter 4.
This study aims to add to this growing body of reflection on the transformation of Tamil Śaivism in modernity by calling attention to an important but still largely neglected problem, namely, how developments in the nineteenth century have come to shape the historiography of Tamil Śaivism. As mentioned above, scholarship on the emergence of Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement has suggested that there was a “revival” of Śaivism around the turn of the twentieth century. Yet this trope of revival (with its implicit suggestion of a preceding period of “loss” or “degeneration”) obscures how the very notion of what Tamil Śaivism is was being reworked in this same period, in the context of a response to the perceived threat represented by Brahminical religion. It was therefore a very particular interpretation of Śaivism as a monolithic Tamil religion, one that emerged only in the final decades of the nineteenth century, that was ultimately identified as the primordial and authentic religion of Dravidian civilization.

The implications of this for the literary historical study of Tamil Śaivism, once they are fully recognized, are profound. For example, Karthigesu Sivathamby (1986), in his groundbreaking account of the rise of modern Tamil literary history, correctly observes how the modern study of religious literature in Tamil has been dominated by a Śaiva perspective that has consistently marginalized the literature of other traditions. However, what is not sufficiently appreciated is that what this Śaiva perspective is was itself being constituted during the crucial phase of the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is this “Śaiva perspective”, which interpreted itself as culminating in a fourteen-volume canon of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophical works in Tamil (i.e. the Meykanaṭa cāttiram), that has been canonized in the classic phenomenological and historical studies of Tamil Śaiva thought produced during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Devasenapathi 1966; Dhavamony 1971; Sivaraman 1973; Siddalingaiah 1979). Yet this vision that looks back to the fourteenth-century Śaiva Siddhānta theologian Umāpati Civācāriyār as the culmination of the premodern intellectual tradition passes over, almost (though not quite) entirely, roughly half a millennium worth of Śaiva literature in Tamil, much of which was concerned with matters of a philosophical or theological nature. As a result, entire traditions of Tamil Śaiva thought that emerged during the late medieval period, including those associated with Vīraśaivism and Advaita Vedānta, were overlooked, as were some of the most prolific and creative authors in the history of Tamil literature, including Tattuvarāyar (ca. 15th c.), Tuṟaimaṅkaḷam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikāḷ (17th c.), and Tiruppōṟūr Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ (17th-18th c.). At the turn of the twentieth century, these and other authors and texts
were either deliberately rejected as misinterpretations of Śaivism, or else reinterpreted so as to harmonize with the new account of “tradition” that was beginning to crystallize, or else ignored entirely. One of the aims of this dissertation is therefore to recover part of this “lost history” of Tamil Śaivism, by bringing to the attention of contemporary scholarship certain works and authors that have been hitherto largely neglected as a result of the reformulation of Tamil religion in the colonial period. The hope is that by doing so future scholars will begin to explore this vast and potentially extremely historically significant body of literature.

Even more than this, however, the dissertation attempts to theorize the processes by which these “alternative” Tamil Śaivisms were forgotten in the first place. Like the pernicious ānava malam, the “primordial stain” that not only conceals the truth from the soul but also hides itself, the consolidation of a monolithic Tamil Śaiva religion at the turn of the twentieth century has largely obscured from view the messy conditions of its own production. Thus the lengthy exploration of nineteenth-century vernacular religious polemics that occupies the core of the dissertation is crucial for problematizing the very idea of a Tamil Śaivite “revival” by demonstrating how “tradition” itself was intensely contested during this period.11 In examining how religious change was motivated by ceaseless intersectarian debates over issues of theology and scriptural canonicity, the dissertation aims to deconstruct the dominant narrative of the Śaiva revival that identifies the primary engine driving socio-religious reform with non-vernacular sources and the interaction of “natives” and “Westerners”. More broadly, it complicates the issue of what constitutes religious anxiety during the colonial period by asking whether the problems being worked out in vernacular texts were different from those that were discussed contemporaneously in English-language materials.

At this point, it may be useful to provide an example that briefly but concretely illustrates the literary historical transformations to which I have alluded. In the introduction (patippurai) to his 1906 edition of the late medieval philosophical poem Oṇiviloṭukkam, the scholar S. Aṇavaratavināyakam Piḷḷai observes that Tamil-language texts that discuss the attainment of

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11 Scholarship on precolonial Tamil Śaivism and Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta has in fact demonstrated that the processes of contestation and reformulation to which I refer have always been a feature of “the” tradition. See, for instance, Peterson 1989; Prentiss 1996, 1999, 2001; Monius 2004a, 2004b; Cox 2005; Harris 2008. See also Goodall 2004 and Cox 2006 on the complex relationship between Tamil Śaiva traditions and earlier Sanskritic forms of Śaivism, especially those that emanated from Kashmir in the early second millennium.
liberating gnisos are divided into two distinct camps. He further notes, or rather laments, the increasingly patent and deleterious impact that this partisan split is having upon the contemporary study of Tamil theological literature (p.1):

Knowledge-texts (nāça caṭśiraṅkal) extant in Tamil are of two types: Vedānta texts and Siddhānta texts. The Kaivalliyanavanītam, Nāgavāciṭṭam, etc. are Vedānta texts. The Civaṇāgapōtam, Civaṇāgaṇacittiyār, etc. are Siddhānta texts. A long time has passed since these works were written. Common people are of the opinion that those who would write knowledge-literature (nāça nūkāla) at present would also write while adhering to only one of these two paths. Few indeed are they who do not rush to ask one who comes forth claiming to have studied a knowledge-text, “Are you a Vedāntin or a Siddhāntin?” The knowledge-texts that are the means to remove the suffering of transmigration have engendered factions. The dispute between the Vedāntins and the Siddhāntins is famous throughout the world. This is a pity!12

S. A. Piḷḷai goes on to denounce factionalism as inimical to the soteriological quest, and singles out the Ōliviloṭukkam13 as one of the few works that doesn’t fall prey to this delusion. According to him, although there are reasons for suspecting that the work’s author, Kaṇṭuṭaiya Vaḷḷār, belonged to Siddhānta tradition, he did not celebrate the differences between the Siddhānta and the Vedānta. As evidence of this, S. A. Piḷḷai cites Ōliviloṭukkam v. 52:

When the [thirty-six] principles (tattuvam) beginning with sound depart, and “self” and “other” fall away, then the relative merits of the Siddhānta and the Vedānta cease to exist. Since liberation is indescribable and beyond [the experience of] bliss, to ascribe division to it is the activity [of the ego-consciousness], my son.14

Through this verse, S. A. Piḷḷai explains, Kaṇṭuṭaiya Vaḷḷār declared that the differences between the Siddhānta and the Vedānta do not endure in the state of truth (unmai nilai). In adopting this expansive religious vision he is said to differ from his predecessors, who composed

12 tamijil vaḷjaṅkun nāgacāṭśiraṅka vēṭānta cāṭśiraṅka ēnṛgment cāṭśiraṅka ēnṛgment iruvakaippāṭum. kaivalya navanītam nāgavāciṭṭam mutaliyāṇa vēṭāntaṅkaḷām. civaṇāgapōtam civaṇāgaṇacittiyār mutaliyāṇa cittāntaṅkaḷām. ik kuṟṟita nūkal ēḻutappāṭu netunjālamāṭu. tarkāṭuḷ nāganiṅkaḷ ēḻutuvōrum irviruvaljīkaḷ ēḷntai paṟṟitāṭ ēḻutuvar eppatē potuṇjaṇa appippīrāyam. nāgacāṭśiraṃ karpūḷēṇ eṛa muṇg varupavāṇai nī vēṭāntiyō cittāntiyō eṇkk kēṭa munṭāṭar cilarē. samsāra tuṅkattai nivrittiappuṇṭuṟkuk karuṇivāyirunta nāgacāṭśiraṅka kaćkikāḷa yunṭākkiviṭṭaṇa. vēḷunti cittaṇṭikāṭukal caṇṭai lōkaappiduritam. ēṭu parittāṭ

13 The title of this text is roughly translatable as The Contraction [of the Phenomenal World] Upon the Cessation [of the Ego-Consciousness].

14 cattāṭi tattuvam pōṭyā tāṃtūm etirūn kaḷaṅgūl cittaṇṭa vēṭānta cīrmaiy ilai – muttiy anivvaṇcacḷ ēṇpav aṭṭuṭ am egil āṅkē piṭam iṭiṭal kaṅmam piḷḷay
the original texts on Siddhānta and Vedānta in Tamil, and from those who came after him, i.e. the hyper-polemical Tamil theologians of the present. S. A. Piḷḷai’s perspective on the contemporary religious climate is summed up by his ambivalent assessment of the Oṭukiham’s future (p. 3): “It must be said that the world is not yet spiritually mature enough for the state of which [Kaṇṇṭaiy] speaks. Nevertheless, the glories of the Self that are expounded through that teaching always exist.”

S. A. Piḷḷai’s remarks offer an intriguing perspective on the Tamil Śaiva literary tradition at a particular moment of intense religious contestation. On the one hand, they can be interpreted to indicate that, at least among certain scholars of Tamil literature in the early twentieth century, there existed ways of appreciating Tamil Śaiva thought and literature that abjured the adoption of an exclusive sectarian viewpoint. Such possibilities were considered to be attested within specific theological texts that dealt with transcendental knowledge in a pan-sectarian or universalist fashion. On the other hand, they also suggest that the consensus intrinsic to such positions was coming under enormous pressure within the context of an increasingly polarized vernacular religious public arena. Indeed, S. A. Piḷḷai’s timely editorship of the Oṭukiham can be read as an attempt to interject a long-forgotten voice of reconciliation into this heated public debate. The failure of this intervention can be judged by the fact that at present Tamil Śaivism is typically identified with Śaiva Siddhānta alone. For many self-identifying Śaivas in contemporary Tamil-speaking South India, the word “Vedānta” carries with it strong connotations of Brahmins and the Sanskrit language. It signifies a socio-religious “other” whose primary relation vis-à-vis Śaivism is that of theological sparring partner. As for the Oṭukiham, it is doubtful if many would even be aware of this text or, if they were, if they would appreciate it for its catholicity.

These reflections serve as a convenient point of departure for asking why this should be the case. Why during the colonial era, the period in which S. A. Piḷḷai was writing, was there a perceived elision of the possibility of pan-sectarianism within Tamil Śaiva discourse? In what way is this omission or erasure linked to the eventual fate of “Vedānta” literature in Tamil? How were perceptions of Tamil Śaiva theology and sacred literature reshaped during the colonial

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15 īvar collum nilakkku ulakku ēṇṭum pakkuvappuṭavillai yēnru tāg collavēntiyirukkēru. ēṇṭum avvupatēcattār payanēyutum āṭma cirēṭrankal eppolutum uḷḷavē.
period? What, exactly, is Tamil Śaivism? These are some of the questions that this dissertation seeks to raise and, hopefully, to begin to answer.

**Selection of Texts and Outline of the Dissertation**

At the center of the dissertation is an attempt to chart how the genre (or, more accurately, metagenre) of Tamil Śaiva “knowledge-literature” (;baseval=1294222) has been received and redefined in colonial modernity. Recall that S. Anavatavānāyakam Piḷḷai had divided this genre into two types, the Siddhānta texts and the Vedānta texts, to which he also added a third category of non-sectarian texts including the *Olivilōtukkam*. Though I will have more to say about this genre in the next chapter, for now it suffices to define “knowledge-literature” as Śaiva literature in Tamil that is understood to expound as its primary subject liberating gnosis (*ñāṇam*, Skt. *jñāna*). Since the time of Umāpati down to the present, this category has been reinterpreted variously by Tamil Śaivas, often in ways that only partially coincide with the standard canon of the *Meykanṭa cāttiram*.

The reason why this genre is so important is because it is in these texts that the most extensive discussions of the essence of Tamil Śaivism are found. In particular, it is here that the problem of other sectarian traditions is dealt with most explicitly. Typically, this is accomplished by claiming some sort of post-sectarian positionality, by asserting that one’s own position is “beyond the sects” (*camayātītam*). Thus by examining how this genre has been defined over the course of the past several centuries it is possible to trace the historical development of an evolving ecology of religious contestation, in which the very identity of Tamil Śaiva doctrine and sacred literature is continually disputed and renegotiated.

The sheer quantity of this literature is so vast, and for the reasons mentioned above still so poorly understood, that it is has been necessary to select, on an admittedly somewhat arbitrary basis, several works that were deemed to be of particular historical interest. This has meant that many works relevant to the “knowledge-literature” genre have been left out of this account. Perhaps the most glaring omission is the “Great Commentary” (*māpāṭiyam*, Skt. *mahābhāṣya*) on the *Civanāṇāpōtam* by the great Śaiva Siddhāntin Civaṇāṇa Muṇivar (18th c.). This is a serious lacuna, especially because the *Māpāṭiyam* appears to consolidate a Śaiva Siddhānta position in Tamil in response to Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, and because the influence of the text on later authors like Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (see Chapters 3 and 4) is so apparent. Future
studies will have to fill out our understanding of the “knowledge-literature” genre in all of its historical complexity. Because of the overwhelming emphasis on Śaiva Siddhānta in discussions of Tamil Śaiva intellectual culture, I have on the whole endeavored to present a range of perspectives that are rarely treated in the secondary literature.

The texts examined in this study are generally arranged in a chronological fashion and can be divided into three broad phases, roughly corresponding to the late precolonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial. The first chapter begins in the late precolonial period in order to highlight a fairly typical post-sectarian argument from this time, one that would be taken up and debated again by colonial intellectuals. The core chapters of the dissertation focus on intersectarian polemics in the nineteenth century, particularly its latter half. It is in these works, especially those treated in Chapters 3 and 4, that a new understanding of Tamil Śaiva universalism is worked out. Chapter 5, which forms a sort of coda to the study, explores the afterlife of the nineteenth-century developments in the postcolonial era. To make matters more clear, I provide below a list of the primary texts investigated, arranging them according to temporal phase and correlating them with the specific tradition the works are associated with:

**Late Precolonial**

*Avirōṭavuntiyār* (Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, ca. 17th c.)  
Chapter 1

*Avirōṭavuntiyār* commentary (Tiruppūrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, ca. 17th-18th c.)  
[Tamil Vīraśaiva]

**Colonial**

*Kaivaliyavanātām* commentary (Ĭcūr Caccitāṅanta Cuvāmikaḷ, 1815-1886)  
Chapter 2  
[Tamil Advaita Vedānta]

*Ācāryappirāpāvam* (Cūḷai Cōmacuntara Nāyakar, 1846-1901)  
Chapter 3  
[Śaiva Siddhānta]

Exegesis of Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry (various, nineteenth century)  
Chapter 4  
[various: Tamil Vīraśaiva, Śaiva Siddhānta, Smārta]

**Postcolonial**

*Teyvattī Kural* (Cantiracēkarēntīra Carasvati Cuvāmikaḷ, 1894-1994)  
Chapter 5  
[Smārta]

Chapter One examines the attempt to claim the right to speak for Tamil Śaivism in two works from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century: Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ’s *Avirōṭavuntiyār* and its commentary by Tiruppūrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ. The chapter analyzes
how Cāntaliṅka, who is remembered to have been a Vīraśaiva, critiques sectarian partisanship and advances a theology of “non-contradiction” (avirōtam) predicated upon a logic of “proximate” and “remote” otherness. I then explore how this doctrine is exemplified in the commentary, which blends together quotations from distinct canonical traditions in order to bolster its own claim to be super-canonical. I trace the commentary’s eclecticism back to a fifteenth-century literary anthology, and argue that such works should be understood as participating in a pan-sectarian literary tradition that overlapped with, but maintained its distinctiveness from, the mainstream school of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta. I conclude that the texts’ hermeneutic of “non-contradiction” may have been a strategy to relate Vīraśaivism to other sectarian traditions with more longstanding ties to the Tamil region while still claiming a position of superior spiritual authenticity.

Chapter Two begins to explore the issue that will occupy the next three chapters, namely how the debate over Tamil Śaivism is being reinvigorated and transformed in the context of late nineteenth-century Madras. The chapter examines Īcūr Caccitāṇana Cuvāmiṅkal’s commentary on the Kaivalliyanaṃvanīṭam, an early-modern work on Advaita Vedānta in Tamil. In particular, it focuses on the commentary’s attempt to reinterpret the text as a critique of Śaiva Siddhānta orthodoxy and to use it to reinscribe Śaivism as a monism. As with the Avirōtatvuntīyāṅ, the commentary is characterized by anti-sectarian rhetoric and a qualified acceptance of the Śaiva ontology of lord, souls, and binding fetters, which are read through the Vedānta hermeneutic of ultimate and conditional truth. The chapter concludes by identifying Caccitāṇanta’s work, not with the cosmopolitan neo-Vedānta taking shape at roughly the same time, nor as a vernacular variant of an expansively conceived “Greater Advaita Vedānta”, but rather as a heterolingual stream of Tamil Śaiva monism, one that is running parallel to the elite tradition of Sanskritic Advaita Vedānta. Tension between this strand of Śaiva thought and the Saiddhāntika dualists is being intensified, I suggest as the explosion of print culture opens up a new vernacular religious public sphere.

Chapter Three considers how the logic of near and distant otherness upon which the tension between sects had been previously negotiated is being transformed in the late nineteenth century. This is explored with reference to a lengthy article entitled Ācāryappirapāvam by the fiery publicist Cōmacuntara Nāyakar. I show how Nāyakar rejects the Avirōtatvuntīyāṅ’s eclecticism and concentric circles of truth in favor of an exclusivist definition of Tamil religion
built around the heroic image of the Śaiva saint Tiruṇāṉacampantar. The chapter explores how Nāyakar reinterprets Campantar in light of Śaṅkara, and ultimately Christ, in order to respond to current tensions between non-Brahmin Śaivas and Śmaṛta Brahmins. The chapter concludes by reflecting upon how vernacular journalism, and the new genre of vernacular literary criticism, is feeding into a new moment of “de-Sanskritization”.

Chapter Four explores how the new emphasis on totalizing narratives of Tamil religious history is having a broad impact upon the reception of Tamil Śaiva literature. Specifically, the chapter examines the controversy that erupted in the late nineteenth century over the sectarian identity of the early-modern Śaiva poet Tāyumāṇavar. Tāyumāṇavar’s poetry is notable for its invocation of a universal religious experience (camaracam) that bridges the apparent divide between Vedāntic and Āgamic revelation. In the chapter I show how nineteenth-century intellectuals associated with the Vīraśaiva, Śaiva Siddhānta, and Advaita Vedānta sects developed distinct and even antithetical conceptions of this poet, using camaracam and the closely related term “Vaidika Śaivism” (vaitika caivam) to demonstrate the universality of their own positions vis-à-vis one another. Tracing the manner in which Tāyumāṇavar’s songs are refracted through these different sectarian lenses, the chapter chronicles the fracturing of a newly created Tamil religious public sphere.

If intersectarian conflict reached something of a fever pitch during the late nineteenth century, by the mid-twentieth it appears to have been largely forgotten, subsumed within the all-embracing post-sectarianism of neo-Vedānta. Chapter Five, however, suggests that sectarianism persists and continues to evolve in the vernacular, as demonstrated by the recorded discourses of the Śmaṛta monastic leader Cantiracēkaṅṭira Carasvati Cuvāmikaḷ. I show how Cantiracēkaṅṭira appropriates the traditions of pan-sectarianism and dissent that were explored in the earlier chapters, integrating them under the category of “Vaidika religion” (vaitika matam), which is presented as a universal monotheism. Yet at the same time I demonstrate that Cantiracēkaṅṭira’s conception of the Vaidika is inextricably linked to a set of local concerns related to what it means to be Brahmin, what it means to be Tamil, and what it means to be Śmaṛta. I conclude by comparing Cantiracēkaṅṭira’s vernacular discourses to his interaction with and reception by Westerners, arguing that in the postcolonial present the invocation of a sectarian positionality largely depends upon the type of audience being addressed.
It has been said elsewhere:

Such reflections on possible connections between theology and history are not meant to posit a crude one-to-one relationship between the two or to trivialize theology’s own seeming imperviousness to the historical context of its production. To do the latter, would be to be dismissive of an entire tradition of inter-textuality which underpins and makes understandable the development of doctrine – where texts talk to other texts as much as to their own material circumstance. To do the former is no longer possible in the context of post-modernism and the historiographical alertness it has generated. Just as theology is relativized by historical context, the substantiality of historical facts, against which a mimetic and fluctuating theology could formerly be measured, has itself been relativized by the deconstruction of entrenched historiography. Such a deconstruction… allows for submerged discontinuities and ironies to become evident… (Raman 2007: 179)

This dissertation, in light of the above remarks, aims to bring a more rigorous historical gaze to the phenomena of Tamil Śaiva theology and literary culture, at the same time as it attempts to question the received historiography that emplots the history of modern Tamil Śaivism within a narrative arc of loss and revival.
Chapter 1

The Song of Non-Contradiction

Standard accounts of the intellectual history of Tamil Śaivism have tended to focus on the school of speculative thought known as Śaiva Siddhānta. From G. U. Pope’s oft-repeated declaration that Śaiva Siddhānta represents “the choicest product of Drāvidian [sic] intellect” (1894: 113-114), to K. Sivaraman’s massive study Śaivism in Philosophical Perspective ([1973] 2001), scholars have often assumed that Śaiva Siddhānta and Tamil Śaiva theology are synonymous. Yet the textual record from late-precolonial South India suggests a much more internally diverse vernacular intellectual tradition than is often recognized. One of the voices that rarely ever figures in accounts of Tamil Śaivism, yet whose existence is suggested in several Tamil literary historiographies, is that of the Vīraśaivas. The present essay explores how this voice expressed itself and understood its place within the Tamil cultural landscape.

The roots of Vīraśaivism are typically traced to the devotional culture of medieval Karnataka, particularly to a corpus of Kannada-language free-verse hymns (vacanas) attributed to a socially diverse group of poets (vacanakāras) around the twelfth century. Features of this Kannada Śiva-bhakti tradition are understood to have gradually spread throughout much of South India, leading to the composition of related religious literature in most of the major regional languages, as well as in Sanskrit. The relationship between this literature and contemporary notions of “Vīraśaivism” as a coherent theological system remains an open question, one that requires the historian of religion to exercise due caution. According to Chandra Shobhi (2005), for instance, it was only in the fifteenth century that the term “Vīraśaiva” was used to denote a self-consciously distinct sect of Śaivism, as virakta ascetics at Vijayanagara consolidated a new vision of religious community around the figures of the

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16 Ramanujan (1973) offers a classic translation of and introduction to some of the major vacana poets. On the early narrativization of this tradition, see Ben-Herut (2013).

thirteenth-century vacanakāras, whose poetry they edited and reinterpreted through the doctrinal framework of the so-called “six stages” (ṣāṭsthala).

One finds occasional references to a Vīraśaiva tradition in Tamil in a number of modern Tamil literary historiographies. Of particular significance is the work of Mu. Aruṇācalam ([1972] 2005), who uses the adjective “Vīraśaiva” to describe several of the authors and texts he examines. The rationale behind this is often left unstated, perhaps because he simply repeats the categorization of earlier literary histories. The oldest work described in this manner is the anonymous Navaliṅkalīlai, a text known only through its quotation in Veḷḷiyampalavāṇa Tampirāṇ’s (17th c. CE) commentary on the Nāṉāvaranavilakkam, and which Aruṇācalam tentatively dates to the fifteenth century ([1972] 2005 vol. 8: 214-215). Several authors dated to the sixteenth century are also identified as Vīraśaivas. These include Rēvaṇa Cittar, author of the Civaṉṉatīpam and the well-known lexicon Akarātinikanṭu (Ibid., vol. 11: 90-99 and 269-275), as well as Kukai Namaccivāyār, author of the Aruṇakiriyantāti, and his disciple Kuru Namaccivāyar, who wrote the Anṟṟamalaivenpā and several other works (Ibid., vol. 12: 163-178).

Apart from these early authors, the Tamil literary figures who today are most closely associated with Vīraśaivism generally date from the seventeenth century. A key work in this regard is the Pirapulīṅkalīlai, a Tamil adaption of Cāmarasa’s fifteenth-century Kannada hagiography on Allamaprabhu, which is firmly dated to 1652. The author of the Līlai, Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikāl, was an immensely prolific writer whose literary skill earned him the title Karpagaikkaḷaṅciyam, or “Treasury of Imagination” (Zvelebil 1975: 231). Civappirakāca Cuvāmikāl is also credited with such works as the Cittāntantacikāṇi, an adaptation of Śivayogi Śivācārya’s Sanskrit Siddhāntaśikhāṇi; the Vēṭāntacūṭāṇi, based on a portion of Nijaguṇa Śivayogi’s Vivekacintāmaṇi; the popular didactic work Napṭeri; and a remarkable though unfortunately no longer extant text entitled Ēcumatanirākaraṇam, or The Refutation of Christianity. Civappirakāca’s brother-in-law, Pēṟūr Cōntaliṅka Cuvāmikāl, was a major author in his own right, having composed four major works: the Kolaimaruttal, the Vairākkiyacatakam, the Vairākkiyāṭīpam, and the Avirōṭavuntiyār. The last of these will be analyzed in detail below. Cōntaliṅka’s disciple was Kumāratēvar, to whom no less than sixteen

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18 Three verses from this last work have survived as citations in Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikāl’s commentary on the Kolaimaruttal of Pēṟūr Cōntaliṅka Cuvāmikāl. More information about these two authors is provided below.
individual works are attributed, including the *Cuttacātakam*, the *Attuvitavunmai*, and the purportedly autobiographical *Makārājaṭuṇavu* (*The Renunciation of the Great King*). Kumāratēvar’s disciple was in turn Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ, another prolific writer, whose compositions include commentaries on all of Cāntaliṅka’s works, a commentary on the *Oļiviloṭukkam*, and the sophisticated devotional poem *Tiruppōrurcannimurai*. Apart from these, other noteworthy texts typically associated with Vīraśaivism include the *Nittāgupūṭi* of Tirukkōvalūr Āṟumuka Cuvāmikāḷ (ca. 18th c. CE), the *Virākamam* of Tirumalājcai Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikāḷ, and the *Vacavapurāṇam*. Most of the authors referred to above are said to have founded Vīraśaiva monastic centers (*ātīṉams, maṭams*), at least a dozen of which still exist today.\(^{19}\)

In exploring a couple of these texts here, I do not aim to merely fill a gap in the scholarship on religion in Tamil South India. It is not my intention to simply suggest that if the Tamil Vīraśaivas were better understood then a more comprehensive understanding of Tamil Śiva-bhakti as a historical phenomenon might be reached. Rather, my aim is to propose that an appreciation of the polyvocality of Tamil Śaiva theology, literary culture, and sectarian identity compels us to reconsider the supposed unity of this tradition. I interrogate this polyvocality through a careful consideration of two closely related texts from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century. The first is the *Avirōtavuntiyār*, or *The Song in the Unti Meter on Non-Contradiction*, a short philosophical poem attributed to Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikāḷ. The *Avirōtavuntiyār* argues that one should transcend sectarian partisanship and accept as doctrine only that upon which all traditions concur. The second work is a commentary on the first written by Cāntaliṅka’s disciple’s disciple, Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ. The most notable feature of this commentary is the manner in which it illustrates the ideal of “non-contradiction” with an eclectic collection of verses culled from various sectarian literatures. In distinct but overlapping ways these works negotiate a nuanced stance predicated upon accommodation, eclecticism, and the relative absence of sectarian self-assertion.

As we shall see, the pan-sectarian positionality articulated in these works makes it difficult to determine what, if anything, is distinctively “Vīraśaiva” about them. I will argue that

\(^{19}\) For information regarding these monastic institutions see Ūraṇ Aṭikal (2009).
what distinguishes these texts is less a clearly defined doctrinal orientation or ritual program than a peculiar way of relating to religious “others”, including the traditions of Śaiva Siddhānta, Advaita Vedānta, and Vaiṣṇavism. In this sense, the texts may be understood as intervening within the broader context of Tamil Śaiva intellectual culture, rather than as representing a self-consciously distinct sectarian worldview. By adopting and refashioning existing theological and literary resources, these texts find a way of embracing religious difference while still maintaining a sense of aloof superiority. In the conclusion, I suggest that this strategy reflects the situation of a minority religious community, one whose members are still struggling to carve out a space for themselves within the pluralist and highly competitive religious environment of the late-precolonial Tamil world.

Not Another Sectarian Text

Details of Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikāl’s life are sparse, and hagiographical sources generally devote less attention to him than to his teacher, students, and kin.20 As mentioned above, he is credited with composing four primary works: the Kolaimaruttal, on non-killing, the Vairākkiyacatakam and the Vairākkiyatīpam, on dispassion, and the Avirōtavuntiyā (hereafter, AU).21 He is said to have married the younger sister of Tuṟaimāṅkalam Civappirakā Cuvāmikal, author of the Pirapulīṅkalīlai, and to have founded a Vīraśaiva monastic center at Perur, a small town near present-day Coimbatore. It is perhaps significant that Perur is in the traditional Tamil geographical region known as Konku Natu, which lies immediately to the southeast of the Kannada-speaking country and which appears to have had a substantial Vīraśaiva presence for some time.22 Cāntaliṅka’s guru was Tuṟaiyūr Civappirakā Cuvāmikal, an ascetic from Tiruvāṇaṭutuṟai Āṭīṇam who is remembered to have converted from Śaiva

20 An early account of Cāntaliṅka’s life occurs in the Pulavarpurṇam of Taṭapāṇi Cuvāmikāl (1931: 206-208); somewhat more expansive versions of the life-story can be found in N. Murugesā Mudaliar (1976: 3 ff.) and Ūraṇ Aṭīkal (2009: 55-64).
21 The Kolaimaruttal’s subject matter is often described as ‘compassion for living beings’ (cīva kāruṇṇiyam), the Vairākkiyacatakam’s as ‘devotion to the lord’ (īcura patti), the Vairākkiyatīpam’s as ‘the removal of spiritual bondage’ (pāca nīkkaṁ), and the Avirōtavuntiyār’s as ‘supreme knowledge’ (parama ṣāṇam).
22 Francis Buchanan, who visited Pērūr on October 30, 1800, notes that ‘for some time before and after the accession of Hyder (i.e. Haidar Alī, r. ca. 1761-1782), [the region] was governed by a person named Madana, who enjoyed his office forty years, and was a Lingabunt (one who wears the Linga)’ (Buchanan 1807 vol. 2: 250). I would like to thank Srilata Raman for pointing me towards Buchanan’s travelogue.
Siddhānta to Viṣṇuism as part of a plan to reestablish Śaiva worship at Chidambaram after it had been interrupted by Viṣṇu officials at Vijayanagara (see Koppedrayer 1990: 206, n. 381). Whether or not this tale is historically accurate, it points to the close and complex relationship between Śaiva Siddhāntins and Viṣṇuśivas in the Tamil country, a relationship that will be explored further in our discussion of the AU. While the absence of more concrete data makes precise dating difficult, it is reasonable to assume that Cāntaliṅka lived during the latter part of the seventeenth or perhaps the early eighteenth century.

The AU was first translated into English in 1860 by the Reverend Thomas Foulkes, under the title Eclectic Vedantism: A Philosophical Poem in Frequent Use Amongst Hindu Women. Other Tamil texts to receive the label “Vedānta” from European scholars in the mid-nineteenth century include the monistic Kaivalyanaṉavaiṭam (see Chapter 2) and the Pañcatacappirakaraṇam (the Tamil Pañcadaśī). Such works were thought to provide a much-needed gateway into the intellectual world of educated, higher-class Hindus, among whom the missionaries were struggling to proselytize. It is unclear whether the title of Foulkes’ translation refers to the AU’s actual popularity with contemporary Tamil women, as indeed appears to have been the case with the Kaivalyanaṉavaiṭam, or simply to the text’s generic connection with a game played by women (see below).

The AU consists of one hundred verses and is composed, as its title indicates, in the unti genre. Each stanza of the text has three lines, the second and third of which end with the refrain ‘rise up and fly!’ (unti para), an apparent reference to a game played by young women, said to be ‘somewhat akin to the English game of battledore and shuttlecock’ (Tamil Lexicon 1982: 417). Two earlier Tamil Śaiva texts, both called Tiruvuntiyār, are also composed in this genre.

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23 As Koppedrayer remarks in the aforementioned footnote, Cāntaliṅka’s brother-in-law, Turaimañkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāṃkal, is also remembered to have been a one-time student of a prominent Śaiva Siddhānta scholar: Veḻḷiyampalavāṇat Tampirāṅ of Tarumapuram Āṭīṇam.

24 This is the range given by Žvelebil (1995: 119). The Apitāṅacintāmaṇī (1910: 619) gives the date 1678 (cālivākaṇa cakāptam 1600), though without justification. The Pirapulīṅkalāi of Cāntaliṅka’s purported brother-in-law, Turaimañkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāṃkal, is dated to 1652 (Žvelebi 1975: 231), which lends circumstantial support to a latter seventeenth-century date.

25 Foulkes’ translation is prefaced by a brief quote from “The Abbot of the Hindu Monastery at Madura, in a recent interview with a Missionary.” The “Abbot” affirms that “missionaries generally are not sufficiently acquainted with Hinduism as a religious system to attempt conversions among the higher and more educated classes, and therefore the only success they meet with is among the mere worms of the country” (Foulkes 1860: 2).
One is the fourteenth poem included in the devotional classic *Tiruvācakam*; the other is the opening volume of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta canon. In a discussion of the latter text, Monius observes how the playful refrain “rise up and fly!” amplifies the work’s central theological notion of the lord as cosmic player, underscoring “a dynamic image of lord and devotee at play in the sea of ever-changing forms, inviting the devotee to break free of worldly bondage and soar toward the lord’s abode” (2004: 153). The *AU*’s theology similarly exploits the *unti* genre’s inherent playfulness, though here the image appears to be that of the lord sporting with his devotees in various sectarian traditions; the devotee is urged to transcend sectarian exclusivism and “rise up and fly” into the all-encompassing sky of the lord. From the outset, the text contrasts this expansive theological vision with the narrow-minded bickering of other religious works:26

Since this is not [another] sectarian text (*camaya nūl*) that ceaselessly contradicts [others],
it is called *The Song in the Unti Meter on Non-Contradiction* – rise up and fly!
That is the name of this text – rise up and fly! (v. 2)27

Much of the first half of the *AU* is devoted to furthering this anti-sectarian theme. After a series of verses glorifying liberation, knowledge, and the renunciation of worldly attachments, the *AU* claims that there is only one path to truth, though it is variously described in the sacred scriptures (v. 23). This singular path, it is said, cannot be realized as long as one remains attached to one’s caste status and, more especially, to one’s sectarian affiliation. Cāntaliṅka goes on at length about this last point, emphasizing the problem of multiple, mutually contradictory sectarian traditions and insisting upon the relativity of competing religious dogmas:

If among the sects (*mataṅkal*) that mutually disagree, one is not by another eliminated – rise up and fly!
which one shall we call false? – rise up and fly! (v. 26)

All sects claim defeat or victory
at different times – rise up and fly!
That is the lord’s doing – rise up and fly! (v. 27)

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26 Citations of the *AU* and its commentary refer to Cāntaliṅka Āṭikaḷ (1965). N. Murugesu Mudaliar (1976) has translated both the text and its commentary into English, albeit incompletely and often quite loosely, and published them along with an introduction and notes. I have in the main followed Citampara Cuvāmi’s commentary while translating the terse stanzas of *AU*.

27 *tavirā virōta camaya nūl agrāl
avirōta untiy e(g)ru unti paṇa
āṁ innūl nāmam e(g)ru unti paṇa*
Apart from unconvincing debaters, there are no unconvincing sects – rise up and fly! say those who have studied and grasped [the scriptures] – rise up and fly! (v. 28)

It is wrong to say that one path among the six [sects] is unrefuted, for all six appear – rise up and fly! to give endless authoritative proofs [for their doctrines] – rise up and fly! (v. 29)

Even if one investigates them all, one’s own tradition will be firm in one’s heart, not leaving from there – rise up and fly! (v. 30)

Those who know the nature of all the sects do not stand amongst them – rise up and fly! What is wrong if they abandon them? – rise up and fly! (v. 31)

There is also one who, thinking, “this path is superior,” abandons one [sect] and adopts another – rise up and fly! He does not attain fault thereby – rise up and fly! (v. 32)

Therefore, for those who have attained the higher path (mēlām negi) what is caste (cāti) or sect? – rise up and fly! Their mental conceptions (caṅkagpam) are destroyed – rise up and fly! (v. 33)
The anti-sectarian message of these stanzas recalls similar statements found in earlier Tamil Śaiva literature, where the terms *camayam* (Skt. *samaya*) and *matam* (Skt. *mata*), both meaning ‘sect’ or ‘sectarian doctrine’, have long been used to suggest a myopic understanding of the divine. For example, the canonical Śaiva text *Tirumantiram* (ca. 11th c. CE), in its fifth section, contains a discussion entitled “The Disagreements of the Six Sects” (*Aṟucamayappiṇakkam*, vv. 1530-1549), wherein the six sects are said to fail to grasp the all-pervasive Śiva.\(^{31}\) Related critiques are found a few centuries later in the poetry of several of the Tamil Cittars (Skt. *siddha*), regional representatives of the pan-Indic Siddha tradition.\(^{32}\) The Cittars Civavākkīyar, Paṭṭiṅattār, and Pattirakiri, all of whom are usually dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, frequently express disdain in their poetic compositions for temple-based worship, Vedic ritualism, and caste.\(^{33}\) The critique of external religious forms in these works is typically

\(^{30}\) See Goodall (2004: xxix-xxx) on the problem of the *Tirumantiram*’s date.

\(^{31}\) Martin (1983: 163) suggests that the *Tirumantiram*’s denunciation of sectarianism may have been motivated by an interest in cultivating “a greater sense of solidarity among the loose federation of Śaiva sects” extant at the time, though her dating of the text to the seventh or eighth century is likely too early.

\(^{32}\) About which see White (1996).

\(^{33}\) For a historical overview of the Tamil Cittars, see Venkatraman (1990). Venkatraman distinguishes between three historically distinct groups of Cittars: the Sanmārgasiddhas, the Nāgasiddhas, and the Kāyasiddhas, to which he adds a fourth group of ‘Siddha-like’ poets (p. 7). He assigns the *Tirumantiram* to the Sanmārgasiddha category, the only extant text of this class, and classifies Civavākkīyar, Paṭṭiṅattār, and Pattirakiri as Nāgasiddhas, dating them to the 14th or 15th century CE (pp. 67-68).
juxtaposed with the notion of an intuitive, anti-intellectual realization of the lord within the heart (neñcu), a term that repeatedly crops up in Tamil literature associated with Vīraśaivas. In the AU, this contrast between ‘outer’ dogma and ‘inner’ truth is interwoven with the unti genre’s playful simplicity to cultivate a rhetoric of sincerity, of not posturing and speaking from the heart. This rhetoric reinforces the text’s central thesis, which is unfolded in the following verses:

Only the knowledge that does not contradict (avirōta pōtamē) any of the six paths is accepted by the knower of truth – rise up and fly!
That is the established conclusion (cittiāntam) – rise up and fly! (v. 35)

The determination of the many sects mentioned in the scriptures
is that there is a supreme lord, souls, and bondage – rise up and fly!
The names used to speak of these differ [in each sect] – rise up and fly! (v. 36)

The text thus introduces the concept of “non-contradiction” (avirōtam) as both an affective condition of subjectivity, i.e. the “state” cultivated by the knower of truth, and as an ontology, reflected in the recognition of the universality of the three metaphysical categories of lord, souls, and bondage (para cīva pantam). These metaphysical entities, which ultimately derive from the Śaiva Āgamas, are subjected to further analysis in subsequent verses. While each of them is said to exist from beginningless time, the interpretation of them is said to differ in each sect (vv. 37-41). Specifically, although the scriptures explicitly affirm the non-duality (attuvitam) of souls and lord, some understand this to signify a singularity (onṛu), whereas others take it to imply a unity of a duality (iraṇṭu). Both of these interpretations are said to entail logical difficulties: the first cannot account for how bondage, and therefore liberation, could occur within absolute

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34 Another noteworthy text to employ the term neñcu in a theological context is the Neñcuviṭutu of Umāpati Civācāriyār, which is considered one of the fourteen texts of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta canon. This is a ‘messenger poem’ in the vein of such works as Kālidāsa’s Meghadūta. In it, the poet assumes the role of a forlorn lover who sends her heart as a messenger to her beloved king, in this case the god Śiva himself. For more information see Dhavamony (1971: 306-314).

35 onṛu neṛikkum avirōta pōtamē
tēru meyinnāgiy end’ unīt pāra
cittiāntam ākum atu unīt pāra

curutikaḷ col pal camayat tuṇtivum
appara cīva pantam end’ unīt pāra
pakar nāmam vēṛu vēṛ’ unīt pāra

36 In his commentary on verse 42, Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ identifies the first view with those who accept “non-difference” (apētam), and the second view with those who accept “difference” (pētam), glossed as “union of a duality” (tuvitak kalappē). He also claims that a third “difference-non-difference” (pēdāpētam) position is implicitly included within the first two interpretations (pp. 64-65).
being; the second cannot explain why the lord has not already liberated all souls through his infinite compassion, nor how primordial darkness (irul, i.e. āṇava malam) could be eternal without impinging upon the supremacy of the lord. Ultimately, since the mind itself is a product of ignorance, all that can be affirmed of the three metaphysical entities with certainty is that they exist (vv. 42-47).

In its critique of the doctrinal positions of monism and dualism the AU explicates “non-contradiction” in yet another sense, namely, as a hermeneutic device. The text’s subsumption of these positions within an overarching theology of non-duality resembles the central strategy by which, as Halbfass ([1988] 1990: 355) notes, Advaita Vedāntins have historically related themselves to other doctrinal systems. A similar strategy, in which the tenets of other schools are hierarchically structured as stages culminating in one’s own position, is also adopted by several texts of the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, especially the Civaṉacittiyār and the Caṅkarpanirākaraṇam. Yet the professed impartiality of the AU – Citampara Cuvāmi even defines avirōtam as “absence of bias” (pakṣapātam illāmai) in his commentary (p. 2) – also strongly echoes the ‘perspectivalist’ doxographies of the Jains, which are characterized by Halbfass as possessing “a special and unique manner of coordinating, systematizing and completing the other world-views, of showing their attachment to partial truths and mere aspects, and of salvaging them from their self-imposed isolation and one-sidedness” (Halbfass [1988] 1990: 267). Indeed, while the two interpretations of non-duality mentioned by the AU are intentionally left underdetermined, the arguments raised against each strongly suggests that they refer, above all, to Advaita Vedānta and Śaiva Siddhānta, respectively. There is, in other words, an implicit critique of both of these traditions’ presumption that they alone have grasped the nature of the relationship between the constituent components of phenomenal reality.

By the seventeenth century, Advaita Vedānta and Śaiva Siddhānta had become the dominant theological traditions among Tamil-speaking Śaiva intellectuals. From Cāntaliṅka’s perspective, then, they would constitute what Robert Levy, in his analysis of the organization of symbolic space in Bhaktapur, refers to as the “near outside” or “proximate other”. According to Levy, the proximate other is that which, lying just beyond one’s own moral order, poses the greatest danger to that order, yet which is also a vital resource that can and must be engaged
with, and in dialogue with which one defines oneself (Levy 1990: 156-159). “Non-contradiction” thus functions as a device by which the AU simultaneously acknowledges these powerful rivals, disarms them by recognizing them as partial truths, and reincorporates them as central components of its own self-representation. It is also likely, especially in light of what is said later in the AU, that the Śrīvaishnavas are also being suggested as a variant of the “unity of a duality” position. Yet for Cāntaliṅka this community clearly represents what Levy would term the “distant outside” or “remote other”, that which one may gesture towards but with which one is not in direct conversation. Other theological positions, such as the pure dualism of the Mādhvas, are summarily dismissed or else, as in the case of the Jains, Muslims, and Christians, are apparently deemed too remote to merit any acknowledgement at all.

At this point the AU drops the metaphysical question, leaving the reader with an underdetermined non-duality and the three principles of lord, soul, and bondage. For a more explicit discussion of the relationship between Vīrāsaivism, Advaita Vedānta, and Śaiva Siddhānta, one would have to turn to the Cuttacātakam (The Purified Practice) of Cāntaliṅka’s disciple, Kumāratēvar. Largely on the basis of his Makārājātugavu, Kumāratēvar is remembered to have been a petty chieftain from Karnataka who renounced his throne and wandered to the Tamil country as an ascetic, where he encountered his future teacher Cāntaliṅka. Without, of course, assuming that Cāntaliṅka’s thoughts are transparently reflected in the writings of his disciple, it might be useful to very briefly examine the Cuttacātakam in the interest of further clarifying what might be implied by the hermeneutics of “non-contradiction”. The text purports to convey the meaning of the Upaniṣadic dictum “you are that” (Skt. tat tvam asi), which was explained to the author by the goddess Periyanāyaki of Viruttakkunru (Vṛddhacalam). The text states that the lord propounded three spiritual paths for souls to follow: the Śaiva, the Vaidika, and the Śivādvaita (v. 1). The first of these maintains that lord, souls, and bonds are eternal and persist in liberation. The second holds that the world is an illusion and that in liberation only consciousness remains. The third and highest path, however, teaches that in

37 I am grateful to Srilata Raman for suggesting the usefulness of Levy’s discussion in this context.
38 The sixteen works which are attributed to Kumāratēvar have been collectively published under the name Cāttirakkōvai (Kumāratēvar 2006). The Cuttacātakam, one of these sixteen, has been rather loosely translated into English, along with the commentary of Cokkaliṅka Civappirākāca Cuvāmikāl, an introduction, and notes, by N. Murugesu Mudaliar (1972).
liberation there is complete union (ayikkam) of the aṅkam (Skt. aṅga) and the liṅkam (Skt. liṅga), i.e. the soul and the lord (v. 4). This is the meaning of the word asī (“you are”) in the statement “you are that”. It is clear that Kumāratēvar intends by these three paths Śaiva Siddhānta, Advaita Vedānta, and Vīraśaivism, respectively.\(^{39}\) In the Vīraśaiva path one is said to realize that the lord, souls, and world are ultimately neither distinct (piṅgaī), nor non-distinct (apiṅgaī), but the godhead (civam) itself, the playful sport (līlai) of Śiva’s divine power (catti) (v. 9). In maintaining that Śiva’s śakti is the material cause of phenomenal reality, the Cuttacātakam departs from Śaiva Siddhānta, which takes māyā as the material cause and āṇava malam as eternal, thus affirming the ultimate distinction of lord, souls, and world. At the same time, in recognizing the metaphysical triad as the legitimate ‘sport’ of Śiva’s innate power, the text also leaves more room for difference than traditional Advaita Vedānta. The theology instead seems to resemble that of the non-dual Śākta Śaivas of Kashmir, whose ideas Kumāratēvar may well have encountered in the Siddhāntaśikhāmani, a Sanskrit Vīraśaiva work which had recently been adapted into Tamil by Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikal.\(^{40}\)

Before moving on to the AU’s commentary it is first necessary to briefly address the remaining half of Cāntaliṅka’s text, which turns from the topic of theology to matters of practice. Since the mind, as a product of māyā, cannot itself grasp the true nature of the three principles, the latter must be realized intuitively in meditative absorption (niṭṭai). This is to be achieved primarily through maṅgolaya cātakam, the practice of dissolving the mind in abstract contemplation of the godhead (vv. 49-60). Here too Cāntaliṅka appears to be drawing on several of the iconoclastic Cittars, for whom the dissolution of the mental apparatus is an essential practice (Venkatraman 1990: 8). Progressively easier niṭṭais and auxiliary practices are then described for those unable to instantaneously abandon all mentation. It is in this last discussion that the clearest attempt is made to extend the text’s universalism beyond the immediate realm of the Śaiva sectarian traditions and gesture towards the “remote other” of Vaiṣṇavism:

Any meditation (niṭṭai) proposed by an adherent of any sect

\(^{39}\) See also Kumāratēvar’s Attuvitavummai (The Truth of Non-Duality) v. 45, which explicitly mentions the terms ‘Vedāntin’ (vēṇāti) and ‘Śaiva Siddhāntin’ (caivacittānti), caricaturing them as an ‘illusionist’ (mittiyaṇvāti) and ‘realist’ (cattiyavāti), respectively (Kumāratēvar 2006: 74).

\(^{40}\) See Sanderson (2012-2013: 84-85 and n. 344) on the relationship between the Siddhāntaśikhāmani and the Śākta Śaivas of Kashmir.
is indeed acceptable to us – rise up and fly! 
so long as it destroys egoistic awareness – rise up and fly! (v. 66)

Any [mantra] – the eight-syllabled, the five-syllabled, etc.,
recite it and root out the falsehood in you – rise up and fly! 
[choosing whichever] one your mind desires – rise up and fly! (v. 81)

Whichever deity you accept as supreme, worship that 
with true devotion – rise up and fly! 
dedicating your body, [mind, and speech] – rise up and fly! (v. 84)

The AU’s willingness to accommodate other religious practices, extending even to the repetition 
of the eight-syllabled Vaiṣṇava mantra “om namo nārāyaṇāya”, is particularly striking when 
considered in relation to Vīraśaivism’s purported association with exclusivist, even fanatical 
devotion to Śiva. The AU seems to be suggesting that its notion of the godhead (civam) is 
expansive enough to include the Vaiṣṇava within itself. This experiential openness is entirely 
consistent with the rhetoric of sincerity that is so central to the AU’s self-representation. In the 
next section we will see how Citampara Cuvāmikal’s commentary matches the AU’s catholicity 
with a comparably expansive literary vision.

Illustrating “Non-Contradiction”

According to hagiographical accounts,42 Tiruppūrūr Citampara Cuvāmikal originally 
hailed from a family of classical poet-scholars (caṅkap pulavar) in Madurai, the seat of 
traditional Tamil learning, where he earned his living by instructing the children of wealthy 
patrons in Tamil belles-lettres. He gave this up for the life of a renunciate after meeting his guru, Kumāratēvar. It is said that when Kumāratēvar introduced Citampara Cuvāmi to Cāntaliṅka

41 emmatattōr evvakai nīṭai collium 
cammattamēy emakk’ unī paṭa 
tarpōta máykkumēl unī paṭa

aṅcu mūŋ ’ aṅ’ akkarātiy ēṭēĭum nīg 
vaicam āṟut’ ō’ engr’ unī paṭa 
maṅam ĭṭumāṅav ɒnr’ unī paṭa

ettwai nām engr’ icaintāy atat tōlu 
cattiya pattiyāl unī paṭa 
taguvāṭyaik koṭutt’ unī paṭa

42 As with Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmi, an early account of Citampara Cuvāmi’s life can be found in Taṇṭapāni Cuvāmikal’s Pulavar purāṇam (1931: 212-215). A more elaborate prose account is found in Ąraṇ Aṭikāl (2009: 192-196).
Cuvāmi, the latter was so impressed with Citampara’s patent literary abilities that he commissioned him to compose commentaries on all four of his works, including the AU.\(^{43}\) Fulfilling Cāntaliṅka’s request, Citampara then returned to his hometown of Madurai, where he had a vision of the goddess MīṆāṭci, who commanded him to travel to Tirupporur, a small town located roughly forty-five kilometers south of present-day Chennai. In Tirupporur Citampara renovated the local Murukaṇṭ temple, founded a Vīrāśiva monastic center, performed several miracles, and composed the elaborate poem Tiruppōṟūrcannitimuṟgaṟ. While the dating of Citampara Cuvāmi has been the matter of some speculation, available evidence points to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{43}\)  Cāntaliṅka is also said to have commissioned Citampara Cuvāmi to compose a commentary on the circa fifteenth-century Olīvīloṭukkam of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal. That one and the same author composed all of these commentaries is supported by their stylistic similarity and the fact that they quote extensively from the same eclectic body of works (see the discussion below). Furthermore, the introductory benedictions to the commentaries on the AU, Vairākkiyacatākam, Vairākkiyatīṟam, and Olīvīloṭukkam all praise Gaṇapati and Murukaṇṭ at Tirupporur, also referred to as Camarapuri. Citampara’s lineage is attested in a verse found at the beginning of his commentary on Cāntaliṅka’s Vairākkiyacatākam (Cāntaliṅka Aṭiṅkāl 1981: 2 karu paramparai vanakkam). This verse praises Civappirākāca Tēṅkaṅt (= Tuṅţiyūr Civappirākāca Cuvāmikā), Cānta Nāyakaṅ (= Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikā), and Paṅta Māmuvā. ‘Paṅta Māmuvā’ may be a play on Kumārāṭvār’s name, Paṅta being the site of a famous shrine to Murukaṇṭ, also known as Kumārāṇ. A Paṅta Māmuvā is, however, also mentioned one generation after Citampara Cuvāmi in the lineage history of Kumārāṭvār’s matam at Viruttacalam (Uraṅ Aṭiṅkāl 2009: 159), and it is possible that this figure could be the intended referent. The same verse also appears to have been appended at a later date to the beginning of Kumārāṭvār’s Makāṟṟjāṟṟumatuṟru (Kumārāṭvār 1935: 24 mūṟru kurumūṟritikal vanakkam).

\(^{44}\)  Mu. Aruṇācalam states that Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ died in 1659, though he does not specify his source for this date ([1973] 2005 vol. 11: 59). Vēṅkaṭaḷām records a Tiruppōṟūr Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ of the nineteenth century (1962: 275-276). Zvelebil assigns the Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ who authored the Tiruppōṟūrmurukaṇṭpiṟṟaiṟṟaimul to the eighteenth century (1974: 214, n. 55). Elsewhere he mentions three separate Citampara Cuvāmikāḷs, the first of whom is reported to have died in 1695 (which may be a printing error for 1659), followed by a question mark and the note, “There is complete uncertainty about his date. Most prob[ably] 17th c., but some sources speak of 19th c.” (Zvelebil 1995: 160). Zvelebil does not adequately distinguish this Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ from the other two he mentions, dated respectively to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The considerable confusion likely follows from the fact that the original or ‘Āṭu’ Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ seems to have founded a lineage of Citampara Cuvāmikāḷs at Tirupporur (see the lineage history of the Tiruppōṟūr Aṭiṅkāḷ in Uraṅ Aṭiṅkāl 2009: 196-197). Just as the pontiffs of Smārtta monastic institutions at Srngeri and Kancipuram style themselves ‘Śaṅkarāčārya’, so later generations of monastics at Tirupporur have also assumed the title ‘Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ’. I have not attempted to determine all of the works that can legitimately be ascribed to the first Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ. However, there is no reason to doubt that the commentator on the Avirōṭavantīyār lived sometime during the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. The commentary occasionally cites the Pirrapulinkāḷḷai, a work that is firmly dated to 1652; thus the commentary was composed sometime after this date. That the commentary was composed within several decades, rather than centuries, of 1652 is suggested, albeit from silence, by the fact that it does not cite the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century philosophical poetry of Tāyumāṅavar, nor the roughly contemporaneous Kaivalliyanavanitam, works that had achieved immense popularity by the early nineteenth century and which are otherwise similar to many other works cited by Citampara Cuvāmi in the text.
In order to better analyze the literary culture at play in the commentary,\(^{45}\) it is first useful to examine the following benedictory verse, in which Citampara praises the author of the AU and reflects upon the text’s intended audience (p. 1):

So that the myriad sectarians who produce enmity amongst the many religious paths will be saved, saying, “This is the good path for [attaining] the state of liberation,” he has given us this work entitled *The Song in the Unti Meter on Non-Contradiction.* Therefore, the great Śaiva (*mākēcag*) of the ancient path that is Vīraśaivism – in which the path of the Vedas and the path of the Āgamas, by which the path to victory is known, are revealed to be one and the same – our Cāntaliṅka Tēcikan, he is truly pure.\(^{46}\)

Here we are told that the AU is addressed to the “myriad sectarians”, who will be freed from their egotistical attachment to various sectarian dogmas by the teaching of “non-contradiction”. It is clear from the second half of the verse that Citampara understands this teaching to be coterminous with Vīraśaivism. Significantly, this is the only occurrence of the word “Vīraśaiva” (*vīracāiva*) in either the AU or the commentary. Here it is equated with the revelation of the underlying unity of the Vedic and Śaiva Āgamic scriptural traditions. Recall the similar claim of the Cuttacātakam, referred to above, that the path of “Śivādvaita” completes the “Śaiva” and “Vaidika” paths. This emphasis on the harmonization of the Vedic and Āgamic corpuses is found as early as the *Tirumantiram*; the often-quoted 2397\(^{th}\) verse, for instance, states that the Vedas and the Āgamas constitute Śiva’s “common” (*potu*) and “special” (*cirappu*) scriptures, respectively, and that the wise do not see any difference between them. The notion of a single, all-encompassing Śaiva revelation becomes a major trope in late-precolonial Tamil Śaiva

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\(^{45}\) See Monius (2001) on the notion of “literary culture” and its role in the imagining of religious community in Tamil South India. Especially germane is Monius’ analysis of Peruntēvaṉār’s commentary on the *Viracōḷiyam*, much of which consists, like the AU commentary, of exemplary verses selected from a range of earlier texts. According to Monius, “in anthologizing a corpus of Tamil poetry that both speaks directly to the ideals of Buddhism and draws on a variety of passages that share the values of Buddhism […] the *Viracōḷiyam* commentary imagines a textual community deeply suffused with the teachings and values, sentiments and ideals, of the Buddha and his followers” (Ibid.: 139).

\(^{46}\) *pāṉ neṟiyil ikal viḷaiikkum pala camayat-tavaruṟu muttu patattir(ka) ītu
nāṟ neṟiy eng’ uyva avirōta unti-
yaṟ ēṇu nūl nalkingāgāl
veṅ neṟi tēr māṟai neṟi ākama neṟi oḷ(ṟu)
egāk kāṭum vīra caivat
ṭon neṟi mākēcag enkaḷ cāntalinka
tēcikan ēṁ tūyōb tāṅē*
literature; in addition to the texts examined here, it also reappears in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century poetry of Tāyumāṉavar, in the well-known phrase vētānta cittānta camaracam, the “same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” (see Chapter 4). For Citampara Cuvāmi, the reconciliation of the two scriptural paths appears to signify, above all, an authentic religious space beyond the petty squabbling of the various sects. The benediction thus implies that Vīraśaivism is the transcendent heart of all sectarian traditions. As we shall see, much of the commentary is devoted to proving this point by demonstrating how the teachings of the AU can be found within a variety of sectarian literatures.

The commentary provides a brief prose gloss for each verse of the AU, usually followed by a more or less extensive exposition of the verse’s meaning. The vast bulk of the commentary, however, consists of quotations from earlier texts, which are appended to the end of Citampara’s discursive remarks on individual verses. The sheer number of these quotations is remarkable: in comparison to the AU’s one hundred verses, Citampara cites no less than five hundred and thirty-six stanzas from eighty different titles. The quotations are presented as authorizing or illustrating the main points of individual AU stanzas, typically being preceded by the phrase “authoritative sources for this” (itarkup piramāṇam), “examples of this” (itarku utāraṇam), or a more specific prefatory gloss. Consequently, the commentary often reads more like a literary anthology than a work of traditional textual exegesis.

The most striking feature of these quotations is their eclecticism; they reflect a diverse body of Tamil literature associated with a number of disparate theological traditions. These include several texts that Citampara would likely have understood as belonging to the Tamil Śaiva devotional canon (Tirumugai),47 including the Tiruvācakam, the Tirumantiram, and the poetry of the saints Appar, Campantar, and Cuntarar. Side by side with these works is the Vaiṣṇava classic Tiruvāyumoḻi, also one of the most regularly cited works. Amongst an otherwise largely Śaiva collection, the Tiruvāyumoḻi is the only Vaiṣṇava work quoted in the commentary, with the exception of a single verse attributed to Periyāḻvār. The Tiruvāyumoḻi thus functions as

47 On the compilation of the Tirumugai see Prentiss (1996: 248-252; 1999: 143-145). Prentiss compellingly argues that the Tirumugai kaṇṭapurāṇam, attributed to the fourteenth-century Śaiva Siddhāntin Umāpati Civācāriyār, which credits the Tirumugai’s arrangement to the circa eleventh-century Brahmin Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi and several other figures, deliberately obscures Umāpati’s own role in the assembly and closure of this canon.
the primary representative of what we have termed the “remote other” within the commentary, and its conspicuous presence serves to reinforce the idea that Vīraśaivism is able to encompass the Vaiṣṇava within itself. At the same time, the frequency with which the Tiruvāyvōli is cited (nineteen times) suggests Citampara’s profound respect for the text; it may be the case that the work’s great literary beauty enabled it to cross sectarian boundaries and be appropriated by other, non-Brahminical communities, as Kampaṇ’s Irāmāvatāram is known to have done.

Apart from these classics of the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotional canons, and the ubiquitous didactic work Tirukkural, some of the most frequently reappearing texts are associated with the monistic tradition of Advaita Vedānta, including the Nāṇavāciṭṭam (the Tamil Laghuyogavāśiṣṭha) and the compositions of Tattuvarāyar (see below). Citampara also quotes from many late Śaiva works, especially the Civāṇgantamālai and the Oļiviloṭukkam, a text sometimes identified with aikyavāda” Śaivism. Less frequently cited are a number of works that are today understood to belong to the Śaiva Siddhānta canon (Meykanṭa cāṭtīraṅkal), including the Civaṇgagacittiyār, the Tirukkalirruppaṭiyār, and the Civappirakācam. Finally, a few works attributed to Vīraśaivas appear in the commentary, most notably the Pirapuliṅkalilai, though it should be emphasized that such works are cited relatively infrequently. That Citampara Cuvāmi conceives of all these works as representing distinct theological traditions is suggested by the way in which he tends to cluster their quotations in the commentary. Thus, generally speaking, verses from the Śaiva Tirumurai and the Tiruvāyvōli tend to be quoted first, followed by verses from Tattuvarāyar, the Nāṇavāciṭṭam, the Pirapuliṅkalilai, Śaiva Siddhānta works and finally the Oļiviloṭukkam.

48 Raman (forthcoming, ch. 2) briefly discusses this unusual work and its reception by the nineteenth-century Śaiva poet Irāmaliṅka Aṭika.

49 The date of the canonization of the fourteen works that comprise the Meykanṭa cāṭtīraṅkal remains unsettled, and thus it is somewhat unclear if Citampara would have recognized these works as belonging to a distinct collection. An anonymous, undated verse containing the abbreviated names of all fourteen texts is found in an 1866 edition of the Meykanṭa cāṭtīraṅkal (S. S. Janaki, cited in Prentiss 1999: 240, n. 9). According to Prentiss, “the issue of closure may not have been settled early on; for example, some scholars argue that the Takaḷaṟu Pōiam by Cīṟkāḷi Cīṟṟampaḷaṇaṭiṅkal replaces Unmai Viḷaṅkam [of Tiruvatiṅka Maṅjavācaḷaṭiṅkal] as one of the fourteen ṣaṅstras” (Ibid.). Prentiss nevertheless concludes, “though when this corpus was constituted as a canon remains an open question, the Tamil texts indicate that the authors wrote with a strong sense of intertextuality, related to their ideology of the Meykanṭa guru lineage, and that they considered their texts to be authoritative; that is, the texts display a collective coherence, which is always insisted on when a corpus is transformed into a canon but is not often found in fact” (Ibid.: 135). On the general problem of dating individual works of the Meykanṭa cāṭtīraṅkal, see Goodall (2004: xxxii, n. 43).
By citing from this wide range of sources, the commentary attempts to establish the universality of the AU’s teachings on renunciation, “non-contradiction”, and maṇḍolayam. One example will suffice to demonstrate this point. At AU 73, Cāntaliṅka elaborates upon the ēka pāvaṇā niṭṭai (Skt. ekabhāvanāniṣṭhā), roughly translatable as the ‘single-conception meditation,’ an advanced contemplative practice involving the visualization of an omnipresent divine light:

The eight [forms of Śiva] beginning with the earth, that which is beyond those, and that which is all around,
A singular light alone abides as these – rise up and fly!
There is nothing else – thus contemplate – rise up and fly!\(^{50}\)

After a brief prose gloss of this stanza, Citampara cites forty verses culled from twenty-four titles. Among the quotations he cites two verses each from the Tiruvācakam, the Tiruvāyoli, the Civaṅṅacittiyār, and the Ṇañavāciṭṭam. Here I have given one verse from each pair:

Earth, water, fire, wind, vast ether, the moon, the sun, and intellect-possessing man – thus becoming eightfold he stands united.
As the seven worlds and the ten directions, yet he is one;
as he stands manifold, so let us play the “shoulder-aim” game!
(Tiruvācakam 15.5)

Becoming one form, two forms, three forms, many forms, the five elements, the two [celestial] lights, and that which has no form, O Nārāyana, who sleeps in the central ocean on the cosmic snake!
Compressing your body fully within [me], you destroyed [my] soul’s afflictions (Tiruvāyoli 4.3.3)

Becoming small, expanding, becoming the multitude of worlds – all these diverse things are just the excellent Brahman. Knowledge is Brahman. This earth is Brahman. The five elements are Brahman. We are Brahman. Our enemies are Brahman. Supportive friends and relatives are Brahman. This indeed is the ascertainment of Caṅkar (Śiva) and the rest.
(NEYāvāciṭṭam, pucunṭaṅ katai 25)

Assuming the world itself as his body, the [various] wombs as his limbs, and the shining [powers] will, knowledge, and action as his internal organs, the lord brings about sensory perception for the countless souls, dancing the drama in which the five great cosmic acts unfold.

\(^{50}\) pār ātiy ettum appālum eppālum āy ŏr cōtiyē niṅrat’ ūnti pāra
uṇṇu vēr’ illaiy eŋr’ ūnti pāra
When read in their respective original contexts, these verses convey quite distinct ideas, none of which is obviously connected with the “single-conception meditation” of AU 73. *Tiruvācakam* 15.5 comes from a poem composed in the genre of *tōṇōkkam*, or “shoulder-aim”, which like the *unti* apparently refers to a game played by young Tamil women. The verse praises Śiva’s simultaneous transcendence and immanence, his unity and plurality and, like AU 73, refers to the traditionally recognized eight forms (Skt. *aṣṭāmūrtī*) of the god. *Tiruvāyomoli* 4.3.3 conveys not dissimilar ideas about the divine, but here it is Viśnu’s majesty, not Śiva’s, that is celebrated, and emphasis is placed on the intimate, even physical, nature of the relationship between the poet and the deity. The *Nāṉavāciṭṭam* verse constitutes the sage Vasiṣṭha’s answer to Rāma’s question regarding the state of awareness enjoyed by Śiva and the other gods and sages; in short, they perceive everything as the non-dual Brahman. Finally, the *Civaṉaṉacittiyār* verse forms part of a larger commentary on the fifth *cūttiram* (Skt. *sūtra*) of Meykanṭar’s *Civaṉaṉapōtam*, the foundational treatise of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, and as such reinforces the verse’s central notion that souls perceive only through the lord’s divine grace.

These differences are, of course, simply ignored by the commentary, which in recontextualizing the verses under AU 73 calls attention to the fact that each of them alludes, in some form or another, to the divine’s immanence in and as the world. The commentary thus

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51 *nila nīr nerupp’ uyir nīl vicumpu nilāp pakalōq
pulaṉ āya maintaṉōt’ ēn vakaiy āyp puṉaruntu niṟṟān
ulak’ ēḷ’ ēṉat ticai patt’ ēṉat tāṉ oruvaṉumē
palav āki niṟṟavā tōṇōkkam āṭāmō* (*Tiruvācakam* 15.5)

ēka mūṟtiy iru mūṟti mūṟru mūṟti pala mūṟti
ākiy āṇtu pūṭam āv ēṟuṇtu cuṭṭar āv āṟuv āki
nākam ēri ātu kaṭalūṭ ūṟuṅna nāṟṟaṇaṉgēy uy
āka muṟṟum akatt’ āṭākkiy āvīy āllaṉ māyṭṭatē (*Tiruvāyomoli* 4.3.3)

kiṭṭcil āki virintu cakat tiraḷ āvī kilaittav ivaiy ellām
viṟṟu piṟramamēy aṟivu piṟram maṇiṟṟu piṟramam
paṇča pūṭam piṟram nām piṟram nammat piṟram akai piṟraman
tañça natiṟku kilai piṟraman cāṅkār ēṭi niciṟṟaymē (*Nāṉavāciṭṭam, pucuoṭṭag katai 25)

ulakamēy uruvam āka yōgikaḷ ṽṛuppat’ āka
ilaku pēr icca nāṇak kiṟiyai uṭkaraṇam āka
alak’ ilā uyir pulaṉaṭk’ aṟivigaiy ākkiy āṇtu
nala miku toḻīkāḷ ōṭu nāṭaka natiṟṟa gāṭaṉ (*Civaṉaṉacittiyār, cupakkam 237)*
implies that all of the verses, insofar as they make their readers reflect upon the lord’s omnipresence, do in fact cultivate the state of awareness aimed at by the “single-conception meditation”. Note that in suggesting that these verses are ultimately conveying the same message, Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ chooses to ignore other passages in the same texts that explicitly contradict the possibility of intersectarian equivalence, such as verses in the Civaṅṅacittiyār that are critical of the monism one finds in the Ēṉavāciṭṭam, or those in the Tiruvāymoḷi that censure Śaiva devotees, or those in the Tiruvācakam that affirm the relative inferiority of Viṣṇu. Carefully avoiding such instances of sectarian self-assertion in these and other texts, the commentator has selected verses that convey, or can be plausibly interpreted to convey, the central values of the AU: a life of asceticism grounded in the renunciation of all attachments, a sincere commitment to the path of “non-contradiction”, and the dissolution of the mental apparatus in divine contemplation.

Through this diverse and highly selective appropriation and re-contextualization of earlier religious literature, the commentary insinuates that the AU’s theology cuts across superficial sectarian distinctions and constitutes the common core of the major religious traditions of the day. To borrow from the title of Monius’ 2001 monograph, the commentary thus “imagines a place for” Viṣṇaivism within late-precolonial Tamil South India. Thus the commentary’s citations do not merely serve to legitimate the AU by demonstrating its rootedness within established textual authority, nor is the cultural work performed by the commentary exhausted in the reinterpretation of these earlier texts, i.e. by bringing them in line with the AU’s doctrinal claims. At the broadest textual level, that is, when the commentary is considered as a whole, the quotes can be seen to reflect the incorporation of distinct canonical traditions within a text that is itself striving to be (super-)canonical. In embedding what were evidently perceived to be preexistent scriptural traditions within its own canonicity, the commentary furthers the AU’s project of claiming a panoptic religious space that could simultaneously accommodate and transcend rival sectarian traditions.

**The Śivayogi’s Syllabus: Eclectic Anthologies and Tamil “Knowledge Literature”**

One other feature of the commentary’s quotations is worth mentioning, and that is the presence therein of verses from many late Śaiva works of a broadly philosophical nature. Quoted with particular frequency is the oeuvre of Tattuvarāyar, a prolific fifteenth-century author. If one
were to add up all of the verses taken from works currently attributed to Tattuvarāyar, they would account for no less than twenty percent of the total quotations in the commentary. While many of the texts and authors Citampara cites have received little to no critical attention to date, Tattuvarāyar, thanks in large part to the pioneering work of Mu. Aruṇācalam, is not entirely unknown to us (Aruṇācalam [1972] 2005 vol. 9: 186-214). Here I would like to briefly consider this fascinating figure, and in particular his religious anthology Peruntiraṭṭu (The Greater Anthology). Like the AU and its commentary, the Peruntiraṭṭu exhibits a remarkable theological and literary eclecticism. Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ appears to be intimately familiar with the work, and it may even have informed the AU’s ideology of “non-contradiction”. Through a consideration of the Peruntiraṭṭu and the manner in which Citampara draws upon it, this section aims to further situate the pan-sectarianism of the AU and its commentary within the broader context of late-precolonial Tamil Śaiva literary culture.

According to the hagiographical tradition summarized by Aruṇācalam, Tattuvarāyar was born in the town of Virai into a family of Śaiva Brahmins (Ibid.: 186-191). At one time he and his uncle, Corūpāṉantar, decided to seek out a guru who could teach them the path to liberation. In order to increase their chances they split up, Tattuvarāyar going north and Corūpāṉantar south, agreeing that whoever succeeded in finding a suitable guru first would become the other’s teacher. Shortly thereafter Corūpāṉantar became a disciple of a great sage named Civappirakācar (not to be confused with the other two Civappirakācars mentioned in this chapter!) and, in accordance with their agreement, became Tattuvarāyar’s guru. Tattuvarāyar went on to compose dozens of works, many of which creatively refashion older literary genres to convey religious teachings while praising Corūpāṉantar and Civappirakācar. In light of Tattuvarāyar’s impressive literary output, Kamil Zvelebil has referred to him as “probably the most powerful medieval poet of solitary stanzas, apart from being an immensely prolific author of various genres (prabandhas) with Śaiva and Vedāntic ideology” (1974: 51).

Zvelebil’s remark calls attention to the theological content of Tattuvarāyar’s works and to the problem of this figure’s sectarian identity. Indeed, much of Tattuvarāyar’s corpus seems to reflect an Advaita Vedānta metaphysics, but one profoundly steeped in the devotionalism and technical terminology of Tamil Śaivism and Śaiva Siddhānta, respectively. These lines get blurred even further when one considers Aruṇācalam’s remark that Tattuvarāyar’s grand-guru Civappirakācar is remembered to have been a Śaiva Siddhāntin (Aruṇācalam [1972] 2005 vol. 9:
The issue is complicated still further, and also intriguingly brought closer to the subject of this chapter, by Aruṇācalam’s reference to two anecdotes that connect Tattuvarāyar’s lineage with Vīrāṣaivism. The first is a note found at the end of a manuscript of the *Peruntiraiṭṭu* and dated to the late seventeenth century, which claims that Tattuvarāyar’s lineage split into two after a few generations, with one branch adopting Vīrāṣaivism (Ibid.: 204). The second is a hagiographical narrative that goes as follows: one day a group of learned scholars, including several Ārṇāttiyars (Vīrāṣaiva Brahmins), approached Tattuvarāyar to complain about two of his compositions, the allegorical war-poems *Mōkavataipparani* and *Aṉṉavataipparani*. These works cast Tattuvarāyar’s guru Corūpāṉantar in the role of a military hero who slays the personifications of delusion and ignorance, respectively. These works were unacceptable to the scholars since, they claimed, the *parani* genre was reserved for a warrior who had killed a thousand elephants in battle. Tattuvarāyar’s reply was that his guru kills the “elephants” of his disciples’ egos. The scholars remained unconvinced, asking whether it was possible to simultaneously destroy the egos of a thousand students at once. In response, Tattuvarāyar plunged himself and the scholars into a state of meditative absorption (camāti) for three full days, after which the doubting Thomases asked for forgiveness and accepted Tattuvarāyar as their guru.

While Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ cites widely from Tattuvarāyar’s entire corpus, including the *parani* poems, he betrays a particular familiarity with a massive anthology of nearly three thousand verses, the appropriately entitled *Peruntiraiṭṭu*, or *The Greater Anthology*. This work consists of two “volumes” (*kaṭṭaḷai*) divided into twenty-six “sections” (*paṇai*) and over two hundred subsections, under each of which Tattuvarāyar provides illustrative verses culled from a wide range of texts. The first volume, entitled “The Sixteen” (*Kalai*), contains sixteen sections

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53 The *Peruntiraiṭṭu* was edited and published by Kō. Vaṭivēlu Cēṭiyār and Maṅkalam Caṇṭhika Mutaliyār in 1912 under the title *Civappirakācap peruntiraiṭṭu* along with the *Kuṭuntiraiṭṭu*, or *The Lesser Anthology*. There is some debate about the authorship of the *Peruntiraiṭṭu*. The aforementioned editors attribute the text to Corūpāṇantar and claim that Tattuvarāyar only composed the *Kuṭuntiraiṭṭu*. In the only indepth study of the *Peruntiraiṭṭu* to date, Mu. Aruṇācalam records the existence of a seventeenth-century manuscript which also ascribes the *Peruntiraiṭṭu*’s compilation to Corūpāṇantar (1972 [2005] vol. 9: 203-205). However, Aruṇācalam concludes that both anthologies should be attributed to Tattuvarāyar alone (Ibid.: 203). Whether or not Aruṇācalam is correct is ultimately irrelevant to my analysis, which primarily wishes to suggest that Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ drew upon the *Peruntiraiṭṭu*’s formal features as a model for his own eclecticism.
spanning a variety of religious topics, including “The Nature of the Wise” (Paramar tīṟam), “Sects” (Camayam), “States of Awareness” (Avattai), and “The Nature of the Guru” (Kuruv iyal). The second volume, entitled “Experience” (Anupavam), contains ten sections, including “The Teaching” (Upatēcam), “The Nature of the Lord” (Irai iyai), “The Nature of Love” (Appiyal), and “The Heart” (Neńcu). The overall sequence of the sections charts a gradual progression from relatively external, discursive forms of religious knowledge, which comprise the chief subject of Volume One, to increasingly interiorized forms of religious experience, the focus of the Volume Two. The anthology is thus structured as a kind of encyclopedia of the soul’s journey from its initial awakening and instruction to its final realization and celebration of union with the lord in the heart.

A curious feature of the Peruntiraṭṭu is that many, if not most, of the titles listed in the anthology are not attested anywhere else; this leads Aruṇācalam to speculate that Tattuvarāyar may have composed much of the anthology himself (Ibid.: 206-211). Nevertheless, among the verses that are attested elsewhere, there is a conspicuous blending of sectarian literatures in a manner very similar to that which is found in the AU commentary. Like the commentary, for instance, the Peruntiraṭṭu quotes the Śaiva Tiruvācakam and the Vaishnava Tiruvāy摩li with almost equal frequency, in addition to works such as the Tirukkalīṟṟuppatiyār (one of the Meykaṇṭa cattiram), and the Paramārtataricaṇam, i.e. the Tamil Bhagavadgītā, a text commonly associated with Tamil Advaita Vedānta. Within the context of the Peruntiraṭṭu’s overall structure, this literary eclecticism suggests that Śaivism and Vaishnavism, as well as Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta, share a common soteriological path. It is possible that this approach towards other sectarian traditions reflects something of a Smārta religious ethos.

While Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ never mentions the Peruntiraṭṭu by name in the course of glossing the AU, there is good reason to think that he drew upon the text both as a source of quotable verses and, more generally, as a formal model for his own commentary-cum-anthology.

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54 Aruṇācalam suggests that Tattuvarāyar composed many of the verses himself and then invented titles for them that deliberately mimic those of well-known Śaiva Siddhānta works. He also notes that some, though not all, of the verses listed under titles that do exist outside the anthology, such as the Tiruvācakam, are not found in the standard editions of these works. According to Aruṇācalam, Tattuvarāyar composed these verses as well and attempted to pass them off as authentic stanzas of the original titles. He speculates that Tattuvarāyar may have tried to misrepresent his own verses as belonging to older, well-respected texts in order to establish a textual tradition for Advaita Vedānta in Tamil, which in the fifteenth century could claim very few vernacular works of its own.
Many of the verses Citampara cites are from titles only attested in the *Peruntirattu*, suggesting that he took them straight from the anthology rather than from somewhere else. For instance, consider the commentary on *AU* 35 which, it will be recalled, is the pivotal verse of the entire text, in which the wise are said to accept as doctrine only that which does not contradict any of the six sects. Citampara cites eight verses in his commentary on this stanza, six of which are taken from works attributed to Tattuvarāyar, including the following three that appear only in the *Peruntirattu* (Cāntaliṅka Aṭikaḷ 1965: 56-57):

The referent of all attested sectarian treatises,
the very excellent subject in the precious Vedānta (*maṟai muṭivil*),
the meaning of that which was declared by Śiva, Hari, and Brahmā,
that which is spoken of by those who renounce all and resolve only upon that which is non-contradictory (*avirōtattaiyē*) –
To reveal this one thing
like a jewel full in the palm of one’s hand,
is the nature of the righteous path of truth. (*Ṇāṉacūriyā*)

Performing austerities, being ceaselessly disciplined –
that is the falsity of all deterministic conceptions (*cakala caṅkarpap poy*).
When knowledge of proper conduct has ceased, there is wisdom.
That is true proper conduct; that alone is capable of revealing liberation just like a gooseberry in the hand.
Know that *that* truth is the knowledge (*vētaṇam*) in the Vedas.
What is not that is pain (*vētaṇam*). (*Ṇāṉacūriyā*)

Great ones adopt the good meaning that is distilled from all the treatises of all the sects men take up and delight in nourishing it.
They do not suffer the ignorance that seizes upon something that is read, takes refuge in it out of a sense of partisan belonging, and then obsessively clings to it to the exclusion of all else. (*Avirōtapōtam*)

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55 *āṟaṅtav eccamayak kalaiyigung ēṭtutuk kāṭṭal āy aru maṟai muṭivil cīṟanta naṟ purul āvē cīvaṇ ariv ayagār ceppiyav aruttamum ākit tūṟantu marṟ avirōtattaiyē tuṉintōr collitum porulum ām oṅrai niṟainta kait talattiṅ maniy eṇak kāṭṭu niṟi caṃmārkattitī iyalpē (*Ṇāṉacūriyā*)

*ceyytē tavam āvē ceṟivatu viṭuvat’ iṇṟiyē cakala caṅkarpap poyy at’ ām olukkap pulamaiy atu āṟavē pōṭam ām meyv olukk’ atuv āy kaiyil āmalakam eṇṉavē viṭṭalik kāṭṭavum vallat’ ēt’ atuvē*
The two verses attributed to “Ṇāṉacūrīyaṉ” are found in the Peruntiraṭṭu’s first volume, in the sixth section, which deals with “Sects”. In that section, Tattuvarāyar sequentially presents and refutes the doctrines of more than twenty different schools of thought by means of illustrative verses. This “discussion” culminates in a reflection on “The False Conception that is Doctrine” (Vāta caṅkarpam), the title of subsection twenty-nine, and ultimately on the post-sectarian truth revealed in “The True Path” (Caṅmārkkam), the title of subsection thirty-two. It is in this final subsection that the two verses Citampara Cuvāmi cites are found. Like the AU, then, this section of the Peruntiraṭṭu imagines a post-sectarian theological space explicitly characterized as one of “non-contradiction”. The third verse Citampara cites, which is found one of the Peruntiraṭṭu’s introductory subsections, is attributed to the “Avirōtāpōtam”, a text with “non-contradiction” in its very name. It is highly likely that Citampara Cuvāmiḷ took these verses straight from the Peruntiraṭṭu, and one wonders if Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmiḷ was not himself also familiar with this work, which appears to adopt a theological position very similar to his own.

Norman Cutler has remarked upon the capacity of the Tamil literary anthology to blur sectarian boundaries in his discussion of the Puṟātiraṭṭu, a text that appears to have been composed at roughly the same time as the Peruntiraṭṭu (2003: 311). Cutler interprets the fact that the Puṟātiraṭṭu includes texts from authors who are known to have been Jain, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Buddhist as evidence

that a nonsectarian or transsectarian literary culture flourished in Tamilnadu in the fifteenth century – a time when Tamil Shaivism and Shrivaishnavism were well on the way to assuming their mature institutionalized forms. This suggests that literary culture was, at least to an extent, independent of religious sectarianism. (original emphasis)

I do not wish to disagree with Cutler’s masterful assessment of the Puṟātiraṭṭu. However, it is important to recognize that his assumption of a sharp distinction between “literary” and

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meyy at’ ām vēta vētaam allātavaγγ’ ayal
vētaam ariyē (Ṇāṉacūrīyaṉ)

ēṭtattav emmatam ennālkal yāvaṟṟiyun tamatāv aṅku
vaṭṭita naṟ porufē koṇṭu vaḷampaṭa makiiyai’ allār
paṭṭit oru porulai’ poriṟ tiṟṟip pāṅkiñgai’ atil otuṅkip
piṭittatu piṭittuk kāṟṟum pētaamai periyörkk ingē (Avirōtāpōtam)
“religious” spheres of cultural activity is not borne out by the *Peruntiraṭṭu*. This text, as we have seen, makes use of the genre of the literary anthology to accomplish patently theological work, as does the *AU* commentary. Both works exploit the anthology genre in order to reveal an underlying unity of religious experience cutting across sectarian lines, even if they may do so for different reasons.

Taken together, these texts suggest that the realm of the “purely literary” was not the only site of transsectarian Tamil literary culture in the fifteenth century, nor in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century. Instead, they point to a Tamil literary culture that was primarily concerned with matters of a theological and more specifically Śaiva nature, yet which nevertheless adopted a hermeneutics of “non-contradiction” that attributed value to bridging sectarian divisions between Śaivas and Vaishnavas, Siddhāntins and Vedāntins. By citing many of the same texts quoted in the fifteenth-century *Peruntiraṭṭu*, as well as several works of a more recent date, Citampara Cuvāmi effectively anthologizes an informal, eclectic canon of Tamil “knowledge literature” (*ṉāṇa nūṟkal*), a term which is often used to describe such texts.⁵⁶ To judge by the frequency with which particular works are cited, it can be said that the core of this collection, at least for Citampara Cuvāmi, consists of texts such as the *Tiruvāacakam*, the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, the works of Tattuvarāyar, the *ṉāṇavāciṭṭam*, and several other texts such as the *Civāṇantamālai* and the *Oliviloṭukkam*. These works were evidently understood to best express the central religious concerns of the day, concerns that appear to have been profoundly shaped by the Tamil Cittar tradition, namely, controlling the senses, withdrawing from worldly attachments, especially those pertaining to sectarian community, and dissolving the mind in abstract contemplation of the lord. Like comparable didactic texts (*nīti nūṟkal*) such as the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, this loosely circumscribed metagene of “knowledge literature” was conceptualized as occupying an essentially non-sectarian literary space. Importantly, these *ṉāṇa nūl* significantly overlap but are not identical with the standard canons of Tamil Śaiva devotionalism and Śaiva Siddhānta, i.e. the *Tirumūṟai* and the *Meykaṇṭa cāttiraṅkal*, that are recognized in contemporary

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⁵⁶ One finds the term *ṉāṇa nūl*, for instance, in a mid-nineteenth-century commentary by Muttukiruṣa Pirammam on Āṟumuka Cuvāvikal’s *Nīṭṭāṉ uphold*, another Tamil Viraśaiva work of the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century (see e.g. Āṟumuka Cuvāvikal 1960: 45). The context makes it clear that the commentator intends many of the same texts cited by Citampara Cuvāvikal, in addition to the poetry of Tāyumāṉavar, the *Kaivalliyavanāṉam*, and the *AU* itself, an indication of the fundamentally open-ended nature of this metagene.
accounts of Tamil Śaivism. The present chapter can only point towards the existence of this metagenre; more work is required to excavate its historical dynamics in the late precolonial period.

Non-Contradiction As an Adaptive Strategy

The hermeneutics of “non-contradiction” that suffuses the AU and its commentary presumes a highly fragmented and intensely competitive sectarian environment. By the seventeenth century, monastic institutions affiliated with different sectarian traditions and preceptorial lineages had proliferated across the Tamil country. As relative newcomers on the scene, at least as far as the Tamil-speaking region is concerned, Vīraśaivas would have had to compete with several other, much more well-established traditions for various forms of royal and lay patronage. Within this crowded field, the cultivation of a position of “non-contradiction” may have served a very practical purpose. As a close reading of the AU suggests, the text’s rhetoric of sincerity subtly criticizes the hypocritical and petty bickering of other sectarian traditions. The text claims for itself a universal theological space that purports to complete the “partial truths” of rival theologies. In a not dissimilar manner, Citampara’s commentary claims that the teachings of the AU are universally present in a wide variety of sectarian literatures. The eclecticism of both texts may thus have functioned to relate the Vīraśaiva community to other sectarian traditions with comparatively deeper historical and literary roots in the region, while simultaneously enabling that community to claim an authenticity and distinctness that leveraged itself against the power and hypocrisy of these same traditions in their institutionalized forms.

It is entirely characteristic of the downplaying of overt opposition between Vīraśaivism and other sectarian traditions that the term “Vīraśaivism” (vīraśaivam) is found exactly once in Citampara Cuvāmi’s commentary, and not at all in the AU itself, and that neither text mentions recognizably Vīraśaiva concepts, such as the liṅga-aṅga-bhāva or the śaṭsthala, nor the Kaṇṇada vacanakāras, nor even the wearing of the liṅgam on one’s body. That is not to say that these distinguishing sectarian markers are not mentioned in other Vīraśaiva works in Tamil; they are found, for instance, in the near-contemporaneous Cuttacātakam, the Cittāntacikāmaṇi, and the Pirapuḷiṅkalai. Nevertheless, it is again characteristic that the AU gives no explicit indication of its association with these works, and it is only the last of these three texts that is cited in Citampara Cuvāmikal’s commentary, and there only infrequently. If one is to take
Citampara Cuvāmikāl’s reference to Cāntaliṅka’s Vīraśaiva identity seriously, then, one would have to acknowledge that it is the form in which the AU presents its theology, rather than any specific doctrinal contents, that is understood to differentiate the Vīraśaiva from the non-Vīraśaiva. Put more provocatively, the AU and its commentary can be interpreted as suggesting that the essence of Vīraśaivism is already present within the established sectarian traditions of the non-Vīraśaiva Tamils, and that if the latter would only renounce their pride in sectarian affiliation, they would themselves become Vīraśaivas. This strategy bears a striking resemblance to that taken, in an admittedly very different context, by the Tamil Jain A. Cakravarti Nāyaṇār in his 1941 Jaina Literature in Tamil, recently analyzed by Emmrich (2011). According to Emmrich, Cakravarti Nāyaṇār, not engaging the controversies that had attended upon earlier, and largely non-Jain, attempts to narrate the history of Tamil literature and the role of the Jains within it, prefers to represent “Tamil literary works as part of a larger Jain literary culture, as documents attesting the degree to which the Tamils, unknowingly, have taken part in the wider world of Jain culture” (Ibid.: 601).

As sophisticated attempts to locate Vīraśaivism within the extant traditions of the Tamil-speaking region, even as they seek to subtly distinguish it from them, the AU and its commentary reveal themselves to be much more than merely Vīraśaiva works composed in (read not Kannada, not Telugu, but) Tamil. That is, they appear neither as footnotes on the periphery of a largely Deccani Vīraśaivism, nor as mere afterthoughts of Śaiva literary production in Tamil. Rather, they reveal their primary historical significance as interventions within the broader religious framework of Tamil Śaivism, as expressions of a perspective that is not reducible to the standard narrative that identifies Tamil Śaivism with Śaiva Siddhānta. Understood in this fashion, these texts illuminate the inherent heterogeneity of Tamil Śaiva intellectual culture. They speak to the continual renegotiation of what being a Tamil Śaiva meant within a socio-cultural context that was always already populated by a plurality of religious communities with distinct but overlapping doctrines, practices, and texts.
Chapter 2

Arguing the Taste of Fresh Butter

In this chapter I continue to examine the internal diversity of Tamil Śaiva theology, turning from traditions associated with Vīraśaivism to those linked to Advaita Vedānta. As we will see, there is significant overlap between these two, particularly in the persistent attempt to articulate a post-sectarian theology around the three metaphysical principles of lord, souls, and bondage. This chapter also moves the discussion of Tamil Śaiva universalism into the colonial period. In discussing how an early-modern work on Advaita Vedānta is utilized to address pressing sectarian concerns in the late nineteenth century, I begin to explore how earlier traditions of Tamil universalism embedded within particular “knowledge texts” are being reinterpreted in the colonial context, an issue that will also be dealt with in Chapters 3 and 4. Here I am primarily concerned with the following questions: What does Advaita Vedānta mean in the Tamil-language context, and how is it related to Tamil Śaivism? How do locally rooted traditions of Advaita Vedānta in Tamil feed, in the colonial context, into a Tamil tradition of neo-Vedānta? In the course of interrogating these questions, I also reflect upon the broader issue of how such a tradition might be understood vis-à-vis Advaita Vedānta in Sanskrit, and whether it might not be appropriate to speak of many Advaita Vedāntas.

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The Tamil nationalist Maṉaimalai Aṭikaḷ once claimed that Tamil literature composed after the fourteenth-century Śaiva Siddhāntin Umāpati Civcāriyār was without merit. In making this evaluation, Aṭikaḷ was giving voice to an increasingly widespread perception among Tamil-speaking non-Brahmin intellectuals in the early twentieth century that Śaiva Siddhānta constituted the authentic theological expression of Dravidian culture. Other traditions omitted from this master narrative were inevitably relegated to the periphery of conceptions of Tamil

57 Aṭikaḷ’s remarks are paraphrased by Sivathamby (1986: 19).
religion and literary history.\textsuperscript{58} One of these marginalized traditions was Advaita Vedānta, whose perceived associations with the Sanskrit language and Brahmins made it anathema to emergent Tamil nationalist and anti-Brahmin sentiments.

Yet at the very same moment that this cultural narrative was beginning to crystallize, one of the most widely read religious texts in Tamil was in fact a work on Advaita Vedānta entitled \textit{Kaivalliyanavanītam}, or \textit{The Fresh Butter of Liberation} (hereafter \textit{KN}).\textsuperscript{59} This text, which appears to have been largely ignored since its composition in perhaps the seventeenth century (see below), was suddenly rediscovered in the colonial period by several prominent vernacular intellectuals and went on to become a major sleeper hit. First published no later than 1842 or 1843,\textsuperscript{60} the \textit{KN} received at least nine commentaries over the next hundred years,\textsuperscript{61} during which time it was translated into every major South Indian language. Equally striking is the text’s readership during this period which, judging from the names of the commentators, publishers, and composers of prefatory materials for the many printed editions, consisted largely of non-Brahmin caste Hindus. There is also some indication that the text was studied by women.\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{KN}’s widespread success quickly brought it to the attention of European scholars as well, including the German Lutheran missionary Karl Graul, who translated the work into German and

\textsuperscript{58} On the dominant position accorded to Śaivism in modern Tamil literary histories see Sivathamby (1986, esp. pp. 95-96). For discussions of the marginalization of Tamil Jain and Vaiṣṇava literary traditions see the respective articles of Emmrich (2011) and Raman (2011) in the \textit{Journal of Indian Philosophy}. In the same issue, Monius (2011) discusses the impact of the emerging Śaiva narrative on the autobiography of the famous Tamil scholar and Brahmin U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar.

\textsuperscript{59} For the purposes of this chapter, all citations of this text and of the commentary on it by Īcūr Caccitāṅganta Čuvāṅikai refer to Tāṇṭavārāya Čuvāṅikai (1928).

\textsuperscript{60} This is the edition of Tiruttaṅkaīc Caravāṇap Perumāḷaiyar and Kāraikkāl Mutuṭcāmi Kavirāyar. On early Tamil pundit-publishing in general, and Caravāṇap Perumāḷaiyar in particular, see Blackburn (2003: 102 ff.).

\textsuperscript{61} The most elaborate commentaries are those of Piṣaicai Aruṇācalu Čuvāṅikai, Īcūr Caccitāṅganta Čuvāṅikai (discussed at length in this chapter), Kōvilūr Pōṇampala Čuvāṅikai, and Kō. Vāṭivēlu Cēṭṭiyār. A recently republished edition of the \textit{KN} (Tāṇṭavārāya Čuvāṅikai 1994) containing Nāṇakuruyōki Irāmalinku Čuvāṅikai’s \textit{vīcēṭa urai} misidentifies itself as repeating and adding to Aruṇācaḷu Čuvāṅikai’s commentary, whereas it is actually Caccitāṅganta’s commentary that is adopted.

\textsuperscript{62} See Meenakshisundaran (1974: 44): “There are a number of \textit{Kaivalya Navaṇīta} saṅgams in the southern districts, for instance in Virudhunagar and other places. They were organizations founded by women and they were a great force in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The leaders were often widows who, thanks to the popular Advaita of \textit{Kaivalya Navaṇīta}, realized their human worth and the possibility of attaining \textit{Brahmānuḥbhava}.” In addition, Vijaya Ramaswamy (2008: 215) cites a passage from a work of Nilampikai Ammaiṭāl, the daughter of Maṇimalai Aṭṭāl, in which she bemoans the fact that Tamil women are studying the “false doctrines” of the \textit{KN}. 
English in the first two volumes of his *Bibliotheca Tamulica* (1854-1865). In 1862, just two decades after its initial publication, the Anglican missionary and Tamil scholar G. U. Pope described the *KN* as “a complete exposition of the Neo-vēdantic system,” including it in a list of six works which could provide a colonial officer with “a thorough mastery of the systems which have most influence over the Tamil mind.”

Despite this remarkable reception, however, neither the *KN* nor its community of interpreters has received much scholarly attention. What scholarship has been done has generally tended to emphasize the *KN*’s perceived continuity with earlier Sanskrit works on Advaita Vedānta. Kō. Vaṭivelu Ĉettiṉāḷ (1985: ii), for instance, notes that the content of the text draws heavily from the *Pañcadaśī*. In the most extensive treatment of the work to date, T. P. Meenakshisundaran (1974: 41-67) classifies the *KN* as an example of “popular Advaita”, by which he means a kind of watered-down vernacular summary of the Sanskrit treatises. He suggests that the *KN*’s emphasis on experience and meditative practice (Skt. *sādhana*) over complex philosophical discussions helped spread the teachings of non-duality among the masses.

Although such analyses are not without value, they tell us little about why this work was so important for its nineteenth-century non-Brahmin audience. In this chapter I examine the colonial reception of the *KN*, focusing in particular on a commentary composed by the Śaiva intellectual Īcūr Caccitāṉa Cuvāmikāḷ (1815-1886). Not much is known about the commentator’s life. He is said to have hailed from a lower-caste Vēṭkōvar or “Potter” family in

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63 According to Wilhelm Halbfass (1988: 111, citing *Briefe* II [Deussen XV], 359), Arthur Schopenhauer is said to have “greeted the translations of Tamil Vedāntic works published in K. Graul’s ‘Bibliotheca tamulica’ with ‘great joy and edification’ because he saw his own teachings reflected in them ‘as in a mirror.’”

64 See Pope’s 1862 preface to Dubois (1879: xxvii). It is not entirely clear what Pope means by “neo-Vedānta” here. He suggests that this neo-Vedāntic “system” is distinctly South Indian and identifies its “great text book” as the “Pañja-daśa-prakaraṇam”, i.e. the *Pañcatacappirakaraṇam*, a Tamil rendering of Vidyāranya’s *Pañcadaśī* (p. xxv). He also maintains that this tradition has been shaped by contact with Sufism and especially Christianity, claiming that the *KN* is “full of evidence of Christian influences,” an assertion he made about several Tamil religious works he admired. Pope’s discussion is also mentioned in Vaitheespara (1999: 93, n. 137).

65 See also Meenakshisundaran (1968: 368-370). A similar evaluation of the *KN* is found in a more recent discussion by Kandasamy (2000).

66 For a brief account see Vēṅkaṭacāmi (1962: 209-210), who appears to follow an anonymous 1936 hagiography (*Śrīmat caccitāṉa cuvāmikāḷīṇī carittirac curukkamum kurupūcait tōttiramum*). The year of Caccitāṉa’s death is misreported in Vēṅkaṭacāmi’s text as 1889.
Madras (now Chennai), and to have received training in Tamil literature from Tiruttaṇikaic Caravaṇaṇap Perumāḷaiyar, who as was mentioned above published one of the earliest editions of the KN. Caccitāṉanta was initiated into a lineage of non-Brahmin Advaita Vedāntins by Piṣaicai (or Piṣaiyugu) Aruṇācalu Cuvāmika,67 then head of the Tirutturutti Intirapiṭṭam Karapāṭṭira Cuvāmikaḷ Āṭṭam, a monastic center said to have been founded by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya.68 It was Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ who composed the oldest extant commentary on the KN, a brief gloss first published around 1845. Caccitāṉanta’s own commentary on the KN, which was first published sometime during the 1870s,69 not only builds upon his teacher’s gloss, it also brings the KN to bear upon contemporary sectarian debates that were beginning to rage in and around colonial Madras. His exegesis of the text is therefore a valuable resource for understanding the vernacular appropriation of Vedāntic teachings in the context of late nineteenth-century South India.

In this chapter I argue that Caccitāṉanta’s commentary dynamically engages with Advaita Vedānta and Tamil Śaivism in a manner that is not easily reducible to either. The gloss’ rhetorical maneuvers and terminological choices accommodate the local Śaiva tradition while at the same time creating a new, hybrid doctrinal space. Specifically, Caccitāṉanta utilizes the KN to articulate a critique of the epistemological and ontological dualism found in Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta. This dualist position, which had been explicated in several key works composed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, maintains that reality consists of three fundamentally distinct yet closely interrelated metaphysical entities: the lord (patī), bound

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67 Aruṇācalu belonged to the Čeṇaikkutaiyar or betel leaf merchant caste by birth; see the ciṟappup pāyiram (n. pag.) of Aruṇācalav Aiyar in the 1868 edition of the Nāyavāćiṭṭam with Piṣaicai Aruṇācalu’s commentary. According to Thurston and Rangachari (1909, vol. 6: 360-361), this caste enjoyed a rather ambiguous social status during the colonial period; its members proclaimed to be relatively high-caste Čeṭṭiyars and Piḷḷaiyārs but were not accepted by others as such. I would like to thank Srilata Raman for bringing this reference to my attention.

68 The title page of an 1868 edition of the Nāyavāćiṭṭam with Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ’s commentary identifies Karapāṭṭira Cuvāmikaḷ with “Caṭāciappirimmēntira Yōkiṣuvarār,” an apparent reference to the famous Advaita theologian and Carnatic composer Sadāśiva Brahendra (early 18th c.). In the introduction to Caccitāṉanta’s anonymous hagiography (n. pag.), Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ’s guru paramparā is given as follows: Karapāṭṭira Cuvāmikaḷ, Tatṭāṭrēya Cuvāmikaḷ, Čeṇkamala Cuvāmikaḷ, Muttuaiy Cuvāmikaḷ, Cuppiramaniyā Cuvāmikaḷ, Nākai Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ, Piṣaicai Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ. The assertion that Śaṅkara founded the Āṭṭam is made in the hagiography as well (1936: 4-5). As Clark notes, many South Indian Advaita mathas were said to have been founded by Śaṅkara (2006: 133-138).

69 Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate a copy of the first edition of Caccitāṉanta’s commentary. The text is mentioned in an advertisement for several other works by Caccitāṉanta that is inserted at the beginning of an 1881 edition of his Carvamataciṭṭiṟantavilakka viṉāviṭai. The commentary must therefore have been composed prior to 1881. A second edition of the text was published in 1889.
individuals (*pacu*), and binding fetters (*pācam*), i.e. the world. As we shall see, Caccitānanta Cuvāmi, without rejecting this scheme entirely, nevertheless attempts to reinscribe Śaivism as monistic, implicitly challenging Śaiva Siddhānta’s claim to be the final word on Tamil Śaiva theology.

In what follows, I will first introduce the *KN* in greater detail in order to set the stage for Caccitānanta’s commentary. Next, I will consider a central theme in the gloss, i.e. its critique of “sectarian” dualists. This anti-sectarian trope, which as we saw in Chapter 1 has deep roots in earlier Tamil Śaiva literature, functions as a central hermeneutical strategy in Caccitānanta’s text, enabling him to clear a space in which to postulate a new universalist theology for Tamil Śaivism. After this, I will examine how Caccitānanta reads a monistic interpretation of Śaiva metaphysics into the *KN*, displacing the dualist position of Śaiva Siddhānta. Finally, I step back to reflect upon the relationship between Caccitānanta’s commentary and Advaita Vedānta more broadly.

**The Kaivalliyananavanītam: A Very Brief Introduction**

Ever since its rediscovery in the nineteenth century the *KN* has generally been regarded as the text on Advaita Vedānta in Tamil. However, it is not the only precolonial work that is associated with Advaita Vedānta in Tamil literary historiographies. It may be worthwhile to at least mention some of these other texts, if only because they are so rarely referred to in secondary literature. Many of these are Tamil adaptations of Sanskrit- or even Kannada-language compositions, although there are a number of independent works as well. According to Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005 vol. 7: 225-234), the first Tamil work to adopt an Advaita position is Paṭṭar’s thirteenth-century *Paramārtataricaṇam*, a loose rendering of the *Bhagavadgītā* in Tamil that aligns itself with Śaṅkara’s interpretation of the text. The relatively early date Aruṇācalam suggests for this work, if correct, points to a long history of engagement with Advaita Vedānta in the Tamil language. The most prolific premodern author in this context is undoubtedly Tattuvarāyar (ca. 15th c.), whose *Peruntirattu* we briefly examined in Chapter 1. The works attributed to him that adopt an Advaita framework include the *Mōkavataipparāṇi*, *Aṅṇavataipparāṇi*, *Paṭṭutuṟai*, and translations of the Sanskrit *Īśvaragītā* and the *Brahmagītā*. The *Cacivānṇapōtam*, an independently circulated portion of the *Mōkavataipparāṇi*, is among the most popular texts on Advaita in Tamil after the *Kaivalliyananavanītam*. Tattuvarāyar’s guru
Corupañantar is also credited with composing a short text on Advaita, the Corupācāram. The most important early-modern works to take up Advaita themes are Vīrai Ālavantar’s Āṇgavācīttam (ca. 16th-17th c.), a Tamil rendering of the Laghuyogavāśīṣṭha; Māttait Tiruvēṅkaṭa Nāṭar’s Meyṅṅāṅgavīlakku (ca. 17th c.), a translation of the Prabodhackandrodaya; and the Tamil Vīraśaiva Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikāḷ’s Vēṭāntacūṭāmanī (17th c.), an adaptation of a portion of Nijaguna Yōgi’s Kannada-language Vīvēkacūṭāmanī. It is worth noting that many of these works were commented upon by Īcūr Cacchitāṅanta Cuvāmikāḷ and his guru Piraicai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikāḷ.

Turning now to the KN, the text consists of 293 stanzas in ācirīya viruttam meter and is attributed to one Tāṇṭavarāyar, about whom virtually nothing is known. Based on available evidence it is reasonable to assume that the text was composed during the seventeenth century. The body of the KN is presented as a dialogue between a guru and his disciple, a form with several precedents in Vedic literature including the Vivekacūṭāmanī and the Yogavāśīṣṭha.

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70 Aruṇācala composed a massive commentary on the Āṇgavācīttam as well as glosses on the Cacivangapōṭam and the Vēṭāntacūṭāmanī. Cacchitāṅanta composed commentaries on the Paramārttataracāṇam, the Corupācāram, the Vēṭāntacūṭāmanī, as well as, it should be mentioned, the Pirapulinikalai, a Vīraśaiva text also attributed to Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikāḷ.

71 His name is also given as Tāṇṭaṅvarāya Cuvāmikāḷ and Tāṇṭavamūrtti Cuvāmikāḷ in the various printed editions of the KN. The author identifies himself as Tāṇṭavaṟ at verse 2.176 and his guru as Nāraṇṇa (Skt. Nārāyaṇa) at 2.179. Various references within the text suggest that the author may have been a Smārta. At verse 1.7 Tāṇṭavarāyar praises Venkaṭeṣa Mukunṭa, i.e. Viṣṇu/Nāraṇṇa at Tirupati, also likely a pun on his guru’s name. Notwithstanding this Vaiṣṇava benediction, the text contains a preponderance of Śaiva references, including an identification of the lord with Daḵśināmūrti (v. 1.72) and as the progenitor of Kuṇa (Skt. Guha, i.e. Skanda, v. 2.134), an exhortation to contemplate the mantra “I am Śiva” (Skt. śiśo ‘ham, v. 1.82), and a recognition of the guru as “cīva corūpam” (Skt. śiva-svarūpa, v. 2.44). Nevertheless, Kō. Vatīvelu Cettiyar (1985: iii) relates an oral tradition that maintains Tāṇṭavarāyar was a non-Brahmin Vēḷāḷar.

72 Prior to its nineteenth-century rediscovery, the KN was translated into Sanskrit by one Kṛṣṇa, alias Śaṅkukavi, who also composed an auto-commentary, the Prabhā (see the unpublished Kaivalyadīpikā, Adyar Library 10.F.18/1916). Karl Potter, in his Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, gives Kṛṣṇa’s date as 1710 (http://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter/cckeyt/txt4.htm, updated November 2013). This, then, is the upper limit for the text’s composition. That the KN is not a Tamil translation from the Sanskrit can be demonstrated by comparing KN 2.175-176 with verses 272 and 273 of Kṛṣṇa’s work. In the Tamil text, Tāṇṭavarāyar proclaims that he danced the Kāṇḍava upon attaining liberation through the grace of his guru Nāraṇṇa, and reflects in amazement that his parents had the foresight to name him Tāṇṭavaṟ. In the Sanskrit version, Kṛṣṇa also states that he danced when he attained liberation through his guru, Brahmānanda Vatīṅdra, but here there is mention neither of the author’s name nor of his parents, and the pun is lost. As for the KN’s lower limit, the fact that the text is not cited in Tattuvarāyar’s Perintirāṭtu suggests that it was composed after the fifteenth century (Meenakshisundaran 1974: 44). The KN is also absent in the anthology-cum-commentarial works of Tiruppōrūr Citappara Cuvāmikāḷ (ca. late 17th c.). Zvelebil (1995: 651) proposes dating the KN to the early seventeenth century. Kō. Vatīvelu Cettiyar (1985: ii-iii) sees a reference to the KN in a verse of the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Śaiva poet Tāyumāṇavar (v. 7.10), but this is not convincing.
Insofar as the disciple identifies himself as Tāṇṭavārayar at the end of the work, the text also reads as a quasi-autobiographical account of the author’s own liberation. The text is divided into two sections: a general presentation of Advaita doctrine by the guru entitled “The Elucidation of Reality” (Tattuva vilakkam, 108 verses including seven introductory stanzas) and an extended question-and-answer session between teacher and student entitled “The Clarification of Doubts” (Cantēkan telittal, 185 verses included six concluding stanzas attributed to Tāṇṭavarāyar’s disciple). In its introduction, the KN describes itself as an accessible vernacular synopsis of Advaita Vedānta, designed “in such a way that even those of immature intellect, who are unable to consult the extensive [Sanskrit] texts that reveal [the nature of] bondage and liberation, can understand.” At the same time, the work claims to be a concentrated distillation of the most important teachings of the Vedāntic tradition, and affirms its ability to grant liberating knowledge (v. 1.6):

Drawing from the vast milk-ocean of Vedānta, the preceptors filled their pots, the original treatises, and bestowed them [upon us]. I boiled all of that [milk], churned it, took [the result] and gave it [here]. Will those who obtain this Fresh Butter of Liberation wander about, eating the dirt that is sensory objects? They will not be hungry.

The text thus pitches itself both as capable of spreading the teachings of non-duality to an expanded audience and as embodying the very essence of the Vedānta. These twin assertions of accessibility and ultimacy may have prompted Caccitāṇanta Cuvāmi to select this work as the basis for his attempt to shift the discussion of Tamil Śaiva theology in a new direction.

The KN may briefly be summarized as follows: after several introductory verses the first section begins with a man renouncing his life as a householder and going in search of an enlightened teacher who can save him from rebirth. After a suitable guru is found, the latter begins to teach the disciple about the true nature of the Self. The guru describes the superimposition (ārōpam) of phenomenal reality on Brahman, which occurs when consciousness

73 v. 1.5: pantamum viṭṭh kāṭṭap paranta nil pāṝkka māṭṭā maintarum uṇarum āṛu. My translation of the KN has benefited from that of Karl Graul (1854-1865).

74 paṭaṁnta vēṭāntam egum pāṛ kāṭṭa moṇṭu mṛṇṇār kuṭāṅkali giṟattu vaitṭā kuravarkal ellāṅ kāyceik kāṭaṁnt ’ etutt ’ aḷḷiṭṭh intak kaivalya navaiṇṭattaiy aṭṭaintivar viṭṭaya maṇ tiṅg’ alaiyarō paciy īḷārē
is reflected in māyai (Skt. māyā) and avittai (Skt. avidyā), wherein it appears as the lord (īcag) and the manifold individual selves (cīva kōṭi), respectively. The guru then teaches the elimination (apavātam) of this illusory superimposition through reflection on the Upaniṣadic dictum “you are that” (Skt. tat tvam asi). The first section concludes with the disciple following the instructions of his guru and temporarily entering samādhi. In the second section the guru responds to the disciple’s remaining questions, explaining the nature of those liberated-in-life (cīvaṃmuttar), the exclusive capacity of knowledge to remove ignorance, the eight forms of bliss and the seven stages of knowledge through which one passes on the way to Self-realization. After receiving this instruction the student achieves liberation, and the work concludes with several verses eulogizing Tāṇṭavarāyar and the KN, presumably attached to the text by one of the author’s disciples.

The Anti-Sectarian Rhetoric of Caccitāṅganta’s Commentary

Extensive research on South Asian commentarial literature has shown that exegetical works are often highly innovative in their own right, although this innovation is almost always carefully articulated in terms of unpacking the meaning “implied” in the primary text. Caccitāṅganta’s commentary is no different in this regard. In the course of elucidating the meaning of the KN, Caccitāṅganta “finds” a sustained argument against a group of people he identifies as “the sectarians” (matattar). Although this term never occurs in the KN itself, Caccitāṅganta interprets verse after verse of the text as censuring the sectarians and their mistaken views. In particular, the commentary understands the text to criticize sectarians for hypostatizing themselves, the gods, and the world into irreducibly real and distinct entities.

Let us examine a couple of instances in which Caccitāṅganta develops this polemical line of interpretation. The opening verse of the KN runs as follows:

Praise to the feet of the One Lord, who abides
as the pure witness of the individual self in the space within the heart
of those inclined towards the desire for gold, lands, and women,
as well as [within the heart] of those adverse to such desire,

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75 For lucid discussions of this trope see, for instance, Raman (2007, esp. 176-177), McCrea and Patil (2006), and Lopez (1996). The second issue of the 2014 International Journal of Hindu Studies, vol. 18, also explores the subject of innovation in Hindu traditions from a variety of interesting angles.
who dwells in the good state above the seven states [of knowledge] that are superior to all [other] states.⁷⁶

According to Caccitāṉanta, this verse invokes the supreme being as the absolute non-dual witness-consciousness. In his gloss, he makes the point that the “One Lord” (ēka nāyakaṉ) is both “the witness of the individual self” (cīva cāṭci), as the KN explicitly states, as well as “the witness of the [lesser] lord” (īca cāṭci). This seemingly innocuous addition prepares the way for the following critical remark (p. 3):

The duality of the witness [of the individual self and the lord] is superimposed on the ultimate state that is the One Lord. The duality of the individual self and the lord is [then] superimposed on the state of the duality of the witness. Not understanding that this superimposed state of the individual self and the lord is, [in fact,] superimposed, sectarians (matattar) adopt these same as god and devotee (āṇṭāṉ atimai).⁷⁷

In other words, sectarians are said to mistake the singular consciousness of KN 1.1 for the superimposed duality of individuals and lord, which are themselves then further substantialized by means of a second error into the respective categories of devotees and personal god. In this way, Caccitāṉanta interprets the benedictory verse as a subtle statement about how one should and should not orient oneself towards the “One Lord”. The clear implication is that the supreme being remains hidden from those who adopt a devotional approach predicated upon the assumption of difference.

The centrality of this anti-sectarian polemic to Caccitāṉanta’s gloss is even more readily apparent in the commentary on verse 1.6, which for the sake of clarity I repeat here:

Drawing from the vast milk-ocean of Vedānta, the preceptors filled their pots, the original treatises, and bestowed them [upon us]. I boiled all of that [milk], churned it, took [the result] and gave it [here]. Will those who obtain this Fresh Butter of Liberation wander about, eating the dirt that is sensory objects? They will not be hungry.

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⁷⁶ poṇ nilam māṭar ācai poruntīgar poruntūr uḷḷan tāṇil antarattīr cīva cāṭci māṭtirami āy nirkum ennilāṅkaligum mikkav ēṇulam avārriṅ mēḷā nappilam maruvum ēkanāyakaṅ patankal pōṛri

⁷⁷ ēka nāyakaṅ eṉṉu nilaiikkuc cāṭcit tuvītan karpitam āṁ. intac cāṭcit tuvīta nilaiikkuc cīvecuvarat tuvītan karpitam āṁ. intac cīvecuvara karpīta nilaiyaṅk karpitam enn’ iṉarrātu ēvaṇṇar vilvavē āṇṭāṅ atimaiy ennak koṇṭaṅgar matattar.
Within the context of this verse, the phrase “the dirt that is sensory objects” (*viṣṭaya maṇ) is an unambiguous allusion to phenomenal reality. That is, Tāṇṭavarāyar is saying that those who study his work will realize the quintessence of the Vedānta and no longer be attracted by ephemeral things. However, Caccitāṇanta understands this phrase much more narrowly; according to him, it refers to “all of the divine worlds (*patavikaḷum*) such as Kailāsa spoken of by all the sectarians (*carva matattaruṇ*) and to the varying degrees of enjoyment which obtain through them” (p. 9).

The explicit mention of Kailāsa suggests that Caccitāṇanta is targeting the Śaivas here above all, although his comment also seems to imply the Vaiṣṇava heaven Vaikuṇṭha, and perhaps other divine worlds as well. He goes on to state that rebirth in these divine worlds, while exalted, is ultimately impermanent and therefore inferior to final non-dual liberation. This negative appraisal of heavenly worlds may be understood to anticipate the more general critique of Purāṇic mythology with which sectarianism was increasingly coming to be identified in modern Hinduism and especially in various neo-Vedāntic discourses. The most striking aspect of Caccitāṇanta’s reading, of course, is that it conflates general spiritual ignorance with the specific desire for rebirth in one of the heavens of the major sectarian deities. By reading such a critique back into the *KN*, Caccitāṇanta identifies the removal of the sectarian desire for heavenly rebirth as the principal *raison d’être* for the text’s Vedāntic instruction.

In other words, for Caccitāṇanta the *KN* is primarily understood as an antidote for misguided sectarian thinking.

The commentary repeatedly brings its discussion of the *KN* back to the subject of the sectarians. The latter are said to mistake extrinsic things for the Self, to be deluded by the concealing power (Skt. *āvaraṇa-sakti*) of *māyā*, and to confuse the immutable Brahman for a deity possessed of qualities who performs cosmic activities. Perhaps the harshest insult comes...
in the gloss of verse 2.29, in which the guru tells the disciple that those who are ceaselessly pained by the ghouls of contradictory thought (vīparītānapīyē) should abide in meditation (Telītal < Skt. nididhyāsana). While “contradictory thought” typically refers in Advaita discourse to a particular form of ignorance in which one habitually identifies oneself as a limited, conditioned being, Caccitāṅganta states that, since the sectarians do not grasp the singularity of Brahman, it is they who are the ghouls!  

In the last chapter, we observed that anti-sectarian rhetoric has a long history in Tamil Śaiva literature, going back at least as far as the Tirumantiram, if not earlier. As the Avirōtavunīyār and its commentary attest, this theme is reappearing in a big way in the early-modern South, albeit with a stronger emphasis on the reconciliation of religious differences within the framework of an all-encompassing Śaiva non-dualism. The expansive conception of the divine civam that characterizes these works can also be seen in the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Śaiva poet Tāyumāṇavar, especially in his oft-repeated reference to the “same taste” (camaracam) of Vedāntic and Āgamic knowledge. According to Tāyumāṇavar, Śiva is

81 See p. 150: ongaiy onr’ ākak koḷvār matattar ātaliy ivaraiyē pēy egal ārika. This slightly awkward sentence literally reads, “Know that since the sectarians take one thing as one thing, [the author] states that it is they who are the ghouls.” As the context makes it clear that the sectarians misunderstand the nature of reality, I take this sentence to mean that the sectarians take one thing (i.e. Brahman) as another thing (i.e. the manifold world of phenomena). That is, I read the sentence as “ongaiy marg’ onr’ ākak koḷvār...” Another possibility is that the positive koḷvār is a misprint for the negative form koḷlār, in which case the sentence would suggest that the sectarians do not take Brahman for what it, in reality, is. In any event, a parallel comparison between sectarians and ghouls can be found in Arunācalca Cuvāmikāl’s 1851 commentary on the Cacivanpōṭam (The Awakening of Cacivāṙṙaṇ), an independently circulated portion of Tatuvarāyar’s Mākavataipparaṇi (The Paraṇ Song on the Slaying of Delusion). In this work the goddess Kāḷi tells her horde of ghouls the story of Cacivāṙṙaṇ, a terrible sinner who was enlightened by a Vedānta guru. Glossing the first verse of this text, Arunācalca explains that these ghouls, desperately in need of Vedāntic instruction, are the “sectarians” (camayavāṅkal) who make a ruckus but do not grasp the meaning of the Upaniṣadic proclamation “you are that” (Tatuvarāya Cuvāmikāl, 1909: 6-8).

82 Caccitāṅganta’s censure of the sectarian desire for transient divine abodes (patavika) recalls the earlier denunciation of sectarianism in Tirumantiram vv. 1530-1549, a section of the larger text entitled “The Disagreements of the Six Sects” (arucamayap piṇakkam). In particular, Tirumantiram v. 1535 criticizes adherents of the six sects for their desire to become heaven-dwelling celestials (vīṇaṕavār).

83 A parallel development appears to be occurring nearly simultaneously in early-modern North India. Thus Gupta (2006: 75) observes how the sixteenth-century Rādāhvāllabhīs “distinguish themselves from other Viṣṇava schools by insisting that they do not ascribe to ‘any general or particular philosophical standpoint’ (dārśanika matavāda)...” I am grateful to Srlata Raman for pointing me towards this reference.

84 On the concept of camaracam in Tāyumāṙavār’s poetry, see Manninezhath (1993). On its reception in the nineteenth century, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.
omnipresent yet stands beyond the grasp of hypocritical, competing, and mutually irreconcilable sectarian traditions (Katiraiyēr Pillai 2010: 166, v. 8.3):

They know how to link together opposing arguments for the sake of their stomachs. They know how to stand confused, the earth and the heavens becoming one, their minds whirling. They know how to assume various disguises. They know the science of murmuring in disagreement over something while conceiving of it differently within. They know, just like me, how to expound upon truthful scripture, as if at a bazaar. They know how to swell like an angry tiger and control the breath, then fall down and turn ruddy red. They know how to clamor incoherently and establish through their base deeds their own particular sect (tan tam matattāyē) as the solid truth.

[But] who knows you, who sports variously within each of the six sects (āṟu camayāṅka toṃum vēṟu vēṟ’ āki)? O blissful supreme who singularly pervades the cosmos and the outer worlds in their entirety!

Tāyumāṉar’s poetry was very widely read throughout the nineteenth century, and it is even cited on a few occasions in Caccitāṉanta’s commentary. Yet while Caccitāṉanta’s critique of sectarianism clearly resonates with the post-sectarian space invoked by Tāyumāṉar, the AU, and like works, it does not conclude that the divine lies concealed within all traditions. Instead, Caccitāṉanta more narrowly insists that monism alone represents the final, post-sectarian truth, and that sectarians cannot not realize this truth until they abandon their lingering attachment to duality. Here the commentary adopts a strategy typically found in Vedānta (and Śaiva Siddhānta) doxographical works, where other traditions are hierarchically arranged as preliminary positions.

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85 māṟupatu tarkkan toṭukkav arivār cāṇ- vayirin porṟṭṭat’ āka
maṉṭalamum viṁṭalamum onṛ’ āki maṉṭ’ uḷala
māl āki nirkav arivār
vēṟuṇuṭu vēṟāṅkal ṽḷaviṟ āṟivār onṛrai
meṇamen onṛ’ akam vēṟat’ ām
vittaiy arivār emaiṉ pāḷavē cantai pōga
meṉ nūl virikkav arivār
čūṟu pūḷi pōr čūṟi mūccaip piṭṭitu viḷi
cekkac civakkav arivār
tiṟam enṛu tan tam matattaiyē tāmatac
cykaik koṭum uḷaṟav arivār
āṟu camayāṅka toṃum vēṟu vēṟ’ āki vilaiy- āḷum uḍai yāvaṟ arivār
aṇṭa pakir anṭamum atanṉkav oru niṟaiy ākiy āṉantāṉa pāramē.
(pūrvapakṣas) culminating in the Advaitin’s established conclusion (siddhānta) of monism. The anti-sectarian trope in Caccitāṇa’s commentary thus functions to render other theological traditions incomplete or preliminary interpretations of reality. It clears the theological air, as it were, so that Caccitāṇa can postulate a new interpretation of Tamil Śaiva theology. In the next section we will examine in more detail how Caccitāṇa elaborates this interpretation with reference to Śaiva metaphysics.

**The Two Truths of the Three Principles**

Caccitāṇa employs a wide range of terminology derived from the Śaiva Āgamas in the course of his commentary. Examples include references to the five powers (catti < Skt. śakti) of Śiva, the four evolutes of māyā (i.e. taṇu karaṇa puvāṇa pōkam), the “pure” and “impure” forms of māyā (cutta māyai and acutta māyai), and the kevala and sakala states of an individual’s existence. 86 Caccitāṇa’s frequent employment of these terms is an indication of his intellectual rootedness within the wider religious world of Tamil Śaivism. The most conspicuous expression in the commentary, however, is undoubtedly the phrase caka-cīva-param, a trinominal compound signifying “the world, the individual self, and the supreme (i.e. the lord, Skt. īśa)”. 87 As with the crucial term matattar, this compound never occurs in the KN itself. Nevertheless, Caccitāṇa uses it no less than thirty-five times in his commentary. He glosses virtually every reference to phenomenal reality in the KN with this term, 88 and even suggests that the entire second section of the text deals with the question of the origin of this triad. 89

The phrase caka-cīva-param precisely mirrors an expression commonly found in Tamil Śaiva literature, namely pati-pacu-pācam, “the lord, the bound individual self, and the fetters (of the world)”, also known as the tiripatārttam (or mupporu, Skt. tripāḍārtha), “the three

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86 See the gloss on v. 2.96 (p. 226), v. 2.41 (p. 164), v. 1.57 (p. 62), and v. 1.79 (p. 87), respectively.

87 The commentary also spells this compound jakajīvaparam or else abbreviates it as cakam āti mūru, “the triad beginning with the world.”

88 For instance, Caccitāṇa (p. 201) interprets an explicit reference to the world at KN 2.77 to imply the other two principles of individual self and lord.

89 See his introduction to v. 2.1 (p. 117), where he glosses the title of the second section of the KN, “The Clarification of Doubts,” as “that [section] which clarifies the doubt which arises concerning the ultimate cause of the three principles” (cantēkan telitalāvatu...cakam āti tiripatāṛtaṁ kāraṇam ākav ēḻum aiyattait telivikkat’ telital).
principles”. These are the primary metaphysical categories of Āgamic Śaivism. Recall as well that these are the same principles, articulated in the slightly different phrase para-cīva-pantam, that the Avirōtavuntiyār recognized as the core of its pan-sectarian theology. They are also the basis for Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta’s elaborate philosophical speculation. According to the realist and pluralist ontology articulated in the foundational (12th-14th c.) treatises of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, the three principles are understood to be eternal, and therefore real, entities. Although they are intimately interrelated to one another, they remain irreducibly distinct. Spiritual bondage is a function of the individual’s beginningless association with the fetters, whereas liberation transpires when, through Śiva’s grace, the individual realizes his and the world’s absolute dependence on the lord, who pervades the other two principles as their innermost essence. Significantly, realization of the individual’s unity with Śiva does not negate the ultimate ontological distinction between them, nor does it entail a “sublation” of the phenomenal world, as in Advaita Vedānta. Hence according to Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta non-duality (attuvitam, Skt. advaita) is not interpreted to signify a singularity in the manner of Śaṅkara; instead, it connotes the inseparability or literal “not-two-ness” that characterizes the relationship between the three principles.  

Despite its absence in the KN, the phrase caka-cīva-param nevertheless figures prominently in a number of other Tamil works adopting a monistic outlook. A rather early example of this is Tattuvarāyar’s circa fifteenth-century Pāṭutugai. The following verse, which Caccitāṇa cites in his commentary on KN 1.92, is taken from the Apayam or “Fearlessness” section of this text (v. 7):

By the Self are produced the world, the individual, and the lord (cakacīvaparan).

By the Self they are destroyed, with the eye of the Self.

O King who bestows grace through me, on me, in me, for me –

I am your slave. [Grant] fearlessness, fearlessness!  

90 For a discussion of these ideas see, for instance, Sivaraman (1973: 8-11).

91 As for the Sanskrit expression jagajīva-para, from which caka-cīva-param derives, it is not entirely clear to me how widespread the use of this term is within Advaita literature composed in Sanskrit. I have found one instance of the phrase in the Pañcadaśi, in the compound jagajīvaparātmanah (v. 6.12).

92 taṅgāl vilaiyūṇ cakacīvaparan
taṅgāl aḷiyun taqat ‘ām vilijal
enqāl eṇaivy enqīl enqāk’ arulum
maṇṇēy aṭiyēy apayam apayam
The employment of *caka-cīva-param* in non-dualist works appears to continue through the nineteenth century. Several years after Caccitāṅanta’s commentary was published, for instance, the phrase appears some two dozen times in a Tamil translation of the *Ribhugītā*, the sixth volume of the *Śivarahasya*. Caccitāṅanta’s commentary demonstrates a patent awareness of the link between this phrase and the general theological position of monism. While he occasionally uses the more explicitly Śaiva terms *tiripatārttam* (twelve times) and *pati-pacu-pācam* (twice) synonymously with *caka-cīva-param*, he clearly prefers the last term. By emphasizing this phrase he thus aligns himself with the “correct” interpretation of the three principles as found in other monistic works such as those of Tattuvarāyar. In other words, the use of *caka-cīva-param* allows Caccitāṅanta to analyze the central elements of Śaiva thought without committing to Śaiva Siddhānta’s dualistic interpretation of them.

Indeed, it is Śaiva Siddhānta’s pluralistic account of the three principles that Caccitāṅanta considers the “sectarian” doctrine *par excellence*. The commentary’s oft-repeated refrain is that the world, the individual self, and the lord have no independent existence apart from a singular, all-embracing consciousness (*āṟivu*). At various points Caccitāṅanta claims that the three principles are false (*poy*), of the nature of mind, and products of *māyā*. He makes it abundantly clear that the distinction between a pluralistic and a monistic interpretation of this triad is the distinction between ignorance and knowledge itself. Thus, commenting on KN 2.41, he writes, “*Māyā is ignorance; it is the knowledge that cognizes the world, the individual, and the lord (jaka-cīva-paraṅkaḷai) as true (mey)*” (p. 164). By contrast, here is his commentary on verse 1.60, in which the guru describes the final three stages of awareness through which one passes en route to final liberation (pp. 65-66):

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93 See *Ripukītai* vv. 3.9, 9.11, 11.28, etc. The Tamil translation was completed by Ulakanāṭa Cuvāmikaḷ, alias Tiruvitāmaruṭūr Piṭcu Čāstrikal, and published in 1885. It is worth noting that the phrase is not found in the Sanskrit original. The *Ribhugītā* was highly regarded by Ramana Maharishi, whose Ramaṇāśramam in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai sponsored the publication of both the Sanskrit and Tamil versions of the text.

94 Note how, parallel to the general vagueness of the term *matattar*, which could be interpreted as referring to Śivas and Vaiṣṇavas alike, the philosophically underdetermined *caka-cīva-param* can encompass, in addition to *pati-pacu-pācam*, the Vaiṣṇava triad *cit-acit-īśvara*, or “the sentient (individual), the insentient (world), and the lord,” also known in Vaiṣṇava texts as the *tattva-traya*. However, Caccitāṅanta never explicitly mentions these latter terms in his commentary.

95 See the commentary on v. 1.45 (p. 45), v. 2.20 (p. 139), and v. 2.90 (p. 219), respectively.

96 *māyaiv epyat’ āgiyāmai; atu jakacīvaparaṅkaḷai meyy en’ uvarum āṟivu.*
The self-luminous appearance of the flashing-forth of discrimination that arises in that way is [the stage called] “direct intuition” (aparōṭcam). If the light that arises in that manner increases, then the bound individual, the lord, and the fetters (pacu-pati-pācañ) appear as pure consciousness. When they appear in that way there is no possibility of modifications of the mind. This being the case, there is [the stage called] “cessation of suffering” (tukka nivirtti). Since this cessation of suffering is itself limitless joy, this alone is called [the stage of] “unobstructed bliss” (itaṭaiy ārra āṉantam).

For Caccitāṉanta, direct intuition into the nature of reality (Skt. aparokṣa-jñāna), the necessary and immediate precursor to liberation, is constituted by the realization that the three principles (note here the use of a variant of the Śaiva term pati-pacu-pācañ) are nothing but consciousness. Similarly, in his remarks on verse 1.28, Caccitāṉanta writes (p. 48):

[The guru] says… “[Brahman is] singular” since consciousness has a single nature, unlike the world, the individual, and the lord (jaka-jīva-param), which appear to exist prior to inquiring [into their essential nature] and appear not to exist after inquiring.

In this way Caccitāṉanta interprets the three principles to constitute what in Sanskrit treatises on Advaita Vedānta is referred to as “conventional truth” (vyavahārika satya), a recognition of multiplicity that persists until one realizes the “ultimate truth” (paramārthika satya) of Brahman. As Hirst (2005: 91-92) notes, Śaṅkara understands conventional truth as possessing some degree of validity since it is public, consistent, and offers a reliable framework for action. Furthermore, insofar as it forms the basis for scriptural discussions of superimposition and sublation, it serves a useful purpose for the seeker of Brahman, even if it is not real in an absolute sense. Similarly, Caccitāṉanta assumes the heuristic validity of the three principles even as he criticizes their ultimate reality. By adopting the Advaita hermeneutic of “two truths” he is able to displace Śaiva Siddhānta’s ontology without thereby completely rejecting the fundamental principles underlying Śaiva thought (and, not insignificantly, ritual practice).
commentary is thereby able to open up a new doctrinal space for monism within the broader religious framework of Tamil Śaivism.99

**The Heterolingualism of Caccitāṇanta’s Advaita**

Despite the foregoing remarks, it is clear that there are significant differences between the language of Caccitāṇanta’s commentary and that of “classical” treatises on Advaita Vedānta composed in Sanskrit. Although the commentary’s basic conclusion of non-duality and its hermeneutics of the “two truths” are consistent with those of earlier Vedāntins, the text’s rhetorical strategies and terminology are, as we have seen, deeply embedded within the local vernacular context. It is also striking to consider the conceptual gulf that separates Caccitāṇanta from more recent figures associated with “neo-Vedānta”. A comparison might be drawn, for instance, between our author and the famous Vedāntin and statesman Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, another South Indian who was born only two years after Caccitāṇanta’s death. Whereas both intellectuals construct an argument for the universality of monism, Radhakrishnan’s idiom is heavily indebted to Western Romanticism, Caccitāṇanta’s to precolonial Tamil Śaivism.

How then might we conceptualize the relationship between Caccitāṇanta’s commentary and the intellectual tradition of Advaita Vedānta? In a recent study of Niścalā’s Hindi-language Vicārsāgar, Michael Allen (2013) attempts to expand the scope of scholarly inquiry into Advaita Vedānta by drawing attention to “the broader genre of vernacular Vedānta” (p. iii). Allen conceives of this neglected genre as situated within a broader cultural phenomenon he calls “Greater Advaita Vedānta”, or “Advaita Vedānta as it was disseminated outside the received canon of Sanskrit philosophical works.” He further suggests that “vernacular Vedānta” may have contributed to the transregional success of Advaita Vedānta in early-modern South Asia.100 Accordingly, Allen (p. 6-7) situates the Vicārsāgar

within a series of concentric circles: the largest circle is Greater Advaita Vedānta; within Greater Advaita Vedānta, there is the neglected genre of vernacular Vedānta; within

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99 This approach recalls that of the sixteenth-century South Indian polymath Appayya Dīkṣita, who reinterprets Śrīkaṇṭha’s Śivādvaita as a propaedeutic for Advaita Vedānta. On the relationship between Appayya and Śivādvaita, see Suryanarayana Sastri (1930 and 1974).

100 See Minkowski (2011) on Advaita Vedānta’s rise to a preeminent position within early-modern Indian intellectual culture.
vernacular Vedānta, there are Hindi works of Vedānta; and within Hindi works of Vedānta, there is The Ocean of Inquiry.

I am in complete sympathy with Allen’s desire to de-monolithicize Advaita Vedānta, a worthy goal he supports with a sensitive and insightful reading of the Vicārsāgar. At the same time, however, certain features of Caccitāṅganta’s commentary make it an odd fit for Allen’s “Greater Advaita Vedānta”. The most important of these is the fact that the text demonstrates a profound engagement with vernacular theology, an engagement that does not seem to be shared to the same degree by Niścaldās’ work. To this we might add the observation that, while Niścaldās’ work quotes almost entirely from Sanskrit texts (Allen, 2013: 92-99), Caccitāṅganta quotes only from Tamil sources, such as the compositions of Tattuvarāyar. These significant particularities resist easy assimilation to a broader, semi-autonomous category of “Tamil Vedānta”, which itself would appear to presuppose the notion, if not the primacy, of a “Sanskrit Vedānta”. This dichotomy seems to present further problems in the Tamil context, where all major theologies are constituted by an admixture of Sanskrit and Tamil traditions and where the dissemination of Advaita Vedānta may have always been more hybrid than notions of “Tamil” or “Sanskrit” Vedānta might allow. Finally, to identify the commentary as part of “Greater Advaita Vedānta” could potentially be construed as implicitly confirming the modern Tamil Śaiva narrative referred to earlier, which would deny the essential “Tamilness” of Advaita Vedānta.

In attempting to think beyond the dichotomy of “Tamil” and “Sanskrit” Vedānta, I have found the work of the translation theorist Naoki Sakai to be particularly helpful. According to Sakai, translation is typically conceived as a means of communicating between two or more languages. This common-sense understanding thus presumes the existence of languages as autonomous, internally coherent unities that are subsequently “bridged” by the act of translation. Sakai critiques this conception of translation, emphasizing the hybridity and multiplicity inherent within all linguistic interaction. He calls for greater sensitivity to the linguistic heterogeneity and “nonaggregate” character of the community formed between addressers and addressees, a mode of orienting oneself towards an audience that he refers to as the “heterolinguual address” (1997: 4).

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101 Cf. Allen (2013: 7): “Although Niścaldās belonged to the Dādū Panth, a vernacular and devotional tradition, The Ocean of Inquiry reads much like any Sanskrit work of Advaita Vedānta; apart from māṅgala verses invoking Dādū at the end of each chapter, there is nothing in the text that would clue the reader in to Niścaldās’ sectarian identity.”
Sakai’s discussion is useful because it calls attention to what might be considered the hybrid or “heterolingual” characteristics of Caccitāṉanta’s commentary, i.e. those features of his religious discourse that elude the currently dominant narrative regarding Advaita Vedānta, which identifies it as an essentially Sanskritic intellectual tradition. Seen through the lens of Sakai’s heterolingualism, Caccitāṉanta’s commentary appears not as a translation of Advaita Vedānta from a Sanskritic context into a Tamil Śaiva one, but as a reinscription of Tamil Śaiva theology from a monistic perspective. Rather than think of the commentary as part of a singular, expansively conceived tradition, then, it may make more sense to understand the work as representing a separate stream of Advaita Vedānta running parallel to, but never actually merging with, the dominant, Sanskritic tradition. It may have been the case that Caccitāṉanta’s non-Brahmin caste background precluded greater engagement with this elite tradition. His KN commentary thus suggests that Advaita Vedānta in Tamil-speaking colonial South India was a plural, negotiated, and highly contextualized affair.

We began this chapter by noting that the KN enjoyed a remarkable popularity during the nineteenth century even as a cultural narrative identifying “Tamil religion” with Śaiva Siddhānta was beginning to take shape. The KN certainly lends a degree of credibility to Caccitāṉanta’s lineage, rooting his counter-reading of the three principles within a definite textual tradition. The success of the text, then, would appear to be at least partially connected to the emergence and empowerment of new voices within colonial Tamil society, and to the corresponding articulation of alternative narratives of Tamil Śaivism. This internal diversity is often overlooked in the historiography of the Tamil nationalist movement, which sometimes speaks of a colonial-era

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102 This is not, of course, to categorically deny any relationship at all between Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmi and Sanskrit works of Advaita Vedānta. Among Caccitāṉanta’s many works, for instance, is a Tamil adaptation of the Dṛḍṛśyaviveka, a text attributed to Śaṅkara.

103 A parallel situation in the nineteenth century appears to have obtained among the Śrīvaishṇavas as well. According to Katherine Young, although several Brahmin Śrīvaishṇava teachers initiated non-Brahmin ascetics (ekāṅgis) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not all Teṅkalai ācāryas were in agreement with this practice, and there was fierce debate over whether the initiated non-Brahmins should be allowed to initiate others. Although these non-Brahmin ascetics managed to have a few disciples this custom was never institutionalized into full-blown monastic orders and seems to have faded, though debates over its acceptability continue to this day (Katherine Young, personal communication, June 14th, 2014).

104 See Raman (forthcoming) for a discussion of the “crisis” of authority facing Tamil Śaivism in the nineteenth century, with special reference to the famous dispute between the “orthodox” Śaiva Siddhāntin Āṟumuka Nāvalar and the followers of the eclectic Śaiva poet Irāmaliṅka Āṭikal.
“revival” or “renaissance” of Śaivism as laying the groundwork for the later Dravidian and non-Brahmin movements. Caccitāṇḍanta’s commentary on the _KN_ clearly demonstrates that the interpretation of Tamil Śaiva theology among non-Brahmins in the latter part of the nineteenth century remained highly contested. In order to better understand the roots of these diverse interpretations of Tamil Śaiva thought more research is required, especially into the comparatively understudied late-medieval and early-modern periods, when alternate and competing conceptions of what it meant to be a Tamil Śaiva were being worked out.

Even as Caccitāṇḍanta imagines the _KN_’s monism to transcend sectarian boundaries, the tone of his commentary suggests that by the late nineteenth century these divisions were coming into much greater relief. It is probably not coincidental that Caccitāṇḍanta composed his commentary on the _KN_ at exactly the same time and place, 1870s Madras, in which the literary career of another intellectual, Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (1846-1901) was taking off. Like Caccitāṇḍanta, Nāyakar was a prolific and highly polemical author; yet while Caccitāṇḍanta endorsed Vedānta as the essence of Tamil Śaivism, Nāyakar was uncompromising in his promotion of Śaiva Siddhānta. There is in fact strong evidence to suggest that Caccitāṇḍanta and Cōmacuntara Nāyakar were ideological sparring partners at this time. Caccitāṇḍanta’s commentary on the _KN_, therefore, may ultimately have been intended as a reply of sorts to Cōmacuntara Nāyakar and his followers’ efforts to promote the philosophical doctrines of Śaiva Siddhānta. In the next chapter, we will see how Cōmacuntara Nāyakar writings contributed to the

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105 At least one of Caccitāṇḍanta’s independent works, the 1876 _Uttamavātanūl_ (Treatise on the Highest Doctrine), provoked a riposte by Cōmacuntara Nāyakar in the latter’s now lost _Kutarkavātavipācigī_ (Smashing the Doctrine of Sophistry), which in turn received an immediate and harsh rebuttal from one of Caccitāṇḍanta’s disciples, Cēṇṇai Muṇjicuvāmi Nāyakar, in the latter’s _Pētavatitimirapāskaram_ (Sun to the Darkness of Dualism). The introduction to this last text, published in 1877, is worth quoting here as it testifies to the ongoing debate among Tamil-speaking non-Brahmins regarding the interpretation of Śaiva theology (Muṇjicuvāmi Nāyakar 1877: n. pag.):

This work was composed for the following reason: The doctrine of non-dualism, expressed in the Vedas, Āgamas, Purāṇas, etc., the Itihāsas, and the Gītā, is alone Śaivism (caivam). Not understanding that, taking the false dualistic Śaivism as [the real] Śaivism, the Crest-Jewel of Fools (i.e. Cōmacuntara Nāyakar) has, apart from ruining himself, assumed the garb of a Śaiva in order to ruin others as well. On account of their delusion, a small number of people have accepted that the false path he wanders around babbling about is the true path and have, therefore, been ruined. Considering this [state of affairs, I have composed this work] so that they might realize that the true doctrine of non-duality alone is Śaivism and be saved.

_innūl iyaṟṟiyatu yātu kāraṇaṁ eṁ – vēṭākama purāṇati itikāca kītakālār kūṟṟappaṭṭa attuvaṭtā cittāntamē caivam ātalāl ataṭaṭiyata ṣṇaṟṟa ṗēṭaṟṭaṁ ṣkīya pōḷliccaivattaḷiye caivam ēṇa koṭṭu tān keṭuvaṭ’ aṇgī piṟṟaṟṟaṇ kēṭutṭapaṭṭuṟṟa karavēṭṭa koṭṭu velvanta mūṭaṟṟiṟṟaṁiṟṟiṟṟaṁ kīṭaṟṟit tīryṟṟum poṇmai neṟṟiṟṟiṟṟai meymi neṟṟi neṟṟi mayakkaṭṭa koṭṭu cūṟṟiḷ koṭṭukyṟṟ ēṇṟṟai nōkki eṭtattam ākiya attuvaṭtā cittāntam oṛgī caivam ēṇa koṭṭu telint’ uyyumāṛṟēv ān._
consolidation of a monolithic account of Tamil Śaivism in the last decades of the nineteenth century.
Chapter 3
The Fierce Wind of Vedic Śaiva Siddhānta

In the late 1880s the controversial Śaiva intellectual Cūḷai Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (1846-1901) published a lengthy essay entitled Ācāryappirapāvam, or The Splendor of the Teachers (hereafter, ĀP). This text set out to establish the preeminence of the central poet-saints of Tamil Śaiva devotionalism, viz. Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar. Collectively remembered as the “teachers of the (Śaiva) religion” (camayācāriyar, camayakuravar), or simply as “the Four” (nālvar), these saints are credited with composing the hymns that comprise the first seven volumes of the Tamil Śaiva devotional canon (Tirumuṟai), and the lives of the first three are narrated at length in Cēkkilār’s twelfth-century Periyapurāṇam, the twelfth and final volume of the same canon. The vast bulk of Nāyakar’s essay in fact consisted of an extended reflection upon Campantar’s life-story as it is narrated in the Periyapurāṇam. This reflection, like virtually all of Nāyakar’s writings, served a polemical purpose: its praise of the saint’s life and hymns was closely interwoven with a critique of the rival sectarian theologian Śaṅkarācārya, the Sanskrit language, and Brahmins. The text was thus an attempt by Nāyakar to recover a glorious Śaiva past, by returning to the textual source in which it was thought to be preserved, in order to critique aspects of his own present.

This chapter explores the ways in which the ĀP utilizes the life-story of Campantar to address concerns about religion, language, and caste at a particular historical moment. I argue that, in the course of bringing the saint’s hagiography to bear upon these issues, the ĀP departs significantly from the representation of Campantar in the Periyapurāṇam, reimagining him as the central hero of a new narrative of Tamil Śaiva universalism. The sharply defined and self-assertive religious vision, which Nāyakar elsewhere refers to as “Vedic Śaivism” (see Chapter Four), would be picked up and elaborated by a subsequent generation of Tamil-speaking Śaiva intellectuals, notably by Nāyakar’s most famous disciple, the Tamil nationalist Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ. While the previous two chapters highlighted the internal diversity characteristic of Tamil Śaiva theology and literary culture, the present chapter begins to examine the formation of what would become the dominant narrative of Tamil Śaivism from the late nineteenth century onwards. As we shall see, Campantar would play a key role in Nāyakar’s reimaginaion of
Śaivism. Through the rediscovery of this Tamil saint, a Śaiva “leader” (nāyagār) who had perhaps never quite been forgotten, but who was thought to no longer be accorded the reverence he deserved, the ĀP held out to its Śaiva readership the promise of rediscovering who they were and, in that very process, of determining who they were not.

**A New Kind of Vernacular Śaiva Intellectual**

Before proceeding to examine the ĀP in greater detail, it will be useful to provide some background information on Cōmacuntara Nāyakar. Nāyakar was born in 1846 in Culai, a neighborhood in western Madras, to a Vaṇṇiyar family. Vaṇṇiyars traditionally worked as agricultural laborers and tenant farmers in what is now northern Tamil Nadu, where they ranked well below the non-Brahman Vēḷḷār elite in the local social hierarchy. Nevertheless, the community experienced a remarkable upward mobility during the nineteenth century. Between 1870 and 1900, the period in which Nāyakar was most active, many Vaṇṇiyars vehemently rejected the derogatory caste-label “Paḷḷi” and insisted, through several published books and a formal census petition, that they were, in fact, descended from “Agnikula Kṣatriyas”, warrior-kings with purported ties to the Pallava dynasty. In 1888, around the same time that the ĀP was first published, a formal caste organization, the Chennai Vannikula Kshatriya Mahasangham, was established to further advance the Vaṇṇiyar claim to Kṣatriya status. While there is little evidence to suggest that Nāyakar was directly involved in Vaṇṇiyār caste politics, there is little doubt that he benefited from the improved fortunes this community enjoyed under the colonial regime. For one thing, he received a formal education; he is known to have studied English and Telugu in grade-school, and even briefly attended Presidency College. He eventually took a job as a clerk in the Madras Municipal office, the descendant of the Company kaccēris whose history and bureaucratic milieu are described in detail by Raman (2012). As we will see, the ĀP’s religious vision is consistent with the new prestige Vaṇṇiyars were claiming in the social realm;

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106 Details of Nāyakar’s life can be found in his biography, written by Maṟaimalai Aṭikai (1957). Je. Em. Nallacaṁip Piḷḷai (1901) also provides some biographical information in a brief obituary notice he composed shortly after Nāyakar’s death and published in the Siddhānta Deepikā. A summary of Nāyakar’s life based on these accounts can also be found in Vaitheespara (1999: 118-139).

107 My discussion of the Vaṇṇiyars here is based on that found in Thurston and Rangachari (1909, vol. 6: 1-28). For a recent discussion of caste competition between the Vaṇṇiyars and the Nāṭārs, both of whom claimed Kṣatriya status under colonialism, see Venkatachalapathy (2010 [2011]: 275-292). I would also like to thank Bhavani Raman for sharing with me her thoughts on the nineteenth-century Vaṇṇiyar world.
its voice is that of a community coming into its own, awakening to the grandeur of its traditions and aggressively defending itself against perceived rivals.

Nāyakar was keenly interested in religious matters from an early age. Remarkably, his parents appear to have been Vaiṣṇavas; in fact, Nāyakar’s name at birth was “Araṅkacāmi”, and it was only later that he adopted the Śaiva name “Cōmacuntara”. Under the tutelage of an elder relative named Accutāṅganta Cuvāmikāḷ, who had taken ascetic vows from the Śaṅkarācārya of Kumbakonam, the young Nāyakar studied Tamil and Sanskrit religious literature with a particular focus on Advaita Vedānta. Thus, like Īcūr Caccitāṅganta Cuvāmikāḷ, Nāyakar was reared in a tradition of non-Brahmin Advaita Vedānta that appears to have had an ambivalent relationship to the Brahminical Vedānta establishment. However, while still in his early twenties Nāyakar was introduced to the theology of Śaiva Siddhānta through several books given to him by Maturai Nāyakam Piḷḷai, a subordinate officer in the civil court at Nagai-Velippalayam. Nāyakar became convinced of the superiority of Śaiva Siddhānta after reading these works, which included the Civaṅgapōtam and the Civaṅgacittiyār, and after managing to persuade Accutāṅganta Cuvāmi of the same, he took lay initiation from an Ādiśaiva temple priest in Kanchipuram. The story of Nāyakar’s conversion is interesting because it suggests that while he benefited from a traditional guru-disciple education as a youth under Accutāṅganta Cuvāmikāḷ, he was essentially self-taught as far as Śaiva Siddhānta was concerned, garnering the bulk of his knowledge not from a guru but from printed books. Nāyakar was thus part of an emerging class of Śaiva intellectuals in Madras who were impressed by the sophistication of Śaiva Siddhānta theology and avidly studied it in their free time, yet who were not directly connected, by means

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108 Intriguingly, Maṟaimalai Aṭikal’s biography on Nāyakar distinguishes between the Advaita Vedānta, or what he terms the “doctrine of māyā” (māyāvātam), of the Brahmins and that of non-Brahmin Tamil Śaivas like Accutāṅganta Cuvāmikāḷ (1957: 29-30). According to Maṟaimalai, Brahmin Māyāvātis hold that everything except Brahman is false, that the Brahman caste is superior, that the Sanskrit Veda alone is eternal and fit to be recited in the temple, that only Sanskrit treatises contain the truth, and that Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, and Rāma are to be worshipped alongside Śiva, who is held to be a “Śūdra god”. By contrast, the non-Brahmin Māyāvātis maintain that while everything but Brahman is ultimately false, in the present world everything is true; they do not acknowledge caste distinctions, and revere equally the Sanskrit Veda and the Tamil devotional scriptures, reciting both during temple worship. Finally, the non-Brahmins accept Śiva alone as the supreme god, and believe that wearing his insignia is a duty incumbent upon them.

109 Maturai Nāyakam Piḷḷai was also an early mentor of Maṟaimalai Aṭikal and, with Cō. Vīrappa Čettiṉiyār, co-founder of the Nagai Velippalayam Saiva Siddhanta Sabai (Vaitheespara 1999: 215-218).
of either geography or caste, to the major Śaiddhāntika monastic centers (āṭīṁs) further south in the Kaveri Delta.

After his conversion, Nāyakar spent the remainder of his life promoting Śaivism and attacking, with all the zeal of a convert, the rival traditions of Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism. In addition to delivering countless public lectures in Madras, Tiruchirappalli, Nagapattinam, and elsewhere, Nāyakar was an immensely prolific author who wrote dozens of essays. Many of these were published in his own theological journal, the Cittāntaratnākaram (The Ocean of the Siddhānta), which began circulation as a monthly around 1879. It was in this journal that the ĀP was probably first published. In 1881, at the age of thirty-five, he retired from his clerical position to devote himself fully to the Śaiva cause, and his razor-sharp rhetoric quickly made him a key figure in – and instigator of – the central sectarian debates of his day. After winning one such debate, which had been formally organized by the Rāja of Ramanathapuram, Nāyakar received the title “The Fierce Wind of Vedic Śaiva Siddhānta” (vaitika caiva cittānta caṇṭha mārutam), which appears on the title pages of his major published works. By the time of his relatively early death in 1901, Nāyakar’s passionate religious advocacy had earned him the devotion of many disciples, chief among whom was the great Maṟaimalai Aṭikal.

Aṭikal’s account of Nāyakar’s legacy bears repeating here because it is one of the clearest acknowledgements that a major shift occurred in the way Tamil Śaivas thought about their own tradition in the late nineteenth century, and also because it reveals that Nāyakar played a key role

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110 Samy states that Nāyakar first published the Cittāntaratnākaram as a monthly in 1867 with a circulation of five hundred copies and then again in August 1879 (2000: 75). The 1867 date seems too early, since according to Maṟaimalai Aṭikal’s biography Nāyakar only converted to Śaiva Siddhānta sometime between 1868 and 1873 (1957: 57). Je. Em. Nallacāmip Piḷḷai suggests that Nāyakar began publishing the journal “from about 1878” (1901: 205). For more information on the intersecular debates that played themselves out in such journals, see Chapter Four.

111 As mentioned earlier, the ĀP was published sometimes during the late 1880s. I have been unable to determine the date of original publication with greater precision as this is not indicated in the second edition of 1907 which I have before me. Portions of the work must be have been composed prior to 1887, when it is mentioned by name in the Nāṇapēṭatēṭṭivu, a work attributed to one of Nāyakar’s disciples. However, towards its conclusion the ĀP itself mentions the Nāṇapēṭatēṭṭivu as well as Nāyakar’s 1888 Irāmatattvaiśīyaṟṟiṟṟaṟṟiṟṟakkuṟṟ, indicating that at least some portions of the work were published after 1888. Nāyakar is known to have published several of his own works under the names of his disciples, further complicating attempts to sort his works chronologically. In an appendix to his biography on Nāyakar, Maṟaimalai Aṭikal provides a partial list of Nāyakar’s literary output along with dates for some of the works, but not for the ĀP. It is furthermore not clear that the dates which are given are accurate.
in this transformation. According to Aṭikaḷ (1957: 15-16), before Nāyakar’s time there were very few people who either understood or taught Śaiva Siddhānta. Ārumuka Nālvar of Jaffna, for instance, although a great Śaiva Siddhāntin himself, largely confined his efforts to expounding the Śaiva Purāṇas. So too, Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikal’s discourses were primarily focused on the importance of practicing compassion towards sentient beings (cīva kārunyam). Hence, in the early to mid-nineteenth century, even those who were devout Śaivas knew little about Śaiva Siddhānta. In this state of confusion, “all of the works that [Śaivas] trained in, which they erroneously thought to be excellent knowledge-texts (nāṇa nūl), were only illusionist (māyāvāta) Vedānta texts, not Siddhānta texts.”113 In other words, at that time there was no widespread consensus that “māyāvāta” works were somehow less Śaiva than Saiddhāntika works; both had the potential to be considered “knowledge literature”. Aṭikaḷ maintains that it was only with Nāyakar that a sustained attempt was made to distinguish between Śaiva Siddhānta, Advaita Vedānta, and Vaiṣṇavism, and to demonstrate the superiority of the first over the other two. His assessment suggests that Nāyakar reshaped notions of Tamil Śaivism and its literary heritage by the very act of differentiating between that which is “truly” Śaiva and that which merely appears to be so. As we will see, recognizing this distinction is a central theme in the ĀP, expressing itself in the sharp lines Nāyakar draws between Campantar, Tamil, and Ādiśaivas, on the one hand, and Śaṅkarācārya, Sanskrit, and Brahmins, on the other.

The Preeminence of the Teachers

The ĀP begins with a discussion of the general significance of the nāḷvar that lays out the basic hermeneutical framework through which Campantar’s hagiography will be interpreted. Nāyakar opens by invoking an audience of Śaiva Siddhāntins who are principally defined by their relationship to the nāḷvar (p. 1).114

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112 This passage is also noted by Vaitheespara (1999: 136-137), though he does not draw the same conclusion from it that I do here.

113 avar ellām vilumiyā nāṇa nūl eṇu pilaipatak karutip payinravaikal ellām māyāvāta vēnta nālkālēy allār cittānta nālkāl alla (1957: 16). Earlier, in the context of describing Nāyakar’s studies under Acçutānanta Cuvāmikal, Aṭikaḷ specifically mentions the following works as māyāvāta texts: Kaivalya[navaṇītam], Ċavavāciṭṭam, Pirapōtacanṭirōṭayam, and Pirapuliṅkalīlai (1957: 9).

114 All citations of the ĀP refer to Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (1907).
If one considers who those revered teachers are who are fit to be lovingly praised and worshipped by all those qualified to observe the practice of the Siddhānta path, it is just those four (nālvarumē): Tirunāṇacampanta-mūrtti Cuvāmikal (Campantar), Tirunāvukkaracu Cuvāmikal (Appar), Cuntaramūrtti Cuvāmikal (Cuntarar), and Māṇikkavācaka Cuvāmikal (Māṇikkavācaka)... If these revered teachers had not incarnated on earth, it would have been difficult for even the word “Śaivism” (caivam) to exist. Therefore it is necessary for us to worship those teachers, the precious preceptors who pour forth sacred grace so that the world might obtain that rare boon [which is Śaivism] and be saved.\(^\text{115}\)

The reader is rhetorically urged to reflect upon the reverence due to the nālvar, a prompting that is given added force by Nāyakar’s usage, repeated throughout the text, of the first-person plural pronoun. Here we get the first glimpse of the manner in which the text attempts to cultivate a readership characterized by a heightened sense theological self-awareness. According to Nāyakar, good Śaivas are acutely conscious of the nālvar as the central proponents of their religion.

Next, claiming to follow several Purāṇic works, Nāyakar asserts that the nālvar are incarnations (avatāram) of divine beings closely associated with Śiva: Campantar is Śiva’s son, Kumāracuvāmi (i.e. Skanda/Murukan); Appar is Vākīcar, one of Śiva’s attendants on Kailāsa; Māṇikkavācakar is Śiva’s mount Tirunantitēvar; and Cuntarar is Ālālacuntarar, another member of Śiva’s host. These relationships perform crucial theological work in the ĀP; by revealing the nālvar as more than mere human poets, as in fact Śiva’s direct representatives on earth, they form the basis for the text’s assertion that Śaivism transcends all other sectarian traditions. As we will see shortly, this assertion is responding to the notion that Advaita Vedānta itself constitutes the ultimate post-sectarian truth, a claim that partly rests on hagiographic representations of Śaṅkarācārya as an incarnation of Śiva. The ĀP immediately proceeds to define the nālvar’s legacy (p. 2): “They came to this earth as protectors of Śiva’s sovereignty, routed the external sects (purāccamayaṅkal) and established Śaivism. Therefore, they alone are the leaders of the

\(^{115}\) cittānta mārkkācaraṇa cīlār āy ṛṣha atikāriṅkal yāvarum āppu pāṟāṭṭi valipatāṅkuriyā acāryāmūrttikal yāvar eṅa vicārīkkiy tirunāṅgacampanāṃtūrti kal cuvāmikal, tirunāvukkaracu cuvāmikal, cuntaramūrtti cuvāmikal, māṇikkavācaka cuvāmikal ākiya nalvarumēyām... ivvācārya mūrttikal pūmiyṅkaṅ avatāryāviṭṭal caivam eṅgum coll oṅgru tāṅgum ciṅvītal kāṣṭhaṃ eṅru peṟṟaṇaṟṟal, ānya arīya peṟṟu ulakam peṟṟ’ uyyat tiruvuruḷ curanta tēcikaratpaṅkal ākiya avvācāryiṟ vaḷiṉātu namakku vaṭtiyam ayyirēṅka.
Siddhānta.”116 This description draws upon allusions to conflict with Jains and Buddhists found throughout the poetry of the saints and given elaborate narrative form in their respective hagiographical traditions. As Peterson persuasively argues, these representations of the religious “other” played a key role in the self-definition of the Tamil Śaiva sect and were central to the refashioning of Tamil culture around Śaiva sectarian ideals (1998: 164). Yet what is most significant about the ĀP’s rearticulation of this trope is the manner in which it is presented as sheer historical fact. The saints’ hagiographies are here interpreted as documents recording Śaivism’s victory over other sects. This historicized reading of the hagiographical materials is fundamental to the ĀP’s broader critique of its contemporary context.117

It is also important to register Nāyakar’s usage of the phrase “external sects” (puṟaccamayaṅkaḻ), a technical term in Śaiva Siddhānta for heterodox traditions that reject the authority of the Śaiva Āgamas. This term implies an entire doxography, elaborated in several earlier Saiddhāntika texts, in which other sects are presented as hierarchically arranged stages culminating in Śaiva Siddhānta. In this way, the ĀP fuses hagiographical representations of the nāḻvar as champions of Śaivism with a specific formulation of Śaiva Siddhānta universalism. This implies that the nāḻvar’s defeat of Jainism and Buddhism extends to encompass all other sects, including those prominent in Nāyakar’s day, like Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism. As he puts it, “… even if those [sects] didn’t exist in their time, [the saints] knew that they would arise later” (p. 5).118 The tension between the historical claim of Śaivism’s supremacy and the reality of ongoing sectarian conflict is then articulated in a hypothetical objection: why, if all other sects were defeated by the nāḻvar, are they still seen to exist? Here Nāyakar draws on the central doxographical strategy of Śaiva Siddhānta to suggest that since all sects were created by Śiva and ultimately lead souls to him, the nāḻvar did not intend to completely eradicate them but merely to demonstrate their inherent deficiencies so that souls might realize Śiva’s grace. In other words, the stubborn persistence of sectarian conflict in the present does not invalidate Śaivism supremacy; if other sects still exist, it is only because the saints allowed them to do so.

116 ivarkal civākāṅ paripālarkal āyp pūmiyṅkaṇ vantu puṟaccamayaṅkaḻaiṅ kaṭintu caivattai nāṭṭigav uṇmaiyāl, ivarkalē cittāntat talaivar āvar.
117 See Raman (forthcoming) for an analysis of the historicization of the Tamil saint in the nineteenth century.
118 avarkal kālattil avaiṅkal illāviṭṭum pinnar mulaikkum enpatu aṅtavar ātalāl.
At this point the ĀP (pp. 5-20) takes up for discussion another work that grapples with the theological implications of sectarian conflict, i.e. Tiruppūrūr Citampara Cuvāṃikāl’s commentary on Avirūtavuntiyār 26-33. These verses, it will be recalled from Chapter One, interpret the plurality of mutually contradictory sectarian traditions to imply that none can claim the truth exclusively and that one should, therefore, completely abandon sectarian partisanship. Not surprisingly, Nāyakar charges this line of thought with an indefensible relativism (p. 5): “it is completely incorrect to assert that all sects possess equal worth (orē mariyātaiyuṭaiyaṇa) or that one should renounce them all.” If that were the case, he writes, then nothing would distinguish the path of truth from the ordinary state of ignorance, and “it would be wrong for sects to contradict one another; it would be wrong to say that both the Vedas and the Śaiva Āgamas are equally authoritative; it would be wrong to speak of Buddhism, atheism, etc. as inferior” (p. 20). Hence only the graded hierarchy of sects outlined in works such as the Civaṇāgaṇacittiyār can adequately account for the plurality of sectarian positions.

It is not just that Nāyakar is here rejecting a pan-sectarian, “perspectivalist” mode of understanding sectarian diversity for a “hierarchical inclusive” one. Nāyakar’s critique of Citampara’s commentary illuminates his concern to tidy up, as it were, the ambiguities of the literary past by determining which texts should and should not be allowed to speak for Śaivism. There is, in other words, a shift away from the earlier pan-sectarian literary culture of the “knowledge literature” to a much more tightly policed canon of acceptable Śaiva works. Implicit in the rejection of Citampara Cuvāṃi’s text is a further denunciation of its eclecticmism, its tendency to demonstrate universality by citing from the sacred literatures of various sectarian traditions. Here it should be recalled that Citampara Cuvāṃi cites extensively from Campantar’s

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119 Excepting verse 29. Nāyakar repeats Citampara’s Cuvāṃi’s summary gloss on these verses without explicitly naming his source. It is unclear why Nāyakar only cites the commentary and not the AU itself. He may have felt that the terseness of the AU would make the discussion too challenging for the readers he wished to reach. Or perhaps his critique had one eye on the Vīraśaiva monastic establishment at Tiruppurur, which lies just south of Madras and which is said to have been founded by Citampara Cuvāṃikāl.

120 ...ellāccamayāṇkalum orē mariyātaiyuṭaiyaṇa evaṭavatu ellāccamayāṇkalum illāmaṇ pōy viṇa veṇṭum evaṭavatu kūruvatu kevalam acappiyam evaṇ ārīka.

121 appatiy őyy accamayāṇkal oṛyaṇ oṛu vīrōṭit’ irupputu piḷaiyām. vēṭam, civākamam eṇṇum iṇaṭumē tulyappiramāṇam eṇratiṃ piḷaiyām. pauṭta cārvākāṭikal iḷiṇtaṇav akak kūruvatum piḷaiyām.
hymns. Nāyakar thus appears interested in forestalling the appropriation of Campanatar for alternative religious narratives that do not culminate in the supremacy of Śaiva Siddhānta.

What is really at stake here in the ĀP’s discussion of Citampara’s commentary is, I would suggest, Nāyakar’s concern with the ascendency of Advaita Vedānta in public religious discourse in the late nineteenth century. This can be glimpsed by observing Nāyakar’s comments on the phrase “the six religions spoken of in the Vedas” (maṣṭai col cat camayam), which occurs in a verse cited by Citampara Cuvāmi in his commentary on AU v. 27. Nāyakar argues that the real “six religions” are not those said to have been founded by Śaṅkarācārya, i.e. the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Gāṇapatya, Saurya, and Kāpālika; rather, they are the six “internal sects” (akaccamayaṅkal) of Śaivism: Śaiva, Pāṣupata, Mahāvrata, Kālāmukha, Vāma, and Bhairava. Therefore, (p. 11):

The “wisdom” of those dimwits who, not knowing to discern in this manner, gush with nonsense, babbling, “Six religions! Six religions!” foolishly prattling, “Śaṅkarācārya established those six religions!” is annihilated beyond recovery… Śaṅkarācārya is only a teacher of the doctrine of one soul (ēkāṃjavatam), one of the six external religions (puraccamayam).

The myth that Śaṅkara established the major Hindu theistic cults (Skt. ṣaṅmata-sthāpana) is found in several, though not all, of the precolonial hagiographies on Śaṅkara (Bader 2000: 253-272). As Bader notes, the episode brings the six sects “under the aegis of Advaita Vedānta” (Ibid.: p. 258), an act that takes on added significance within the larger hagiographical context of Śaṅkara’s “conquest of the four quarters” (dig-vijaya). The printing of such hagiographies in late nineteenth-century Madras would have heightened public awareness of this narrative and its universalist implications. Later on in the ĀP, in fact, Nāyakar mentions a hagiography entitled Caṅkaravijayam (Skt. Śaṅkaravijaya), a Tamil adaptation of several dig-vijaya texts by Toḻuvūr Vēḷāyuta Mutaliyār. Nāyakar is acutely sensitive to the ways in which the Śaṅkara narrative is being, or has the potential to be, utilized to construct a master narrative of India’s religious culture, one that would render Śaivism as just another sectarian tradition subordinate to Advaita

122 ippati vicāritā’ ariyātu ṣaṅmatam, ṣaṅmatam eṅru kattik koṇtu, accaṇmatanikalaiyuṅ caṅkarācāriyaru tāppitār eṅru pulampā niṅru kulaṟi valiyuṅ kumatikal pōtamuṅ kuṇappāṟ’ īṇmaiyāy oḷintatu… caṅkarācāriyaru puraccamayam āṟaṇurl ong’ ākiya ōkāṃjavatattukku māṭtirām āciriyaṟ āvar.

123 Note that the translator is not a Brahmin. For more information about Toḻuvūr Vēḷāyuta Mutaliyār, one of the chief disciples of Irāmaliṅka Aṭṭikal and later an ardent Theosophist, see Raman (2002).
Vedānta. The hermeneutics of “non-contradiction” seems to resemble the theological presuppositions of this narrative a little too closely for Nāyakar’s liking. In the remainder of the essay, Nāyakar elaborates his counternarrative, which utilizes the life-story of Campantar to illuminate “the nature of all the sects, and the truth of the Siddhānta that shines beyond them” (p. 20).124

The Child-Saint and the False Philosopher

The bulk of the ĀP provides an abbreviated prose account of Campantar’s life as it is narrated in the Periyapurāṇam, divided into eight separate sections. Each of these is followed by an excursus (cūcaṇai) that comments upon the episodes summarized in the section. Here I discuss only the first three cūcaṇai, which are the lengthiest and most innovative.125 The first narrative segment recounted in the text covers just two episodes: the child-saint’s birth in the temple-town of Cīrkāli to the Brahman Civapātavirutayar and his wife Pakavati, and his drinking of the goddess Umā’s breast-milk at the age of three (pp. 21-22). The excursus on this section, spanning forty-four printed pages, is the longest in the ĀP. Its purpose is essentially twofold; first, it attempts to prove that, not only was Campantar an incarnation of Śiva’s son Kumāracuvāmi, he was born without recourse to a womb; and second, it aims to debunk the notion that Śaṅkarācārya is an incarnation of Śiva.

Nāyakar compares Campantar’s birth to that of Ukkirapāṇṭiyaṉ, another incarnation of Kumāracuvāmi whose tale is recounted in Paraṅcōti Muṉivar’s Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam. According to Nāyakar (p. 23), just as Ukkirapāṇṭiyaṉ’s birth to Queen Taṭātaṉkai of Madurai (i.e. the goddess Mīṉāṭci) was a matter of “mere appearance” (tōṟṟal māṭṭiramāka), so in the case of Campantar one should accept that Pakavati possessed the mere appearance of a uterus, etc… that our divine teacher Nāṇacampanṭ (Campantar) was not, [therefore,] born after having dwelt in her womb; that since his incarnation [was accomplished] without any recourse to a womb, it was, in

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124 ...cakala camayaṅkaliṅguṭaiya taṉmaiyum, avavṟaiy atikkiramittu viḷaṅkuṅ cīttāntav uṇmaiyum…

125 Even within first three cūcaṇai, I focus only on the central points raised by Nāyakar, whose prose is generally characterized by an extremely dense style of argumentation.
fact, stainless (*nirmalatvam perputu*); and that Pakavati’s uterus and all the rest [appeared merely] for the sake of removing her and Civapātavirutayar’s desire for a son.  

The point of affirming that Campantar’s birth occurred “without any recourse to a womb” (*ayōṇijamākavē*), is to establish the child-saint’s freedom from “stain” (*malam*). While this term can signify the pollution generally associated with the female womb in South Asia, here it also more technically implies the metaphysical stain (i.e. *ānava malam*) that according to Śaiva Siddhānta binds souls (*pacu*) until they are released from it by Śiva, the eternally stainless lord (*patī*). In asserting Campantar’s stainlessness, then, the ĀP radically removes the saint from the realm of bound souls, that is, normal human beings, and associates him not merely with Kumāracuvāmi, but with Śiva himself. This association is a persistent theme running through the ĀP, reinforced by the text’s repeated references to Campantar as a “manifestation of Śiva” (*civa vīpūti*) who possesses “the nature of the supreme lord” (*paramapatitvam, pati taṇmai*).  

The implication that Campantar is in some ultimate sense Śiva himself, an idea facilitated by the fact that Śiva is Kumāra’s father, underpins Nāyakar’s argument for Śaivism’s supremacy, and also anticipates his subsequent denunciation of Śaṅkara’s *avatāra*-hood.

The only problem is that the *Periyapurāṇam* does not state that Campantar is an incarnation of Kumāracuvāmi in the context of describing the saint’s birth. To demonstrate that Cēkkilār nevertheless understood Campantar to be Śiva’s actual son, Nāyakar cites the episode in which the three-year-old Campantar, temporarily abandoned by Civapātavirutayar on the bank of the Čīrkāḷī temple tank, looks toward the temple’s *sīkharā* and cries for his mother and father, prompting the appearance of Śiva and Umā. To this are added dozens of quotations from the *Periyapurāṇam* in which Campantar is referred to as “the Son” (*Piḷḷaiyār*). While this appears to be an overly literal reading of the *Periyapurāṇam*, Nāyakar also supports his case with a battery of quotations from other texts, including the *Sanatkumārasamhitā*, the *Kantarantāti*, the *Tiruccentūrakaval*, the *Tiruppōrūrcanitimuṟai*, the *Čīrkāḷimāṉiyam*, and the *Upamanyubhaktavilāsam*, which do explicitly identify Campantar with Kumāra/Murukaṇ (pp. 10, 72, 149, 152-153, 197, etc.)

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126 E.g. pp. 10, 72, 149, 152-153, 197, etc.
These quotations demonstrate that Nāyakar’s assertion of Campantar’s divinity is by no means new. Yet what is new is the way in which Nāyakar has gathered together these scattered, text-immanent references to Campantar as Kumāra and presented them to the reader as evidence of the unanimity of tradition with respect to the historical fact of the saint’s incarnation. The text thus continues to skate a thin line between mythology and history. It is also worth noting that two of the texts cited, the Sanatkumārasaṃhitā and the Upamanyubhaktavilāsam, are Sanskrit works, their quotations given in Tamil transliteration. This willingness to directly engage with the Sanskrit literary tradition is a central feature of Nāyakar’s writings, as we shall see further below.

Having established Campantar’s divinity, the ĀP turns to undermine the purported divinity of Śaṅkara. Śiva’s incarnation as the Advaita theologian forms the mythological background of most of the Śaṅkara hagiographies (Bader 2000: 100-135). Nāyakar’s discussion (pp. 37-47) focuses on a brief passage from the Śivarahasya, a Sanskrit work attaching itself to the Skandapurāṇa, in which Śiva predicts his future incarnation as a great Śaiva devotee named Śaṅkara. The ĀP deals with this Purānic passage by arguing that it cannot refer to Śaṅkara the Advaita Vedāntin. For instance, Nāyakar argues that since Śaṅkara was by all accounts born from a female womb, he was, unlike Campantar, a mere bound soul (pacu) tainted by stain (malam) who therefore could not have been an incarnation of the stainless Śiva. Similarly, since Śaṅkara the Advaitin slandered Śiva and Śaivism through his false doctrine, he cannot be the “greatest of Śaivas” prophesied by Śiva. Consequently, Nāyakar argues, the Śivarahasya must indicate another Śaṅkara who has yet to come.

The rejection of Śaṅkara’s divinity is carried over into the ĀP’s discussion of the episode in which Campantar drinks the goddess Umā’s breast-milk. In this context, Nāyakar examines several verses from the Saundaryalaharī, a Sanskrit stotra dedicated to the goddess and

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128 Peterson traces the origins of the Campantar-Kumāra topos to the war-cult of the imperial Cōḷas, noting that the Takkayākapparanti, a near-contemporary of the Periyapurāṇam, “portrays Campantar as an incarnation of the war god Murukaṉ-Skanda, the son of Śiva, who has been born on earth to exterminate the Jains” (1998: 182).

129 Nāyakar explicitly mentions two contemporary texts that had alluded to this passage as evidence for Śaṅkara’s divinity: the Tamil hagiography Cankaravijayam and the Pētavātitimira-pāskaram (Sun to the Darkness of Dualism), which as mentioned at the end of the last chapter is a short work attacking Nāyakar’s ideas that was published in 1877 by Ceṅgai Muṇicuvāmi Nāyakar, a disciple of the monist Īcūr Caccitāṇa Cuvāmikāl.
attributed to Śaṅkara, which alludes to the deity’s miraculous milk (pp. 49-55). Particular
attention is called to Saundaryalaharī 75 which, in an apparent reference to Campantar, speaks
of a “Tamil child” (draviḍa-śiśu) who drank the breast-milk and became a great poet. The verse
is cleverly interpreted to signify that Śaṅkara considered himself to be a mere bound soul who
was in awe of the majestic Campantar and had to beg for a few drops of the liberation-bestowing
drink. Several pages are then spent refuting the possibility that the “Tamil child” was not
Campantar but rather Śaṅkara himself, an interpretation found in a number of the
Saundaryalaharī’s commentaries. Nāyakar argues that Śaṅkara could not have drunk the sacred
milk given his patent moral failings, which are amply documented in his own hagiographies.
Citing the Caṅkaravijayam again, Nāyakar relates the episode in which Śaṅkara is said to have
entered the body of King Amaruka in order to sleep with the ruler’s wives and learn the erotic
arts, an episode which, according to Nāyakar, confirms that Śaṅkara “ruined the chastity of the
king’s wives through deceit, transgressed his ascetic duty, and, unafraid of the blameful sin,
became ensnared in the net of [the women’s] vulvas” (p. 55).130

For centuries, a critique of Advaita Vedānta, often pejoratively referred to as the
“doctrine of illusion” (māyāvātam), has been central to the self-representation of Tamil Śaiva
Siddhānta. Yet while these earlier critiques had largely proceeded by refuting the basic tenets of
Advaita Vedānta on logical or theological grounds, the AP bases its arguments on a novel form
of “comparative hagiography”. Here emphasis is placed not on doctrinal differences, but rather
on the relative ethical qualities of each system’s representative figure. Through such an
investigation, the text denounces Śaṅkara’s divinity even as it refashions Campantar in the light
of Śaṅkara, imbuing the child-saint with the same universal qualities that the dig-vijaya works
had foisted upon Śaṅkara. This itself appears to echo an earlier conflict between Advaita
Vedāntins and the followers of the dualist theologian Madhva, whose hagiographers depicted
Śaṅkara as a widow-born incarnation of the demon Maṇimat.131 Yet again what is most
conspicuous about Nāyakar’s discussion of Śaṅkara is the manner in which he reads the texts in
question, here the Śivarahasya, Caṅkaravijayam, and Saundaryalaharī, as historical documents

130 ...araca pattiṅikaḷai vaṁcaṇaiyār karp’ aḷiṭṭut taṇṭatu tuṇavaiyun tuṇantu paliḷaṭvattukk’ aṅcămal aṅgōr paka-
valaiyir cikkunṭu...  
that cannot be dismissed out of hand, but must instead be shown to mean something other than what Advaita Vedāntins take them to mean. The ĀP’s thus participates in what Raman (forthcoming) has identified as the reimagination of the holy life in colonial South India, in which the saint is no longer the impersonal instantiation of a fundamentally timeless perfection, but rather an individual and ambivalent figure of history.

The Lucid Tongue of the Teachers

The second section of Campantar’s life-story recounted in the ĀP picks up immediately after the breast-milk episode (pp. 66-67). Returning from his ritual bath, Civapātaviratayar sees the milk dripping from the child’s mouth and asks who fed it to him. In reply, the three-year-old points to Śiva and Umā in the sky and bursts into song, uttering the verse beginning “He wears a woman’s earring in one ear” (tōṭutaiya ceviyaṉ) that would become the opening hymn of the Tamil Śaiva devotional canon. Father and son then go to worship Śiva in the temple, after which they are surrounded by the astonished citizens of Cīrkāli, who joyously praise Campantar as he is carried about on his father’s shoulder. If the first excursus had attempted to demonstrate the superiority of Campantar in comparison to Śaṅkara, the second excursus argues that Campantar’s hymns constitute a “Tamil Veda” whose sacrality exceeds that of the Sanskrit Veda.

The starting point for the discussion is, of course, the miraculous exclamation of the three-year-old Campantar. Nāyakar argues that this verse, and by extension the nālvar’s hymns as a whole, shares the Sanskrit Veda’s formal structure and esoteric content (pp. 73-76). Thus he suggests that the first syllable of the verse, i.e. “tō”, is an amalgamation of two separate elements: the sacred syllable om, which is considered to be the essence of the Veda and is normally intoned prior to its recitation, and the takara vittiyā (Skt. daharavidyā), which refers to the intuitive awareness of Brahman within the heart-space revealed in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. According to Nāyakar, the fact that the nālvar’s hymns do not lack these characteristic features of the Sanskrit Veda proves that they too are also a Veda. This is not a particularly radical claim; the nālvar themselves occasionally refer to their poems as a “Tamil Veda” (tamiḻ marai),132 and the Periyapurāṇam does the same.133 Nevertheless, precolonial Tamil Śaivas did not attempt to

133 See e.g. Tīruṉāyacampantamūrttinaiyaṉar purāṇam v. 357, etc.
explicate the “Vedic-ness” (vaidikatva) of the nālvar’s hymns in the elaborate manner that Nāyakar attempts here, and I am unaware of textual precedent for the arguments he makes here.134

The subsequent discussion moves from a comparison of the nālvar’s hymns with the Veda to a more general evaluation of the relative merits of Tamil and Sanskrit: “If one asks why the beneficent Ēṉaṉacampanta (Campantar) graciously composed those [hymns] in Tamil and not in Sanskrit, [it is because,] since Sanskrit and Tamil possess equal prestigiousness, the two are in fact one” (p. 77).135 This discussion is explicitly formulated as a response to contemporary claims by Brahmins that Sanskrit alone is a sacred language (pp. 77-78):

If you ask why some people in the world say that Sanskrit alone is excellent, that it is the mother tongue (mātru pāṣai), that in it alone are the primordial Vedas [composed], that its greatness [renders it] fit to be accepted by the first (i.e. Brahmin) caste, that Tamil, on the other hand, is not so excellent, and that it (i.e. Tamil) is fit to be adopted by Śūdras – since it is the ignorant who speak in this way, great ones do not accord it respect. Let us [now] reveal that [Tamil] is the best [language] of all according to authoritative sources and as established through logic and experience.136

As in his comparison between the nālvar’s hymns and the Veda, Nāyakar first attempts to establish parity between the two languages. He cites from several earlier texts, including the Tirumantiram, the Kāñcippurāṇam, the Tiruvilaiyāṭarpurāṇam, and the Ḥālasyamāḥtmyam, to affirm that Tamil, like Sanskrit, is primordial (anāti sittamākavē), and that both languages were created by Śiva, who subsequently taught them to Agastya and Pāṇini, respectively.137

134 This contrasts sharply with the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, which for centuries had maintained that the hymns of the Āḻvārs, and particularly those of Nammāyār, constituted a vernacular Veda.

135 See Davis (2000: 270-318) on the tension between Tamil and Sanskrit present within the Agastya mythic cycle. The Kāñcippurāṇam of Civaṉaṉa Muṉivar (18th c. CE) relates the myth in which Śiva teaches the legendary Tamil grammar Akattiyam to Agastya. Several other mythological works speak of Agastya creating Tamil himself (Ibid.: 296), a notion Nāyakar firmly rejects since it would undermine the divine origin of the language.
After demonstrating that Tamil does not lack that which makes Sanskrit great, the text then proceeds to argue for Tamil’s preeminence (p. 81):

Even if Sanskrit and Tamil were indeed created by Lord Śiva, they respectively resemble the Vedas and the Śaiva Āgamas, which were created by the same supreme lord. Just as the Śaiva Āgamas possess greater lucidity (telivu) than the Vedas, Tamil possesses greater lucidity than Sanskrit. 138

According to Śaiva Siddhānta, the ultimate truth is only partially revealed in the Vedic scriptures; its full elaboration is to be found in the Śaiva Āgamas, which spell out that which is only implicit in the Veda. Nāyakar applies this Saiddhāntika principle of scriptural revelation to the linguistic realm, implying that Tamil is capable of expressing clearly and completely that which Sanskrit can only convey inarticulately or partially. Thus Sanskrit is said to be included within Tamil; it is a “portion” (amicam) of the latter “as śakti is a portion of Śiva” (civaṇṭaiya amicamē caktyī āpār pōla, p. 85). Further textual sources are cited or alluded to in order to prove Tamil’s superiority. Reference is made, for instance, to a myth from the Hālāsyamāhātmya in which the goddess Sarasvatī, i.e. the Sanskrit language incarnate, is cursed to be born on earth as forty-eight separate people, one for each letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, who are to remain in the mortal realm until they have learned the Tamil language. The text also points to the three Tamil caṅkams, ancient literary “academies” founded Śiva and Murukan, for which no parallel exists in the case of Sanskrit. Nāyakar also refutes the notion that in the distant past Brahmins lived in Northern India and spoke Sanskrit, whereas Śūdras lived in the South and spoke Tamil. Rather, he maintains that from time immemorial castes were equally distributed geographically, and that Tamil was therefore spoken by all who lived in the South, not just Śūdras (pp. 82-91).

Having argued the preeminence of Tamil and thus of the Tamil Veda, the ĀP finally turns to consider the latter’s author, the nālvar. Nāyakar rejects the notion that the different castes of the saints reflect the value of their respective compositions. 139 Here he spends several pages arguing that all four figures, not just Campantar, are incarnations of divinities born without recourse to a womb and are, therefore, free of caste. He concludes by asserting that, just as the

138 kērvāṇamuṇ tirāvītamuṇ cīvaperumāṇ aruḷicceytaṇavēy āviṇum, avvirantum apparamapatiy aruḷicceyta vēṭacivākamaṇkalaiyē mugaiyē otti irukkingaga. vēṭattīṇu cīvākaman telivāy iruttal pōlavē kērvāṇattīṇuṇ tirāvītām telivāy irukkingatu.

139 Traditionally, Campantar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar are said to have been Brahmins, whereas Appar was a Śūdra.
Brahmins of Cīrkāḷi praised Campantar as he was carried on his father’s shoulder, so contemporary Brahmins must worship the nāḻvar with devotion, for it is only through love for the nāḻvar that the greatness of one’s family is established (pp. 91-108).

The second excursus draws upon a number of earlier articulations of Tamil’s parity with, and superiority over, Sanskrit. As with the discussion of Campantar’s divinity, what is new here is less the content of what is said than the way in which it is articulated; again, Nāyakar has culled older texts for scattered references, in this case, to the status of Tamil as a sacred and prestigious language, in order to make a totalizing argument about its status vis-à-vis Sanskrit. It is this argument for Tamil’s preeminence that would form the basis for later elaborations by Śaiva intellectuals like Maḻaimalai Aṭikaḷ. Nāyakar’s discussion thus straddles premodern and modern discourses surrounding Tamil. Driving the consolidation of this narrative about language is the assertion by Brahmins that Sanskrit is the sacred language par excellence, an assertion that, either explicitly or implicitly, renders the nāḻvar’s hymns a second-tier scripture. Nāyakar is inverting this scriptural hierarchy and affirming that it is the vernacular text that is the real Veda.

The Friends of the Teachers

The third segment of the Campantar narrative that is related in the ĀP follows the child-saint as he begins his series of pilgrimages to the various temple-towns of the Kaveri Delta (pp.

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140 For an overview of some of the major positions staked out in the precolonial period, see Ramaswamy (1998).

141 See Ramaswamy (1997: 24-34).

142 Peterson (1989 [2007]: 54-59) offers a fascinating discussion of the different attitudes held by Tamiḻ Śaivas and Smārtas Brahmins with respect to the Tirumuḷai, one which I am tempted to repeat here. According to Peterson, “the Smārtas accept the singing of the Tēvāram songs as part of the Āgamic heritage of their religion and celebrate the presence and lore of the Tamiḻ Śaiva saints as part of the history and iconography of the Tamiḻ Śiva temple… Yet they continue to have a unique symbolic significance for Tamiḻ Śaivas… When Tamiḻ Śaivas worship at the subsidiary shrines in which various aspects of Śiva are depicted within the Śiva temple, they sing or recite selections from Tamiḻ sacred literature, especially from the Tēvāram and the Tiruvācakam. At the same shrines, the Tamiḻ brahmins and affiliates of other sects prefer to use late Sanskrit devotional stotras, nāmāvalis (litanyes of names of the deity), and other Sanskrit texts” (Ibid.: 55). Recalling her own experience of temple processions at the Kapāḷiśvara temple in Mylapore, Peterson notes how Smārtas point to the fact that Brahmins lead the procession chanting the Vedas as proof of the scriptural supremacy of the Vedas and of the superiority of Brahmins within the caste hierarchy. By contrast, Tamiḻ Śaivas explain that the Ītuvârs (professional singers of the Tamiḻ hymns) chant the Tēvāram poems at the end of the procession, “since the hymns of the saints are the final and most accessible embodiment, in the form of mantras, of the essence of the Vedic mantras and of the Āgamas, which are the word of Śiva himself. Even more significant [for Tamiḻ Śaivas] is the fact that the Tirumuḷai is sung simultaneously with the Veda, an act that affirms their sectarian view that the Tēvāram hymns are equal to the Vedas as scripture and mantra” (Ibid.: 56-57).
While several notable events occur in this section, the third excursus (pp. 111-140), the last to be examined here, focuses on the episode in which Campantar meets, befriends, and feeds the lutist Nilakanṭha Yālppāṇar, who will become Campantar’s travelling companion and musical accompanist. Nāyakar takes the friendship that develops between the Brahmin Campantar and the low-caste musician as a starting point to articulate a critique of caste, and particularly of the treatment of Ādiśaiva temple priests by Brahmins.

Nāyakar begins his critique with the following observation, “Our lord [Campantar] gave a feast and bestowed his friendship upon [Nilakanṭha] for no other reason than the latter’s love. Consideration of lowness of caste is not a quality of the liberated” (p. 113). The goodwill that Campantar extended towards Nilakanṭha “is a custom that should be observed by everyone in the world.” It proves that the path of devotion (pakti) trumps that of ritual propriety (viti), that if a Śūdra exhibits the attire of a Śaiva (civa vēṭam) and a passionate love for god, even a Brahmin must revere him (pp. 113-114). Two other saints from Periyapurāṇam are mentioned to support this last point: the hunter-devotee Kaṇṇappar, whose ritually impure but lovingly rendered offerings of fresh meat were preferred by Śiva to the “proper” ritual service of the Brahmin Civakōcariyār; and the Brahmin Appūti Aṭikāḷ, whose devotion for the Śūdra saint Appar was so great that he drank the water used to wash the latter’s feet. Nāyakar further declares that Śaiva initiation eliminates one’s caste and, potentially reflecting his own experience of discrimination as a low-caste Vaṇṇiyār, he criticizes initiated Vēḷāḷārs who continue to take pride in dining with Brahmins and who refuse to dine with pious initiates of the “Anulōma” castes.

As Prentiss has noted, the idea that acts of worship performed with devotion transcend caste distinctions is an important theme in the Periyapurāṇam, and stands in marked contrast to the caste-bound rules governing temple worship in the Śaiva Āgamas (1999: 127-133). Nāyakar is clearly picking up on this theme but, as usual, he adapts it to suit his own purposes. The ĀP takes the general critique of caste in the name of bhakti that pervades the Periyapurāṇam

143 ivarukku empirāṅg virunt’ aliṭatum, tamatu tōḻamaiyait tantatum ivaratu anṟu kāraṇamāṅkav anṟi vēṟ’ illai. jātiy iliṟai nōkkural mutturka nilaimaṅṟu anṟu.
144 ituvē yāḻvarmāṭṭum payappāṭṭakka paṉṟām.
145 See also Monius (2004: 190): “The Periyapurāṇam thus imagines that the human condition is molded by the presence or absence of love for the divine, a love for Śiva the heroic father that must be expressed externally in worship and service without regard to restrictions of caste or other marks of human embodiment.”
and sharpens it into a pointed critique of Brahminical arrogance. The primary point made here is that Brahmins must acknowledge the superiority of devout Śaivas, even if the latter belong to a lower caste. Stories in which Brahmins are shown to recognize the equal, if not superior, devotion of a lower-caste Śaiva are interpreted as having an immediate prescriptive value for inter-caste relations. Ironically, whereas up to this point the essay had vigorously argued for Campantar’s divinity in order to guarantee the supremacy of Śaiva Siddhānta, here the saint’s humanity is emphasized in order to highlight the implications of his actions for contemporary social life.

The ĀP continues its critique of Brahminical exceptionalism by turning to the Ādiśaivas, also known as Civappirāmaṇars or Kurukkaḷs, who traditionally conduct the Āgama-based ritual worship in Śaiva temples. Nāyakar objects to the fact that some Brahmins look down upon Ādiśaivas as inferior to themselves, and offers several arguments as to why it is the Ādiśaivas who are, in fact, superior. For instance, he notes only the Ādiśaiva can worship in the sanctum sanctorum (karppakirakam) of the temple, whereas Brahmins are only permitted to worship the god from the antechamber (antarāḷam); Ādiśaivas are said to have emerged directly from Śiva’s five faces, unlike Brahmins, who emerged from the mouth of Brahmā; only Ādiśaivas have the authority to give darśana of Śiva, bestow his sacred ash, and distribute his blessings; and finally, even if Brahmins are responsible for reciting the Vedas in the temple, the Vedas are ultimately inferior to the Śaiva Āgamas, which recited by the Ādiśaivas (pp. 119-136).

Virtually all of the arguments Nāyakar raises to prove the superiority of the Ādiśaivas derive from the Śaiva Āgamas. Many of the same remarks would be made nearly a century later by the priests at the Mīṉāṭci temple in Madurai studied by Fuller (1984). Nāyakar’s interest in defending the glory of the Ādiśaivas can be explained, in part, by the fact that he was himself initiated into Śaiva Siddhānta by one such temple priest in Kanchipuram. But the real issue is determining who truly represents the Vedic heritage – Brahmins, who follow the heterodox traditions of Advaita Vedānta and Vaishnavism? Or the pious Ādiśaivas who accept Śiva alone as the supreme being and foster the doctrines of Śaiva Siddhānta? For Nāyakar, the latter is the only correct answer. This is the final major component of the master narrative being articulated in the

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146 See Brunner (1964).
ĀP: as Campantar trumps Śaṅkara as the true leader of the Śaivas, and as Tamil displaces Sanskrit as the sacred language *par excellence*, so too the Ādiśaiva supplants the Brahmin as the foremost representatives of the sacred on earth.

**Campantar, Literary Criticism, and the Making of Tamil Śaiva Modernity**

Authors of vernacular religious literature in India often become the focal point for localized discussions on theology, language, and caste. This point has been made effectively by Friedhelm Hardy (1995) in his analysis of the Ācāryahṛdayam, a thirteenth-century Tenkalai Śrīvaiṣṇava eulogy on Nammāḻvār, the author of the devotional classic *Tiruvāymoli*. Despite being composed more than half a millennium prior to the ĀP, the Ācāryahṛdayam’s claims are remarkably homologous to those of its similarly named cousin: for instance, the Ācāryahṛdayam asserts that Nammāḻvār is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, that he was born without recourse to a womb, and that his Tamil hymns are superior to the Veda since they provide liberation to all social classes regardless of caste. Hardy describes the Ācāryahṛdayam as an instance of what he terms “de-Sanskritization”, a tendency within Indian religious history that moves “away from the axis of ‘integration’ or ‘Sanskritization’” (p. 37). According to Hardy, within the centrifugal logic of the Ācāryahṛdayam, “a high level pan-Indian but elitist culture is abandoned in favour of a socially wider, but regionally restricted, religious culture… [The work] de-Sanskritizes in order to universalize; it opens itself up to a large segment of society previously excluded from salvation […] while at the same time it reduces its realm of application from the whole of India to the region in which Tamil is spoken.” (Ibid.: 46). Hardy thus helps us see how the ĀP is picking up on a much older strand of Tamil religious thought that uses the vernacular bhakti poets to discuss issues of religious, linguistic, and caste identity. The ĀP may thus be interpreted to signify another moment of “de-Sanskritization”, of articulating the universality of one’s tradition in a particularly regional but relatively egalitarian manner.

The dynamic of premodern de-Sanskritizing was taking on new forms in the nineteenth century in the wake of the proliferation of print culture within Tamil society from the 1830s onwards. The newness of this situation is signaled by the fact that it is only in the nineteenth century, following upon the publication of the Śaiva devotional classics (i.e the *Tirumurai*), that Tamil Śaivas begin to compose commentaries on their vernacular scriptures. This remarkable development indicates that a major shift had occurred in the way in which these texts were being
apprehended by Śaiva intellectuals.147 While the history of these commentaries awaits further research, it is fairly clear that the emergence of modern Tamil literary criticism, which was part of the broader transformation of Tamil philology in the nineteenth century,148 also had a major impact on the way in which such precolonial texts were received. For it was at this time that the traditional Tamil commentary, or urai, was increasingly supplemented by an ever-increasing number of new genres, including prose renditions of poetic texts, journal articles, and independent essays devoted to religious and literary matters. All of these forms are in some way incorporated into the ĀP. As Nāyakar’s text demonstrates, this new form of literary criticism was marked by a conspicuous tendency towards historicizing accounts of tradition in earlier texts. It is also clear that this literary criticism did not, in general, recognize the old conventions that governed the scriptural commentary. Thus one could compare a wide range of texts without concern for linguistic or generic boundaries. Thus Nāyakar can take up in nearly the same breath the Periyapurāṇam, the Saundaryalaharī, and the Avirōtavuntiyār.

These changes facilitated the kind of totalizing religious narrative that we find in the ĀP. There is here a major attempt to provide a unified account of tradition that would “once and for all” establish the supremacy of Śaivism and Śaiva Siddhānta over Vedānta. In this Nāyakar goes well beyond the earlier anti-Vedānta polemics of philosophical writers such as Umāpati Civācāriyar or Civaṇāna Muṅivar. Ultimately, this is why the ĀP’s rejection of the Avirōtavuntiyār for the hierarchical doxography of classical Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta represents more than a shift from one model of sectarian diversity to another. In the elaborate narrative that Nāyakar weaves around Campantar, there is an inversion of the earlier logic of proximate and remote otherness that governed differences between sectarian communities. In the ĀP, the hermeneutical frame of reference is expanded well beyond the precolonial paradigm, as strictly “philosophical” disagreements now encompass concerns of a specifically literary, ethical, and even ethnic nature. At the same time, the boundaries that are being drawn between the sects are

147 This state of affairs contrasts sharply with that found in the Śrīvaishnava tradition, which had already developed an elaborate exegetical tradition around the Āḻvārs’ poetry centuries prior. This is not to deny, however, that Tamil Śaivas engaged in other ways of interpreting their vernacular texts in the precolonial period. The Periyapurāṇam itself is an interpretation of the significance of the Nāyaṭārs and their hymns. Another important mode of reception involved selectively quoting from and arranging these hymns in anthologies. See Prentiss (1999: 145-151), for instance, on Umāpati Civācāriyar’s Tēvāra Arulmuṇgaittirattu.

148 On this see Ebeling (2009a and 2009b).
now sharpened to such an extent that they can allow for no more areas of overlap or sharing of theological resources. The model of concentric circles of religious truth implied by a “perspectival” text like the *Avirōtavuntiyār*, or even a “hierarchical” text like the *Civaṉāgacittiyār*, is no longer possible in this rigid definition of Śaivism in terms of an “either/or”.

To recap: the ĀP is a text of stark contrasts: Campantar versus Śāṅkara, Tamil versus Sanskrit, the Ādiśaiva versus the Brahmin. These dichotomies function to structure a totalizing vision of Tamil Śaiva community whose boundaries are extremely sharply defined. Around the figure of the child saint, Nāyakar consolidates a sense of coherence and a comprehensiveness that the Tamil Śaiva tradition may never have known before. That Nāyakar should select Campantar as the hero of his grand narrative can perhaps be explained by the fact that the saint’s hymns open the Tamil Śaiva devotional canon. It may also reflect the fact that conflict with heterodox sects is a central feature of Campantar’s hagiography, although it is significant that the ĀP briskly moves past the episode in the *Periyapurāṇam* in which eight thousand Jains are impaled on stakes. Or perhaps it is because Campantar is unique among the Tamil Śaiva saints remembered in the *Periyapurāṇam* for his full-throated praise of the Tamil language. Finally, it may be the case that Nāyakar’s personal devotion to Campanar played a role. As Je. Em. Nallacāmip Piḷḷai (1901: 206) wrote in an obituary published shortly after Nāyakar’s death, “[Nāyakar] brought into special prominence the worship and honoring of the great saints and Acharyas, Gnana Sambandhar, Appar, Sundarar and Manickavachakar, and he was himself a special devotee of that ‘Divine Child’ Gnanasambantha.” Indeed, it would appear that Nāyakar saw himself as a kind of latter-day Campantar, whose duty it was to defeat heterodoxy and once again restore Śaivism to its rightful place.

It is important to recognize that Nāyakar’s narrative is not yet articulated in terms of an imagined prehistorical Tamil utopia, which is only enabled by the “rediscovery” of the Caṅkam corpus. Nor does Nāyakar avail himself, or even display an awareness of, the recent

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149 This episode has often generated a significant amount of uncomfortableness for Tamil Śaivas. Just a few decades after the ĀP was published, Kācīvāci Centinātaiyar (1907) attempted to provide an elaborate defense of Campantar’s behavior that would protect him from Christian charges of cruelty.

150 This possibility was brought to my attention by Anne Monius.
contributions of European scholarship to Tamil history and linguistics. Yet there can be little doubt that Nāyakar’s monolithic vision of Tamil Śaivism and Śaiva Siddhānta is that which is picked up and elaborated upon by later Śaiva intellectuals such as the Tamil nationalist Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ. This fact has implications for how we understand what is sometimes referred to as the “revival” of Tamil Śaivism and Śaiva Siddhānta in the nineteenth century. First, it should be clear by now that this was less a “revival” than a thoroughgoing and multi-faceted reimagining of what Tamil Śaivism is. Second, this reimagining is only being indirectly mediated by colonial modernity. Here I differ somewhat from the positions adopted by scholars such as Ramaswamy (1997) and Vaitheespara (1999), who largely attribute the Śaiva “revival” to the impact of Orientalist scholarship on indigenous intellectuals. It is Nāyakar’s creative reading and consolidation of precolonial literature that drives the religious innovation occurring here. I have devoted considerable attention to the details of Nāyakar’s admittedly dense arguments in order to bring out this point more clearly.

It is worth reiterating that Nāyakar’s consolidation of a master narrative for Tamil Śaivism would have significant implications for Tamil Śaiva literary culture. In general, there is in his works a shift away from late precolonial texts towards the more distant textual past, especially the Tirumugai and the Meykaṇṭa Cāṭtiraiṅkal. When late precolonial works do appear, it is either to be rejected by Nāyakar or to function as supporting “evidence” that confirms a broader point about the unanimity of precolonial Śaiva “tradition”. That is, many of the “knowledge texts” increasingly appear less and less as living theological expressions in their own right. In the next chapter, I examine the reception of one of the few late precolonial works that did remain vital for Tamil Śaivas in the colonial period and beyond, namely, the poetry of Tāyumāṉavar. By examining the contested reception of this poet and his works, I hope to show that the synthesizing of a monolithic Tamil Śaivism in the late nineteenth century was

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151 In this regard, Nāyakar’s treatment of Campantar can be contrasted with that P. Sundaram Piḷḷai in his landmark work, Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature, or The Age of Tirujnana-Sambandha. Originally published under the title “The Age of Tirujnana Sambandha” in 1891, just a few years after Nāyakar’s essay, Some Milestones draws upon literary, philological, and epigraphical evidence to argue for a much earlier dating of Campantar, and by extension of the entire Tamil literary tradition, than was acknowledged by the majority of European scholars at the time. Like Nāyakar, Sundaram Piḷḷai recognizes the importance of Campantar for the Tamil Śaiva tradition, and he even refers to many of the same works, such as the Saundaryaalakārī, in the course of his discussions of the saint. Yet the historicist lens through which Sundaram Piḷḷai examines these texts is explicitly indebted to the endeavors of European scholars, while Nāyakar’s interpretations arguably owe a greater intellectual debt to the thirteenth-century Śaiva Siddhāntin Aruṇanti Civācāriyar.
accompanied by a more general fracturing of the newly emerging vernacular religious public sphere.
Chapter 4

The Dispersion of Tāyumāṉavar

You come playfully rushing toward the quarters and the ends of the quarters, as if at the speed of thought.

Like the great Meru of pure gold and a Meru of good qualities, you reach up to the shining pole star and stand like the very terrible discus-bearer [Viṣṇu].

You are able to scoop up into your hand all the seven oceans and drink them in a ritual sip.

You take up Indra’s world and even [his elephant] Ayirāvatam in your hand and play ball with them easily.

You fix the entire heavenly sphere in a mustard-seed and reveal the eight clans of mountain-ranges [therein].

You, who are capable of still more comprehensive supernatural powers – do you not possess some rare power to appear before [me,] your servant?

Oh host of wise Cittars who have obtained the good state that is the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta! (v. 7.1)

Let us begin the present chapter by examining this remarkable verse. The bulk of the poem is addressed to Śiva; it primarily consists of descriptions of the god’s miraculous powers, or cittis (Skt. siddhi), which sequentially build upon one another to construct an image of the

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152 Tikkoṭu tikantumum maṇga vēkam eṇṉavē
cenṟ’ ōṭiy āṭi varuvīr
cempoṭ makamēruv oru kuṇamēruv eṇṇavē
tikāḷi turuvam alav’ alāviy
ukra miku cakrataraṇ eṇṇa nirpīr kaiyil
ulun’t amilum ācamaṇam āv
ōr eļu kaṭalaiyum paruka vallīr intrāṇ
ulakum aiyiravatamumē
kaikk’ eliya pant’ āv ēṭtūtu vēḷaiyēṭṭuvēṅ
kakaṇa vaṭṭattaiy ellāṅ
kaṭukitaṭiy iruttīyē aśṭa kula vērpaivuṅ
kāṭṭuvēṅ mēlu mēlum
mikka cittiṭāḷi āḷam valla nīr aṭṭimai muṅ
viḷaṅkav aru cittiṭilaiyō
vēṭāṇṭa cittiṭaṇṭa camaracu naŋ gilai peṟṟa
vittakac citṭar kaṇamē

All references to Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry in this chapter refer to Nā. Katiraivēr Pillai’s [1937] 2010 edition.
deity as the all-powerful lord of yoga. After five such descriptions, the verse’s steady, linear progression is abruptly cut short by a question, also addressed to the god, that is at once self-effacing, plaintive, and perhaps even a bit impatient: “Do you not possess some rare power to appear before [me,] your servant?” The last two lines of the verse then provide the refrain, in which the poet turns to address the Cittars (Skt. siddha), those inscrutable, iconoclastic, and inconceivably fortunate yogis before whom Śiva has appeared and to whom he has given a portion of his supernatural abilities. Significantly, the verse ties the Cittars’ intimate relationship with the deity to a specific awareness or experience of what it calls “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” (vētānta cittānta camaracam). This ideal state, the poem implies, is what the devotee realizes when Śiva finally reveals himself.

The verse, the first in a set of ten entitled “The Host of Cittars” (Cittar kaṇam), each of which ends with the same refrain, is among the most famous stanzas attributed to the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Śaiva poet Tāyumāṉavar. It is also fairly characteristic of Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry in general, blending together as it does older traditions of emotionally charged Tamil devotionalism, power-oriented Tantric yoga, and depersonalized theology. These separate streams are made to meet and comingle with one another in the expansive theological space that is invoked by the phrase “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddānta”. This crucial expression, variations of which are found no less than sixteen times in the poet’s corpus, conjures a kind of universality that is able to comprehend and reconcile different religious traditions within itself. In Śaiva Āgamic sources, the term “same taste” (camaracam, Skt. samarasa, also encountered in the abstract nominal form sāmarasya) typically refers to the

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153 The date of Tāyumāṉavar is unsettled. Manninezhath (1993: 5) proposes dating him to 1602-1662. There is however a tradition that maintains the poet lived in the eighteenth century during the reign of Vicaya Rakunāta Cokkaliṅka Nāyaka of Tirucchirappalli. Zvelebil (1975: 249) suggests either the seventeenth or the eighteenth century. To these scholars’ arguments I can only add that Tāyumāṉavar’s poems are not cited by Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikal (late 17th or early 18th c.) in his anthology-cum-commentarial works.

154 Alongside this confluence of earlier religious forms, Shulman (1991) sees in Tāyumāṉavar the expression of “a surprisingly rich subjectivity, comprising a multiplicity of often conflicting impulses and ideas, in lengthy internal monologues that are, in themselves, in formal terms, innovations in Tamil literature” (p. 64). He further locates the emergence and inherent ambiguities of this subjectivity within the context of a reevaluation of the body as a soteriological vehicle in Nāyakar-period South India (pp. 68-69). Raman (forthcoming, ch. 2) cautions against bringing the terms selfhood and individuality into a discussion of premodern sources, preferring instead to refer to a new “mode of sincerity and to an aesthetics of the personal” in Tāyumāṉavar’s poems.

155 As according to Manninezhath (1993: 156).
union of Śiva with his Śakti, or to the union of the practitioner with the guru and/or deity. In his poems, Tāyumāṉavar appears to be extending the implication of the term to encompass the realization of the singular vision of two seemingly different bodies of scripture, the Upaniṣads and the Śaiva Āgamas. At the same time, the locution is enigmatic, if not intentionally elusive, for the term “Vedānta” can also refer to a specific school of Upaniṣadic thought, especially Advaita Vedānta. Similarly the “Siddhānta”, the “established conclusion” of the Āgamas, can also be taken to refer to Śaiva Siddhānta as a specific school of Śaiva theology. So too the term “same taste” in this context could be taken to imply a relationship of identity, equivalence, similarity, or perhaps something else. The phrase leaves these possibilities in a state of unresolved tension, and it is precisely this ambiguity that allows camaracam to be taken up by later authors who would reinterpret it in according to their own fashion.

While this verse may have been composed during the early-modern period, I would contend that its story, and indeed the story of Tāyumāṉavar, really begins in the nineteenth century. It was at this time that Tāyumāṉavar’s poetic corpus became one of the most widely celebrated compositions in the Tamil language. Ever since its initial publication in the first half of the century, Tāyumāṉavar’s poems have been on the lips of just about everyone: young and old, rich and poor, learned and illiterate.Śaivas of various stripes, Christians, Muslims, and even atheists have all demonstrated a profound appreciation for his poetry. Judging from the intensity and diversity of this reception, it would not be an exaggeration to say that virtually no precolonial Tamil work was as successful in the nineteenth century as Tāyumāṉavar’s songs.

In this chapter, I examine how Tāyumāṉavar is interpreted by nineteenth-century intellectuals affiliated with the three major sectarian traditions of Tamil Śaivism, i.e. Vīraśaivism, Śaiva Siddhānta, and Advaita Vedānta. As we will see, each of these traditions

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156 According to Venkatachalapathy (2012: 152, n.77), beggars regularly included Tāyumāṉavar’s songs as part of their repertoire.

157 On the varied Śaiva reception see the present chapter. Christians both Indian and European have displayed a remarkably consistent fascination with Tāyumāṉavar and with the concept of camaracam in particular. One of the first was the well-known author, reformer, and Catholic convert Māyūram Vētanāyakam Pillai, who composed a collection of musical works entitled “Songs on the Same Taste of All Religions” (Carva camaya camaracam kirttagaikal). For a brief discussion of the latter work see Ebeling (2010: 202-203). Zvelebil (1974: 115) notes that the Sufi poet Kuṇāṅkuṭi Mastāṅ Cākipu modeled his poetry on that of Tāyumāṉavar. Srilata Raman (forthcoming, ch. 4) briefly discusses the atheist reception of Tāyumāṉavar.
develops quite distinct and, in the case of the last two communities in particular, even antithetical conceptions of the poet. Nevertheless, I will argue that these different views are united by a common set of concerns about the universality of Tamil Śaivism and the canonicity of its sacred literature. The ambivalence that animates these concerns, I further suggest, is not radically new, but is in fact already present in Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry, especially in the phrase “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta”. In attempting to resolve the ambiguity of this expression, the three major Śaiva sects effectively consolidate competing visions of Tamil religion. This chapter thus traces the dispersion of Tāyumāṉavar as his poetry passes through the prism, as it were, of colonial modernity. By following how the songs are refracted by these different sectarian communities in the nineteenth century, it is possible to observe the fragmenting of an emerging Tamil religious public sphere.

The New Ňāṇa Nūl

Tāyumāṉavar was immortalized within the pantheon of great Tamil poets in the nineteenth century. Extant evidence suggests that one of the earliest communities to seriously engage with his poetry at this time was that of the Tamil Vīraśaivas. Vīraśaiva scholars, or at least those with demonstrably close ties to Vīraśaivism, were among the first to edit, publish, anthologize, and comment upon the poetry. Generally speaking, these intellectuals interpreted Tāyumāṉavar’s corpus as a pan-sectarian work, one whose universality consists not in its exclusive adherence to a particular doctrinal system, but rather in its ability to illuminate fundamental truths common to all such traditions. This orientation should not be surprising, as we have already seen that the Tamil Vīraśaivas had cultivated a pan-sectarian positionality for several centuries. Instead of attempting to tease out the precise theological allegiance of the poet, as was – as we shall see – characteristic of his Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta critics, the focus of the Vīraśaivas was primarily on inserting and explicating Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry within the eclectic gnoseological tradition of the “knowledge literature” (ṅāṇa nūl).

It is likely that the pan-sectarian interpretation of Tāyumāṉavar can be traced as far back as the initial publication of the poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century. The key figure involved here is Tiruttaṉikaic Caravaṉapperumāḷ Aiyar, who along with his brother Vicākapperumāḷ Aiyar operated the Kalvi Viḷakkav Accūkkūṭam, the earliest of the pundit-run Tamil printing presses. Stuart Blackburn (2003: 105) has written about the significance of this
press, noting that “the Aiyar brothers’ substantial literary and publishing record… exerted a deep
influence on the formation of Tamil literary culture, especially in making available texts which
carried the burden of religious reform during the later half of the [nineteenth] century.” Indeed,
few texts would prove to be as important for Tamil religious thought in the latter part of the
century as Tāyumāṉavar’s pāṭals. It is important to observe, however, how the Aiyar brothers’
Vīraśaiva background informed their publishing activities. Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar, in
particular, edited and published several works by earlier Vīraśaiva authors such as Cāntaliṅka
Cuvāmikaḷ, Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, and Kukai Namacivāyar, as well as other
important Tamil texts lying outside the sphere of Śaiva Siddhānta orthodoxy, such as the
Kaivalyavanānītam. In other words, Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar was an eclectic, at least in terms
of the religious texts he chose to publish. Among these religious works was the first edition of
Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry, which he brought out with Poykaippākam Cupparāya Mutaliyār,
probably in 1836.\footnote{Tambyah (1925: clxxix) notes that Arnold, in his Galaxy of Tamil Poets (p. 171), declares the first edition of the poems to have been published in 1836, although the publisher is not specified. According to a search I performed on WorldCat, a second edition of the poems edited by Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar and Poykaippākam Cupparāya Mutaliyār was published at the Kalvi Vilakkav Accukkūtam in 1840. I presume that the first edition is the same as that referred to by Arnold.} This would remain the standard edition of the poems until the close of the
nineteenth century. The fact that Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar brought out the first edition seems to
suggest that the poetry was, from the beginning of its entry into popular circulation, associated
with the eclectic nāga nūl literary culture.

More explicit information on the reception of Tāyumāṉavar within Vīraśaiva-aligned
circles can be found in a mid-century commentary on a fascinating if now somewhat forgotten
text entitled Niṭṭāṉupūṭi (The Experience of the Concentrated State). The author of the
Niṭṭāṉupūṭi is Tirukkōvalūr Āṟumuka Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. 17\textsuperscript{th} or 18\textsuperscript{th} c.), who makes his Vīraśaiva
background apparent by praising the Kannadiga saints Basavaṇṇa and Cenna Basavaṇṇa (v. 8)
and the Tamil Vīraśaivas Kukai Namacivāyar and Kuru Namacivāyar (vv. 9-10). The text itself
purports to be a translation of the twenty-eighth chapter of the Uttara Vātula Āgama. In it, Śiva
teaches the goddess how to attain liberation through an advanced contemplative technique called
“the practice of the concentrated state” (niṭṭai cātaṇṭai), the essence of which is silently imparted
to the disciple by the spiritual instructor, who is of course none other than Śiva himself, through the “seal of consciousness” (ciṣṭ muttirai).

The Niṭṭāṇupūti was published no later than 1863 along with an extensive commentary by Mutukiruṣṇa Prammam (1815-?), an Āyiracetiyyar who worked for the colonial government in Madras. Mutukiruṣṇa’s commentary on the Niṭṭāṇupūti is the direct descendant of the commentarial-cum-anthological works of the Tamil Vīraśaiva Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ, whose gloss on the Avirōtavuntiyār we examined in Chapter One. Like Citampara Cuvāmi’s work, the bulk of Mutukiruṣṇa’s commentary consists of quotations from other religious works: to the ninety verses of the Niṭṭāṇupūti’s base text (plus one in praise of the author), Mutukiruṣṇa cites four hundred and ten exemplary verses, for an even five hundred (plus one) verses total.

What’s more, Mutukiruṣṇa draws from many of the same texts that had been quoted by Citampara Cuvāmi, including the Tiruvācakam, the ṇāṇavāciṭṭam, and the Olūviloṭukkam. Mutukiruṣṇa’s quotations are also eclectic in the same way that Citampara Cuvāmi’s are, blending stanzas from texts affiliated with the Śaiva (e.g. Tiruvācakam), Vaishnava (e.g. Tiruvaiyōmi), Śaiva Siddhānta (e.g. Tiruvarutpayan), and Advaita Vedānta (e.g. ṇāṇavāciṭṭam) traditions. The Niṭṭāṇupūti commentary thus represents a continuation of the pan-sectarian literary culture of the “knowledge-texts” (nāṇa nūlkal).

Yet the commentary also expands this literary culture by including citations from texts that had been composed since Citampara Cuvāmikāḷ’s time. Among these new additions to the nāṇa nūl repertoire, it is the poetry of Tāyumāṉavar that stands out the most. The commentary cites this poetry thirty-eight times, far more than any other text. Verses from across the corpus are quoted to illustrate core ideas of the Niṭṭāṇupūti, including the process of contemplation, the necessity of mental discipline, and the role of the guru. Indeed, over the course of the gloss,

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159 See the introduction to the edition of the Niṭṭāṇupūti published by the ṇāṇiyār Maṭālayam (Niṭṭāṇupūticāram 1933 [1960]: 7-8). The title page of early runs of the text indicate a strong connection between the commentator and Tāyumāṉavar: they describe Mutukiruṣṇa Prammam as the nephew and disciple of Mutturāma Prammam, who in turn is said to have “arose in the lineage of Tīrumāḷa, the teacher of Purified Advaita Vedānta” (cutta atvaita vēṭāntaṭṭcāriyar ākiṇa tīrumāḷar marapil eluntaruliyā). The connection here is that Tāyumāṉavar, in a well-known decad of poems (vv. 5.1-10), also locates himself within Tīrumāḷa’s line through his teacher, the “Silent Preceptor” Mauṇa Kuru of Tirucchirappalli. Each verse of the decad 5.1-10 ends in the following refrain: “Oh Mauṇa Kuru who comes in the lineage of [Tīru]muḷal!” (muḷal marapil varum mouṇa kuruṭṉē). The link with Tāyumāṉavar is made even more explicit on the title page of the Curuticāram, another work Mutukiruṣṇa Prammam edited, which refers to the latter directly as “the teacher of the knowledge of Purified Advaita Vedānta Siddhānta Camaracām in the lineage of Tīrumāḷa” (tīrumāḷar marapil cutṭāvaita vēṭānta cīṭṭāntā cīmaraça nāgācīryāy āy).
Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry appears as the “knowledge-text” *par excellence*. It seems clear that the abundance of these quotations reflects the fact that Muttukiruṣṇa saw himself as belonging to the same spiritual line as the poet. For him, Tāyumāṉavar’s songs represent the foremost key for unlocking the secrets of the *Niṭṭāṉupūṭi*.

Muttukiruṣṇa’s identification of Tāyumāṉavar as a pan-sectarian figure is made particularly apparent in the commentary on verse eighteen of the *Niṭṭāṉupūṭi*, a verse which states that liberation can be achieved neither through the study of scriptures, nor through the investigation of the reality-levels constitutive of phenomenal experience (*tattuva cōtaṇai*), but only through the “one word” (*ōr moli*) that the guru “speaks without speaking” (*collāmar collum*). In his uncharacteristically lengthy discursive remarks on this verse, Muttukiruṣṇa describes in detail the process of *tattuva cōtaṇai* with respect to both the Śaiva Siddhānta and the Advaita Vedānta systems, recounting their elaborate accounts for the gradual appearance and differentiation of phenomena as well as their equally elaborate methods for progressively transcending this realm and attaining liberation (*Niṭṭāṉupūṭicāram* 1933 [1960]: 50-57). He concludes that neither of these methods are effective in themselves, but only through the grace of the guru, who is ultimately the one who reveals the truth to the disciple, whatever the latter’s sectarian tradition may be. Without actually condemning either Śaiva Siddhānta or Advaita Vedānta, this discussion contains a devastating critique of the overwrought cosmological and eschatological schemes of these two sectarian traditions, subtly insinuating that both sects are obsessed with differentiating themselves from one another by coming up with ever more complex theologies. According to Muttukiruṣṇa, the *Niṭṭāṉupūṭi* obviates all of this superfluous complexity by recognizing that the guru’s grace is the only necessary and sufficient cause of liberation. Following this discussion, Muttukiruṣṇa cites several works to support the notion that *tattuva cōtaṇai* does not culminate in liberation, including Tāyumāṉavar v. 28.29:

> Not troubling itself with the ghoulish *tattvas*,
> it is only the munificent silent [preceptor] who bestows grace
> that [my] mind, possessed of love, eternally contemplates.
> My hands rise to praise him. My two eyes quiver to see him.\(^{160}\)

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\(^{160}\) *tattuva pēyōṭē talaiyarittutk kollōmal
vaittav aruṇ mōga vaḷḷalaḷey niṭtam appu
piṇak karutu neṇcu pōrṇak karam eljumpuṅ
kāṇat tutikkum iru kan*
Muttukiruṣṇa thus directly connects Tāyumāṉavār to a notion of spiritual truth that is understood to transcend, though not to directly contradict, convoluted and mutually irreconcilable traditions of sectarian dogma.

While the Nīṭṭāṉupūṭi and Muttukiruṣṇa Prammam may be largely unknown today, the publication of the commentary was noticed by more than a few contemporary intellectuals. This is clear from the substantial number of cāttukavi, or introductory poetic endorsements, that accompany the printed text. The authors of these poems represent a variety of important religious and intellectual streams of mid-nineteenth-century Tamil society, virtually all of which lie outside the mainstream Śaiva Siddhānta establishment. These include Eṭuttukkūṭṭi Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ, a member of Tāyumāṉavār’s lineage; Muttukkumāra Cuvāmikaḷ, then head of the Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ Āṭīṉam; and Kā. Murukēca Nāyakar, a disciple of Puṟaicaḷ Aruṇācalu Cuvāmikaḷ of the Tiruttutūṭti Intirapīṭṭam Karappāṭṭīra Cuvāmikaḷ Āṭīṉam, and thus a fellow disciple of Ṭicūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ. The most well-known cāttukavi author, at least from the perspective of the present, is undoubtedly the poet-reformer Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, alias Irāmaliṅka Aṭīkal. Irāmaliṅka’s presence in this list is particularly interesting because he fashioned his own eclectic religiosity, in part, in light of his reading of Tāyumāṉavār, going so far as to name his reformist movement the Camaraca Vēṭa Caṃmārka Caṅkam, or “The Society [for the Establishment of] the Path of Truth that is the Camaraca Veda”. While I do not examine the relationship between Irāmaliṅka and Tāyumāṉavār here, it is worth noting that the former saw himself as occupying a position outside the major sectarian traditions, much as Muttukiruṣṇa interprets Tāyumāṉavār.

The primary reason why I have brought up the cāttukavis, however, is to draw attention to one of their authors in particular: Puracai Aṣṭāvatāṇam Capāpati Mutaliyār (d. 1886). Capāpati Mutaliyār was one of the great Tamil poet-scholars (pulavar) of the nineteenth century; the title “Aṣṭāvatāṇam” signals his successful accomplishment of a series of difficult intellectual and

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161 For a lucid discussion of this genre see Ebeling (2010: 62-73), who stresses its centrality to the “economy of praise” that characterized the world of the traditional poet-scholar (pulavar) in nineteenth-century Tamil South India.

162 Vēṅkaṭacāmi (1962: 291) provides a full list of the cāttukavi authors.

163 See Raman (forthcoming) for a discussion of the connection between Irāmaliṅka Aṭīkal and Tāyumāṉavār.
literary feats, and was a mark of high intellectual distinction at that time. Capāpati Mutaliyār is important to this chapter because he composed, sometime around mid-century, what is probably the earliest extant commentary on Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry.164 This extremely learned exegesis, which I examine briefly below, is fortunately preserved at the beginning of Nā. Katiraivēr Pilḷai’s own recently republished commentary on the poems ([1937] 2010: 19-60). Like several of the other figures we have already mentioned, Capāpati Mutaliyār had close ties with the Tamil Vīraśaiva tradition, particularly that strand which is connected to Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikal. According to Vēṅkaṭacāmi (1962: 205), for instance, Capāpati Mutaliyār composed a hagiography (carittiram) and a hundred-verse eulogy (patiruppanattantāti) on Citampara Cuvāmikal, in addition to many other works on the town of Tiruppōrūr and its famous Muruṉaṇ shrine. Capāpati’s commentary on Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry thus provides a particularly valuable window onto the reception of the poet within a Tamil Vīraśaiva milieu.

The commentary is somewhat unusual in that it only covers the initial section of the poetic corpus, which is entitled “Homage to the Supreme Śiva Whose Sport is the Sacred Grace” (Tiruvaruṉ vilācap paraciva vanakkam) and which consists of three verses that form a kind of prologue to the rest of the poems. Capāpati tends to read these verses as embodying scholastic Śaiva theology in literary form; that is, he reads the poems as a kind of versified śāstra. In this he sets a precedent that would remain the standard approach to the poems down to the present day.165 Much of Capāpati’s gloss is spent unpacking the sophisticated philosophical concepts that are supposed to inform particular words and phrases in the first three verses. A relatively straightforward example of this comes in the commentary on a phrase in the first verse: “[that] which, willing [the infinite billions of worlds into being], flourishes as the soul of the soul” (iccai vaitt’ uyirkk’ uyir āyt taṭaittatt’ etu). Capāpati interprets this clause as referring to the process whereby Śiva, in order to liberate souls from bondage, transforms his singular grace (arul) into

164 Capāpati Mutaliyār died in 1886 according to Vēṅkaṭacāmi (1962: 204), which is thus the upper limit for the commentary. It is reasonable to believe that the commentary was composed at least a decade or two before this, however, as Capāpati was most active mid-century. Several library catalogues date an edition of Tāyumāṉavar’s poems with the polippurai of Māṅkāṭu Vaṭivēḷu Mutaliyār to 1840. This is incorrect; the year-name given on the title page of this work, cārvari, should instead be taken to designate the year 1900. The next oldest commentary after Capāpati’s is likely that which is attributed to “a few scholars” (cīla virvāṅkal urai) and published by Ti. Campanta Mutaliyār in 1889.

three separate powers (*cattika*), i.e. will, knowledge, and action (*iccai, ſaŋgam, kiriyai*). The commentator divides the phrase into three segments, one for each of the three powers and their respective liberating functions. This interpretation is then supported with a quote from the *Civaŋacittiyār* (v. 1.63), which deals precisely with the subject of the three powers and the activities they perform for the soul (Nā. Katiraivēr Piḷḷai [1937] 2010: 22). The combination of these explanations and quotations from well-established works serves to legitimate Tāyumāṅavar’s poems as authoritative representations of Śaiva theology.

While this is undoubtedly a kind of Śaiva Siddhānta theology, it is not to be confused with that which would be espoused by the likes of Cōmacuntara Nāyakar just a couple of decades later. Like Muttukiruṣṇa Prammam, Capāpati interprets the poems within the framework of a Śaiva pan-sectarianism. For one thing, his citations reflect the same eclectic literary culture represented in Muttukiruṣṇa’s work, with quotations taken from the *Civaŋacittiyār*, the *Tirumantiram*, the *Vaḷḷalār Cāṭtiram*, the works of Tattuvarāyar, and a verse from the *Tiruvāymoḷī*. The commentary also elaborates an explicitly pan-sectarian stance in the course of glossing particular phrases in the first three verses. One example of this is the gloss on the following phrase from v. 1.1: “[that] which abides [as the deity of] all the tens of millions of sects, even as they everywhere continually argue against one another, saying, ‘[That is] their god,’ ‘[This is] our god’” (*camaya kōṭikāl elān tan teyvam en teyvam eṅ’ eṅkun toṭart’ etirvalakkitavu niṅrat’ etu*). Here Capāpati, after enumerating the various sects and the ways in which they criticise one another’s arguments, suggests that the divine manifests as the various forms of Śiva, as Viṣṇu, as Śakti, and even as the Buddha to the adherents of different sects, granting them the various heavenly abodes (*mutti pатаṅka*) that they desire. The catholicity of this interpretation is underscored in Capāpati’s immediately succeeding remarks on the same verse’s obscure reference to Śiva as a “great all-pervasive judgement” (*eṅkaṇum peru vaḷakkāy*). Capāpati suggests that this “great judgement” refers to the fact that people contradict each other’s beliefs ceaselessly, but that unlike a normal disagreement about a particular subject, this “great judgement” is said to “proceed by accepting the many different tenets of particular people at particular times and places” (*itu avar avarum aṅk’ aṅkum avvakkālattut tattam palvēru*

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166 On this fascinating and as yet largely unexplored text see Mu. Āruṇācalam (2005 vol. 9: 173-181), who notes that while it is generally considered a Vedāntic work, it blends elements of the Śaiva Siddhānta, Advaita Vedānta, and Vaiṣṇava traditions.
The implication of all this is that Śiva encompasses any and all points of view. There are a few other instances in the commentary like this, where a pan-sectarian position is more or less explicitly worked out. Perhaps it is sufficient to simply note that on these occasions Capāpati cites Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikā’s *Avirōtavuntiyrī*, the *locus classicus* of pan-sectarian Śaivism, to support his interpretations.

While Capāpati reads the poems within the context of a pan-sectarian framework, he nevertheless briefly takes up, perhaps for the first time, a question that would become hotly debated in subsequent decades, namely, the issue of what Tāyumāṉavar himself really believed. The commentary addresses the identity issue in its remarks on the closing sentence of the first verse, “Let us with folded hands worship [that supreme being], conceiving him also as the space whose nature is silence” (*mōṉav uru veḻiyat’ ākavum karuti aičali ceykuvām*). Capāpati takes this sentence in two ways: on the one hand it refers to Śiva in his form as the supreme preceptor Taksināmruttī (Skt. Dakṣiṇāmruttī), and on the other it refers to Tāyumāṉavar’s actual earthly preceptor Maṅga Kuru.167 In his remarks on the second verse the commentator connects Taksināmruttī with a position that recognizes the ultimate superiority of the teachings of the Śaiva Āgamas vis-à-vis the Vedas. He notes that it was Taksināmruttī who, speaking to Caṅkara and the other sages under the shade of a banyan tree, “taught the characteristics of the three principles which are revealed in the Āgamas that elucidate the Vedānta” (*vēṭāntat teliv’ ākiya ākamatt’ iyampum tiripatārtta’ iyalpukalaivum upatēcitaru’lu’*), and then proceeded to enlighten them further by forming the “seal of silence” (*mōṇga muttira’*) with his hand (Nā. Katiraivēr Pillaī [1937] 2010: 41).168 In his commentary on the first verse, Capāpati links Tāyumāṉavar’s praise of Taksināmruttī to other verses in the corpus that are also taken to highlight the supremacy of Śaivism. The most important of these verses are vv. 14.10-11, which come from the “World of Forms” (*Ākāra puvaṇam*) section of the corpus, also known as the “Secret of Chidambaram” (*Citampara rakaciya’*). These two verses would become central to the debate over the poet’s religious identity, and I quote them in full here:

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167 Actually, he also reads the sentence in a third sense as alluding to the “First God” (*mutar kaṭavavu’*), i.e. Gaṅapati, who is conventionally invoked at the beginning of any work.

168 Note that this mythological image also lies at the core of the theology of the *Niṭṭāṉupūṭi*, and that we have again here the assertion of the three metaphysical principles as the core of Śaiva religion.
Its nature unchanging, revealing all the eight attributes [of yoga] beginning with self-restraint, it becomes bliss through love, becomes the circumference of objects to teach their use (?) and reveals the gradual doctrine so that one may attain the good state. Thus, as the delusion-severing [Vedic] mantras, phonology, astrology, and the other auxiliary disciplines bow in obeisance, it places the crown of silence on its unwearied head and sits in state –

Ah! Vedic Śaivism is lovely! (v. 14.10)

Ah! This is wondrous! There is nothing like this religion (camayam). According to the judgment of all the wise: for those who wander about, sporting with the supernatural powers animā, etc., for those of great austerity who without speaking maintain silence, and for those who have obtained the boon of further and further enjoyments like [those enjoyed by] Indra, etc., there is no other refuge apart from this, none. This is the path that can reveal grace like [the heavenly wish-fulfilling trees] Cantāṇam and Karpakam.

This path alone is the path of truth (caṇmārkkam) (v. 14.11).

The key phrase is “Vaidika Śaivism” (vaitika caivam) in verse 14.10. The importance of this expression, in terms of the history of Tāyumāṉavar’s reception, is second only to vētānta cittānta camaracam, whose semantics it also appears to parallel. Immediately followed in v. 14.11 by the emphatic declaration, “there is no other refuge apart from this, none,” Vaidika

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169 iyalp’ enṟun tiriyāmal iyamātiy
enkūñamun kāṭiy anpāl īppam ākīp
payaṉarulap poruḻkal parivāram ākīp
panp’ uravuṇ caupāga pakṣan kāṭṭi
mayal āru mantiraṅ cikṣai cōṭīṭāi
maṛ’ anka nūl vanaṅka maṅga mōliy
ayarv’ arac cēṇiyil vaittu rācāṅ
kattil amarntatu vaitika caivam alakit’ antō

Nā. Kätiraivē P’ilḷai reads the last line slightly differently: …vaitika caivam alakit’ anṟō or “Isn’t Vedic Śaivism beautiful?”

170 antōv īt’ aticayam iccamayam pōl īṉ’
arṅar ellā naṭuv arṅjav anįmāv āti
vant’ āṭī tiripavarkkum pēcā mōṇam
vaitt’ irunta māṭavarkku maṛṇu māṛrum
intrāti pōka nalam pēṛṇa pēṛkkum
ituv aṟṟit tāyakam vēr’ illaiy illai
cantāṇa karppakam pōl arulaiṅ kāṭṭat
takka neṟiy inneṟiyē tāṅ caṇmārkkam
Śaivism comes to be understood by later intellectualsin, especially the Śaiva Siddhāntins, as proof of Tāyumāṉavar’s exclusive allegiance to a particular religious vision. Capāpati takes this phrase, together with others such as Tāyumāṉavar’s repeated references to Śiva as the “source of the liberation [attained through] the Siddhānta” (cittānta mutti mutalē) in the refrain of verses 4.1-11, as evidence of where the poet stands on the religious spectrum: “[These quotations demonstrate that] for this author only the Siddhānta that clarifies the Vedānta is preeminent. Therefore, he is connected only to that [Siddhānta]” (Katiraivēr Piḷḷai 1937: 30).

All this would seem to suggest that Capāpati Mutaliyār takes Tāyumāṉavar to be a Śaiva Siddhāntin. And indeed, in a certain way, that is what he is saying. The commentator even supports his statements by citing two verses from the Civaṉācittiyār (vv. 8.15-16), in which it is said that the Śaiva Āgamas constitute a special (cirappu) revelation that explains the general (potu) teachings of the Vedas and the Vedānta. However, it is necessary to be careful about jumping to a conclusion about what “Śaiva Siddhānta” actually means to an intellectual like Capāpati Mutaliyār. As we have seen, he generally interprets Tāyumāṉavar within a pan-sectarian theological framework. His understanding of Śaivism is therefore quite different from other intellectuals, like Cōmacuntara Nāyakar, who identified themselves with a much more narrow reading of the Śaiva tradition. It therefore makes sense to interpret Capāpati’s remarks as still adhering to a premodern conception of sectarian identity, which as we have seen could allow for degrees of relative truth. It is only in the subsequent reception of Tāyumāṉavar that we see the newer logic of outright rejection of the other that characterizes certain strands of Tamil Śaiva modernity.

The Semantics of Camaracam

The question of Tāyumāṉavar’s religious identity, briefly explored by Capāpati Mutaliyār, would become the subject of a major intersectarian controversy in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Members of the Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta traditions each claimed Tāyumāṉavar as one of their own, and fiercely opposed parallel arguments made by adherents of the rival sect. These attempts to appropriate the poet for a particular sectarian position differ markedly from what we find in the Vīraśaiva literature, where Tāyumāṉavar is

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171...ivvāciriyyarkku vēṭāntat teḻiv’ākiya cittāntamē cirappuṭaitt’ātalāl aṭt’ ongē uṭamēṭ’ ēnpatu perappaṭukūṅṟatu.
largely left an unmarked figure, whose very lack of a specific doctrinal commitment is what enables him to transcend sectarian boundaries. Here, instead, the opposing sects try to identify their particular doctrinal system with the universal theological space invoked in Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry. This debate played itself out over several decades, in prefatory materials attached to the printed editions of Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry, as well as in theological journals and essays published by leading figures of the two sects. The disparate interpretations that emerged from this conflict are reflected in the observation of T. Isaac Tambyah, an early scholar of Tāyumāṉavar, who notes, “readers of the poems of Tāyumānaswamy have sometimes formed different opinions as to what exactly was the religion he professed” (1925 [1985]: xxii). We have already mentioned how it is the ambiguity of the poetry itself that enabled these different interpretations. The most significant instances of such ambiguity for the debate are to be found in the expressions “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” (vētānta cittānta camaracam), “Vaidika Śaivism” (vaitika caivam), and also “falsehood” (poy). As we will see, the claims each sectarian community makes regarding Tāyumāṉavar’s identity largely hinge upon how these expressions are interpreted.

The earliest evidence of the controversy that I have been able to find is a brief three-page Foreword (Cūcaṉai, lit. “Note”) printed at the beginning of an 1872 edition of Tāyumāṉavar’s poetry, which was published by Ti. Paracurāma Mutaliyār. While the author of the Foreword is not clearly marked in the text, it appears to be Corkkapuram Irāmaliṉkat Tampiran, who is indicated on the title page as having supervised the publication of the work. I have unfortunately been unable to unearth much information about this figure, though his name suggests that he was

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172 Tambyah refers to the opinions of several European and Indian figures in this context. According to him, G. McKenzie Cobban and G. E. Phillips understand the poet to be a Vedāntin. On the other hand, an article from Prabuddha Bharata, which Tambyah attributes to Ananda Kumaraswami, maintains that Tāyumāṉavar rose from “the Saiva Siddhanta faith in which he was born to the Universalism [sic] of the Vedanta.” Yet another writer is said to have held the poet to be a pantheist, while Nagalingam Mutaliyar, one of the editors of the poems, “repudiates the imputation of monism and universalism to the poet.” For his part, Tambyah (1925 [1985]: xxix) suggests that the Tāyumāṉavar’s religion is “Vaidika Saivam”. As he puts it, “He adheres to the Siddhanta and finds in it, according to his eclectic predilections, something which can take in the Vedanta. This eclectic harmonizing he calls Vedanta Siddhanta Samarasam (சமரச).”

a Vēḷāḷār ascetic (tampirāṇ) affiliated with a Śaiva Siddhānta monastic institution.\textsuperscript{174} I have chosen to dwell on the Foreword here both because of its relatively early date and because it lays out in a remarkably concise manner the major points that later Śaiva Siddhāntins like Cōmacuntara Nāyakar would take up in their own reading of Tāyumāṉavar.

The Foreword begins by bemoaning the fact that Advaita Vedāntins, whom Irāmaliṅka Tampirāṇ disparagingly refers to as “Māyāvādins” or “Illusionists”, have misinterpreted Tāyumāṉavar and his poetry (p. 1):\textsuperscript{175} “The Māyāvādins are confused, ignorantly proclaiming the author of this text to be one of them, and adhering to views regarding his songs that are commensurate with their false understanding.”\textsuperscript{176} The text thus points towards an even earlier appropriation of the poet by Advaita Vedāntins, though it does not further specify who these people are. Irāmaliṅka replies to what he perceives as the poet’s misappropriation by laying out his account of how the Tāyumāṉavar should be understood (p. 1):

The truth that has been confidently proclaimed in the usage of the wise is that since [Tāyumāṉavar’s] lineage is in fact the Siddhānta Śaivism that speaks of its own perfection in the perfection that is Śiva, only the usage that emerges from seeing the experience of camaracam uttered in the Vedas and the Āgamas is established with certainty. This is to say that if, in order that the truth that the Veda is indeed the Āgama be clear, [Tāyumāṉavar] has emphasized [as much in passages such as] (v. 45.2.12), “the Śaivism that is Vaidika,” and (v. 14.10) “Ah! Vaidika Śaivism is lovely!”, not even absent-mindedly mentioning the Doctrine of One Self in the entire text — then the spiritually mature are unlikely not to have seen that both the views of the Vedas and the Āgamas have established the three categories of bound souls, Lord, and fetters. This, in fact, is what is expressed [by Tāyumāṉavar in the phrase] “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta”\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{174} Vēṅkaṭaçāmi (1962: 221) mentions a Irāmaliṅka Tampirāṇ who belongs to Tiruvāvaṭuttai Āṭiṅam. Whether or not this is Corkkapuram Irāmaliṅka Tampirāṇ is unclear.

\textsuperscript{175} All citations of the Foreword refer to Ĉiçaṇi (1872).

\textsuperscript{176} Ĉiçaṇi (1872: 221) mentions a Irāmaliṅka Tampirāṇ who belongs to Tiruvāvaṭuttai Āṭiṅam. Whether or not this is Corkkapuram Irāmaliṅka Tampirāṇ is unclear.

To paraphrase this somewhat dense passage: the wise proclaim that Tāyumāṉavar belongs to a Śaiva Siddhānta lineage, and it is therefore that tradition which is identified in the poetry with the experience of camaracam that is expressed in the Vedas and Āgamas. This is determined by the fact that Tāyumāṉavar never refers to the “Doctrine of One Soul” (ekāṃmavātam), i.e. Advaita Vedānta, but instead explicitly emphasizes that his position is one which recognizes the Śaiva Āgamas as the highest truth. This is communicated, above all, by the poet’s references to “Vaidika Śaivism”. Again we have the reference to v. 14.10 that we observed earlier in Capāpati Mutaliyār’s commentary. As the author of the Foreword explains it, Vaidika Śaivism is that tradition which derives from the Vedas and the Āgamas, both of which expound the reality of the three principles of lord, souls, and fetters. This is the key to the Foreword’s interpretation of the phrase “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta”: the Vedas and the Āgamas have the “same taste” because they teach the same metaphysics. According to this logic Śaiva Siddhānta is indeed Vedic, in so far as it is rooted in Vedic teachings, but ultimately it enfolds the Veda within itself as a subordinate element, since only in the Āgamas are the three principles of lord, souls, and fetters fully explicated. This is what Irāmaliṅka means when he says, “The Veda is indeed the Āgama” (vētamē ākamam).

After this the text describes and rejects the alternative, “Māyāvāda” interpretation of camaracam (pp. 1-2):

A few of petty intelligence use this [camaracam] to bring about an equivalence (camāṉattuvam) with regard to Śaivism, as if they too somehow insidiously (mella mella) have a close relationship with truth, [holding the view that] Vedānta and Siddhānta are two truths that stand in a state of equivalence to each another (camam ākiya tulaiyil nirkum). This is a great sin even to listen to. It is useless to think that the sect of others is consistent with and equivalent to Śaivism, and to practice under the notion that, by adopting such a sect, the truth may be obtained. If one objects to this, then one contradicts the intention of [Tāyumāṉavar] when he says, (v. 14.11) “there is no other refuge apart from this, none. This is the path that can reveal grace like [the heavenly wish-fulfilling trees] Cantāṇam and Karpakam. This path alone is the path of truth.”

178 This is here joined with a very similar quote from v. 45.2.12, “The Śaivism that is Vaidika” (vaitikam āṅ caivam), which comes from the Ennāikanṭi section of the corpus. Specifically, v. 45.2.12 is the penultimate verse of the subsection “Praise of the Guru-Lineage” (Kuru marapiṉakkam), which contains verses that praise several of the founding teachers of Tamil Saiva Siddhānta, including Meykaṇṭār, Aruṇanti Civācāriyar, and Umāpati Civācāriyar. Needless to say, this section of the text is frequently pointed to by Śaiva Siddhāntins eager to claim the poet as one of their own.
Hence, it is to be held, through proper investigation, that “the same taste of Vedānta-
Siddhānta” refers to the truth abiding in both [Vedānta and Siddhānta] as the same.\(^\text{179}\)

Thus the Māyāvādins are said to interpret \textit{camaracam} to mean that the Vedānta and the
Siddhānta teach two distinct truths that nevertheless possess “equivalency” (\textit{camāṇattuvam}) with
respect to one another. The implication here is that there are two paths, both of which provide
valid ways to achieve liberation. This is a fascinating interpretation of \textit{camaracam}, and one
wishes that Irāmaliṅkat Tampirāṅ was more informative about whom, specifically, he is referring
to.\(^\text{180}\) It is nevertheless clear that, for Irāmaliṅka, \textit{camaracam} does not mean the “equivalence”
of two paths, but rather that Śaiva Siddhānta alone is the universal truth running through both the
Upaniṣadic and Āgamic scriptural canons.

The Foreword goes on to say that Tāyumāṇavar cannot be referring to Advaita Vedānta
when he speaks of the “same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta”, since the texts of the Māyāvādins
contradict the Siddhānta. Instead, Irāmaliṅka claims, the poet refers to the Śivādvaita Vedānta of
Nīlakaṇṭha Śivācārya, also known as Śrīkaṇṭha (p. 2). The relationship between Tamil Śaiva
Siddhānta and Śivādvaita is complex.\(^\text{181}\) The Foreword may be picking up on the remarks of
Civaṇāņa Muṇivar (18\textsuperscript{th} c.), who in his magisterial commentary on the \textit{Civaṇāņapōṭam}
approvingly cites Śrīkaṇṭha’s arguments to the effect that the Śaiva Āgamas are equal to the
Vedas,\(^\text{182}\) and who also suggests that the differences between the two schools are only a matter

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\textsuperscript{180} \text{\text{Muttukūrūsa Prammam points to the equivalence of the two sects in his critique of their respective theological systems, which we have discussed earlier. One also finds the equivalence of these two traditions implied in another work entitled \textit{Ariyāṅga citiṭīyar}, published in 1860 by Pārippākkam Muṇiyappam Mutaliyār at the request of Appācuvaṁi Piḷḷai. Like Muttukūrūsa, this work also describes the cosmology and eschatology of both sects, apparently in an attempt to demonstrate their overarching unity. Intriguingly, the title page of this work refers to it as a “\textit{Text \[that Reveals\] the Innate Experience of Vedānta Siddhānta Camaracam” (\textit{vēṭānta citiṭīnta camaracu cūvāupava nūl). Could a work like this be what Irāmaliṅkat Tampirāṅ has in mind?}}}

\textsuperscript{181} \text{\text{The recent scholarship of McCrea (2014) and Duquette (2014 and 2015) has added substantially to our understanding of Śivādvaita beyond the classic studies of Suryanarayana Sastri (1929 and 1930).}}

\textsuperscript{182} \text{\text{See Civaṇāņa Muṇivar ([1936] 2008: 21-22).}}
of verbal expression and not substantive.\textsuperscript{183} In any event, the Foreword further substantiates its interpretation of Tāyumāṉavar by citing a well-known verse from the \textit{Tirumantiram} of Tirumūlar that also asserts the essential identity of the Vedas and the Āgamas:

The Vedas and the Āgamas are the scriptures of the true god.
They are said to be general and special [revelations, respectively].
They say that when those two utterances of the Lord are examined,
they [are seen to have] different ends.
But for the great there is no difference. (\textit{Tirumantiram} 8.15.28, v. 2397)\textsuperscript{184}

This verse comes from a crucial but cryptic section of the \textit{Tirumantiram} entitled “The Six Ends” (\textit{Āṟ’ antam} vv. 2370-2404), which appears to reference six different religious paths: Vedānta, Siddhānta, Nādānta, Bodhānta, Yogānta, and Kalānta. Of these, Vedānta and Siddhānta alone are said to lead to \textit{civam} (v. 2393). As Manninezhath (1993: 31) notes, the \textit{Tirumantiram} is one of if not the earliest Tamil text to use compound \textit{vēlāṇa cittāṇtam}, and it is likely that Tāyumāṉavar had this very section of the work in mind when he spoke of the “same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta”. Irāmaliṅkat Tampirāṅ suggests that since Tāyumāṉavar belonged to Tirumūlar’s lineage, he could not have conceived of the Vedas and the Āgamas as expressing two distinct but “equivalent” truths, as the Māyāvādins purportedly maintain.

The final nail in the Māyāvādin’s coffin, according to the Foreword, comes from the following verse, in which Tāyumāṉavar is understood to explicitly denounce the former’s position (v. 13.10):

While those who create the many kinds of sectarian paths,
the sinners who say “we ourselves are god,”
and those who deceive with contentious reasoning
bow their heads,
And while the righteous Yama, who calls souls to come to him,
sits alone, tending to his buffalo –
I bow in all directions
to the one who teaches the silent knowledge with his generous hand
in order to remove the verbal confusion of Caṇakaṉ and the other sages

\textsuperscript{183} Thus Civaṉaṉa Muṉivar ([1936] 2008: 144): \textit{citāṇtotro porul āṇ muruntal iṅ’ āyūgm vāyruṇu maṭtiraiyāṅ muraṇutalīr civāttuva caivam vēṟ’ eṇappatat’ eṅ’ uṇarka.}

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{vētamōṭ’ ākamam meyy ām īcāvaṅ nāl ōtum potuuṅ cīṟappum eṅ’ ūḷaṅa nātu uraiyavai nāṭāl irāṅ’ antam pētamāṭ eṇpar periyōrkk’ apētamē}
dwelling in the shade of the banyan tree,
the compassionate Cōmacēkara whose nature is pure, eternal grace,
the divine presence that faces the south:
O inconceivable Brahman!
O divine sport that is the rising of the bliss of consciousness!\(^{185}\)

Again the central image here is that of Dakṣināmūrti, Śiva as the guru-god who faces south. The poet worships the deity as wicked men bow their heads in reverence, and while the mighty god of death himself idly passes time with his buffalo, unable to do his job, since he cannot kill those who are engaged in the acting of worshipping Śiva. The Foreword understands the phrase, “the sinners who say ‘we ourselves are god’” (\(\text{iyāṅkaḷe kaṭavuḷ enṛiṭum pātakattavaruṁ} \)) to be a direct reference to the Māyāvādins, who unlike the Śaiva Siddhāntins reject any ultimate ontological distinction between the Self and Śiva. As with the verses referring to “Vedic Śaivism” and the Śaiva Siddhānta \(\text{cântâṅcăriyaś} \), this quote would become a favorite of Śaiva Siddhāntins eager to claim that Tāyumāṉavar identified himself with their position.

Irāmaliṅkat Tampirāṇ closes by stating that he wrote the Foreword “so that the sinners who, as in the proverb ‘What is being read is the \(\text{Tiruvācakam} \) even as what is being demolished is the Śiva temple!’, habitually slander Śaivism even as they read this book with great haste, will have their arrogant speech subdued and be saved” (p. 3).\(^{186}\) The text is thus said to be for the benefit of the deluded Māyāvādins, effectively ensuring that they do not sink still further into sin through their misinterpretation of the text. The anxiety evinced here is indicative of the new

\(^{185}\)  \(\text{pañ mukac camaya nerî [p]aṭaṭiṭtavaruṁ iyāṅkaḷe kaṭavuḷ enṛiṭum} \)
\(\text{pātakattavaruṁ vātu tarkkam iṭu paṭiṭaruṇ talai vaṇanķiṭat} \)
\(\text{taṅ mukattīl uiy varav aḷaikkum ema taɾumāṇum pakaṭu mēykkiiya y RTC} \)
\(\text{taṇṭī iruppa vaṭa niṭal iṭu valar caṇakaṭ aṭi muggōrka taṇi} \)
\(\text{coṅ mayakkām atu tīr vaṇ kai koṭu mōga ṇaṇpa am t’ uṇarttiyē} \)
\(\text{cutta niṭav arūl iyaḷpaṭ’ ākav uḷa cōmacēkara kirpāḷuḷ y RTC} \)
\(\text{teṅ mukattīṭa mukam āy irunta koḷuṇ emmukattītuṁ vaṇaṅkuṭeṇ} \)
\(\text{teṇivatark’ ariya piramamēy amala ciρ cūkōṭa yā vilācāme} \)

\(^{186}\)  … “pañṭippatu tiruvācakam – itṭippatu civaṅ kōyī’” \(\text{enṭapu pōḷ innūlaiv oṭiṭyum paṭtiṭu varuvaṭoṭu caivattaip puṇaṅkāri varum pāṭaṅk vāymatam aṭaṅkī uyaṭ poṛuṭ’ enṭapatām.} \)
patterns of textual circulation that were being facilitated by the commercialization of Tamil print culture in the nineteenth century. As scholars such as Stuart Blackburn (2003), Sascha Ebeling (2010), and A. R. Venkatachalapathy (2012) have noted, the spread of print went hand in hand with the decline of the monastic institution as an important site of Tamil literary culture, which was increasingly centered in the emerging urban center of Madras. The proliferation of print meant that the number of people who had access to religious literature expanded dramatically, and that one could no longer presume the presence of a preceptor who could explain how a particular text should be interpreted. Ebeling (2009a: 302) in particular calls attention to the new practice of incorporating critical introductions, glossaries of difficult words, indices, and other prefatory materials in printed editions as a way of supplementing the information that previously would have been provided by one’s teacher. As the Foreword demonstrates, such materials could be utilized not only to make a work more accessible, but also to counter rival interpretations and otherwise attempt to steer audiences towards a particular reading.

**Construing Vaidika Śaivism**

The controversy over Tāyumāṉavar’s identity would only continue to gain momentum over the next decades, particularly through the medium of vernacular theological journals. These journals played a major role in facilitating public debate about religion during the 1880s and 1890s, and were part of the broader explosion of polemical literature in Tamil in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Representatives of the Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta sects went back and forth attacking one another’s positions in these journals, with the former publishing in Tamil periodicals such as Nākai Nilalōcani and Žāṉāmirtam, and the latter in the bilingual Sanskrit/Tamil magazine Brahmavidyā. While most of these articles appear to have been lost, what material I have been able to find and examine suggests that the question of Tāyumāṉavar’s identity was central to a rapidly intensifying debate about the very nature of Tamil religion.

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187 It should be noted, however, that the monastic institutions themselves were also quick to seize upon the new opportunities made available by the spread of the vernacular press.

188 On the last point see Raman (forthcoming, Chapter 3).
One of the key figures involved on the Śaiva side of these “journal wars” was Cōmacuntara Nāyakar. Nāyakar actually composed an entire essay on the subject of camaracam, entitled Camaracanāṅgatīpam, or “The Lamp [that Reveals] the Knowledge of Camaracam.” Likely published in the late 1880s or 1890s in Nāyakar’s own journal, the Cittāntaratmākaram, the essay attempts to claim camaracam for the Śaiva Siddhānta sect, much as Irāmalinkat Tampirāṇ had done. The article begins with yet another quote from Tāyumāṅavar that is meant to unequivocally tie the poet to the Āgamic Śaiva tradition:

The Śaiva religion alone is the true religion. Don’t abandon this notion, which reveals the space in the hall [of Chidambaram] wherein one obtains the primordial reality beyond the sects, and enter the path of sects in which one wanders in falsehood. O people of the world! Gather together to see the divine hall that grants liberation! (v. 30.2)\textsuperscript{189}

The essay is structured around this verse, and many of the points Nāyakar makes reiterate those found in Irāmaliniṅka Tampirāṇ’s Foreword. As in the latter work, Nāyakar cites the crucial verses 14.10 and 14.11 on Vaidika Śaivism, the reference to “the sinners who say ‘we ourselves are god’” at v. 13.10, and the praise of Meykanṭār at v. 45.2.4. Nāyakar also rejects the possibility that Advaita Vedānta is implied by the term “Vedānta” in the phrase “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” on the grounds that it contradicts the essential teachings of Śaivism, i.e. the reality of god, souls, and fetters. Though he does not refer to Śrīkanṭha’s Śivādvaita, he likewise concludes that Śaiva Siddhānta is the “same taste” that unites the Vedānta and the Siddhānta.

Despite these similarities with the Foreword, however, Nāyakar situates his discussion of camaracam within a much wider context than had Irāmalinkat Tampirāṇ. The latter, as we have seen, had been content simply to assert the universality of Śaiva Siddhānta and demonstrate the incorrectness of the “Māyāvāda” interpretation of camaracam. Nāyakar, on the other hand, uses camaracam to demonstrate that Śaivism includes all other sectarian traditions within itself. This,

\textsuperscript{189} caiva camayamē camayaṅ camayaṅi troop pālam poraṅlaik kaivanīṭavē maṅrul veli kāṭum intak karuttai viṭṭup poy vant’ uḷaluṅ camaya negi pukuta vēṇṭā mutti tarun teyva capaiyaṅ kāṅpatarkuc čēra vāruṅ cekattīrē
he suggests, is what is ultimately behind Tāyumāṉavar’s assertion, “the Śaiva religion alone is the true religion.” As we saw in the last chapter, what is important for Nāyakar is to spell out how Śaivism, and Śaivism alone, can occupy a post-sectarian positionality, and to similarly delineate how and why Advaita Vedānta is Śaivism’s inferior. The Camaracanāṅgatīpam elaborates and amplifies the question of Tāyumāṉavar’s identity so that it resonates with a broader discussion about the fundamental nature of Śaivism.

Perhaps the clearest statement of what is at stake for Nāyakar in this question can be found in yet another article he published, first in Nākai Nilalocagi and then the Cittāntaratnākaram, entitled Pirahmavityā viṅkarpā niracanam, or “The Refutation of the False Notions [Published] in Brahmavidyā”. Here Nāyakar replies to an article in Brahmavidyā that critiques a fellow Śaiva Siddhāntin for denying that Śaṅkarācārya is the “world-teacher” and for claiming to be a “Vaidika Śaiva”. The author of the Brahmavidyā piece, none other than the editor of the journal himself, Rā. Śrīnivāsa Śāstrikal, had suggested that the term “Vaidika Śaiva” is a neologism, not based on authoritative scripture, and that the terms Vaidika and Śaiva properly refer to members of two separate sectarian traditions. Nāyakar defends his compatriot’s usage of the term Vaidika Śaiva, formulating his response under the heading “The Elucidation of Vaidika Śaivism” (Vaitika caiva viḷakkam). He cites Tāyumāṉavar v. 14.10 as an authoritative source for the term, and elaborates that the Vaidika leads to the Śaiva, that the Veda is the means of knowledge (piramāṇam) that designates Śiva as its object (piramēyam). Consequently, “‘Vaidika Śaivism’ and ‘Śaivism’ are the same thing” (p. 3).190 According to Nāyakar, this means that those who locate themselves solely within the Vedic tradition do not actually attain a real connection with Śiva (p. 3-4):

Therefore, only those who are able to publically proclaim, “We are Śaivas,” belong to the lineage that publically proclaims, “We are Vaidikas; we are Vaidika Śaivas.” Those who publically say, “We are not Śaivas; we are Vaidikas,” are indeed consummate atheist intellectuals.191

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190 vaitika caiva viṅkapat, caiva viṅkapat orēy ām.

191 itagāl, yām caiva oru velivarrattakkavāre (yām vaitikar, yām vaitika caiva oru) velivarrutal marapāyai’ ēgka. yām caiva ākōm, yām vaitikar oru velivarupavar parama nāstikap paṇṭitarēy āvar.
What is so fascinating about these remarks is the way that they use the term “Vaidika Śaiva” to turn what had become by that time the commonly accepted notion of “Vaidika” on its head. Those who proclaim to be Vaidikas are in fact atheists (nāstikas, lit. “deniers”), because they deny that the Vedas culminate in the Āgamic revelation of Śiva’s supremacy. On the other hand, those who are willing to publically acknowledge their exclusive devotion to Śiva are revealed to be the true Vaidikas. The article thus reveals that by the late nineteenth century Śaiva Siddhäntins had adopted the phrase “Vaidika Śaivism” to signify their own position and to use this term to assert themselves vis-à-vis their sectarian rivals. This, ultimately, is why Täyumäṉavar is so important to figures such as Cömacuntara Näyaka: the universality of phrases such as “the same taste of Vedänta-Siddhänta” and “Vaidika Śaivism” bolster the claims of Śaiva Siddhäntins to a post-sectarian universality. No less remarkable about Näyaka remarks, however, is its emphasis on the public acknowledgement of one’s religion, which speaks to the new public space that is being opened up through the medium of these journals and by print culture in general. Here we see how the debate over Täyumäṉavar is actually feeding into a wider debate about religion and the Tamil public sphere. I will return to this line of thought in the conclusion of this chapter.

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Before we get there, however, let us turn to consider the appropriation of Täyumäṉavar within the framework of late nineteenth-century Advaita Vedänta. We have already had a few glimpses of what this looks like, particularly in our discussion of Irämaliṅka Tampiräṅ’a Foreword. There, Irämaliṅka says that the Vedäntins interpret camaracam to signify the “equivalence” of their position to Śaivism. Irämaliṅka, and later Cömacuntara Näyaka, criticize this position, arguing that the phrase signifies the universality of the Śaiva tradition, which though rooted in the Veda is fully revealed in the Āgamas. As we will see, for the Vedäntins

192 Nicholson ([2010] 2011) has recently argued that in the late medieval period a widely accepted consensus had emerged regarding the meaning of the terms āstika (lit. “affirmer”) and its antonym nāstika (lit. “denier”). At this time, Nicholson suggests, Vedäntins such as Vijñänahikṣu successfully argued not only that āstika philosophies are those that accept the sanctity of the Veda, but more importantly that these schools of thought constitute “different aspects of a single, well-coordinated philosophical outlook,” an argument that laid the groundwork for later notions of Hindu unity (p. 3-4). Simultaneously, the meaning of the term nāstika became frozen as a vague pejorative that simply designated all those who did not accept the Vedas’ authority, i.e. the materialists, Buddhists, and Jains (p. 180). It is remarkable to compare this account of āstika and nāstika with Näyaka’s employment of these terms.
camaracam signifies Tāyumāṇavar’s recognition that the dualistic worship of Śiva taught in the Śaiva Āgamas ultimately culminates in the realization of one’s identity with Brahman. That is, for them Tāyumāṇavar’s poetry signifies the fact that the Śaiva tradition is subsumed within the universality of the Vedānta as interpreted by Śankarācārya. Śaivism’s “equivalence” to the Vedānta, in other words, is less a statement of parity than it is of the all-encompassing nature of Advaita Vedānta.

This position is articulated in a three-part article published in Brahmavidyā entitled “The Fierce Wind to the Māyāvāda Śaivas” (Māyāvāta caiva caṇṭa mārutam). Published in 1893-4 under the pseudonym “A Hindu” (Ōr Intu),193 the article may have been written by the journal’s editor Rā. Śrīnivāsa Śāstrikaḷ, though the author explicitly denies this in the article. It was common for the contributors of journal articles at that time to write under a pseudonym (or pseudonyms); this practice may be connected to the often acrimonious tone of the articles, though the identity of the authors was usually an open secret. Like Nāyakar’s “Refutation of the False Notions [Published] in Brahmavidyā”, “The Fierce Wind to the Māyāvāda Śaivas” is formulated as a response. The target is a series of articles written by a friend of Cōmacuntara Nāyakar named Arakkōṇavāci Vīrapattiramūrtti (also a pseudonym), who had attacked the views of one Pāṇumūrtti (yet another pseudonym), who in turn had written an article asserting that the derogatory term “Māyāvāda” (“Illusionism”) best applies to the Śaiva Siddhānta sect, not Advaita Vedānta. “The Fierce Wind to the Māyāvāda Śaivas” is thus the latest salvo in an ongoing debate between the two sects over which one is endorsed by the Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures, i.e. which one is “Vaidika”, and which should have to bear the despicable designation “Māyāvāda”.194 It is in the context of affirming that Advaita Vedānta is found in authoritative

193 I was fortunate to locate, among the poorly maintained stacks of the Maraimalai Adigal Library (now located on the top floor of the Connemara Public Library in Chennai), a volume containing seventeen articles culled from Brahmavidyā. All of these contain polemical attacks against Cōmacuntara Nāyakar, Capāpati Nāvalar, and other Śaiva Siddhāntins at the time, and appear to date from 1886 (the year the journal was first published) through the late 1890s. No explicit publication data is given for the article I discuss here, though its date can be inferred from intra-textual references to other articles and events.

194 While a consideration of the term “Māyāvāda” (Tam. māyāvātm) is beyond the scope of the present chapter, a study of its history in Sanskrit and Tamil contexts would be very useful. An important and early reference to the term in Tamil is found in the fourth section of the Tiruvācakam, which is often interpreted as a quasi-autobiographical account of Māṇikkavācaṉar’s conversion to Śaivism. At Tiruvācakam 4.54-55 the poet refers to “the fierce wind of the Māyāvāda” (māyāvātam eṣuṇi caṇṭa mārutan) that swirled around him and attempted to lead him astray. As mentioned in Chapter Three, it was Cōmacuntara Nāyakar’s dedicated opposition to Advaita Vedānta that earned him the title “The Fierce Wind of Vedic Śaiva Siddhānta” (vaitika caiva cītānta caṇṭa mārutan), an
scriptures, especially Tamil ones, that the recurring theme of the article is precisely the question of Tāyumāṉavar’s identity. Here I focus solely upon those parts of this rather lengthy piece that bear upon this question.

One of the central arguments of the article is to demonstrate that Advaita Vedānta, which it usually refers to as the “doctrine [that proclaims] ‘I am Brahman’” (akam pirama vātam), is found in authoritative texts, especially the poetry of Tāyumāṉavar. The quotations that “A Hindu” marshals to support this idea (pp.14-16) follow a pattern that is typical of his other articles as well, wherein citations from Upaniṣadic and Purānic works, always given in Tamil translation, are followed by original Tamil texts, the last of which is almost always the poems of Tāyumāṉavar. As in these other instances as well, here too the citations from Tāyumāṉavar are by far the most numerous (eleven passages in this instance), indicating the poet’s importance for “A Hindu’s” project. Here I give two of the verses quoted in their entirety, bolding the snippets that “A Hindu” cites:

Do not the Vedas which say that you are the ether and the rest [also] speak of me being you? Tell me, O Parāparam! (v. 43.108)¹⁹⁵

To bestow upon me the awareness that “you” and “I” are not different, You came in the form of the Silent Preceptor and, like a mother you prevented [me from pursuing other things], and protected me, your devotee, like a son. O supreme being! [In return] for your sacred grace, what is there for a totally destitute person [like me] to do? Does any recompense exist? (v. 27.58)¹⁹⁶

The clauses in bold are taken by the author of the article to reflect a monistic position, and to demonstrate that Tāyumāṉavar ultimately recognizes the identity of the Self with Śiva.

¹⁹⁵ vāṅ āṭi nīy ēṇaṅē vaiṅta maṟaiy eṟṟai nī tūṅ ākac collōṭō cāṟṟēy parāparamē

¹⁹⁶ nīy eṟṟa nāṅ eṟṟa vēṟ’ illaiy eṟṟa niṟaiy’ aruḷat tūṅ eṟṟa mōṟa kuruv āṅi vantu taṭiṟṭu’ aṭīmaic cēy eṟṟak kāṭṭaṅaiyē parāmē nīy tīruvaruḷukkēy eṟṟa ceyyūṅ kaimmār’ uḷata cuttav ēḷaiyarē
A related issue “A Hindu” (pp. 20-24) raises is what Tāyumāṉavar means when he speaks of the world as being a “falsehood” (poy), a “mirage” (pēy tēr, lit. “ghoul chariot”), or some similar term, as in the following verse:

When I call the whole world that appears “utter falsehood”  
and take on the form of that wisdom called “truth”,  
My Lord!  
Won’t that be the very time that I no longer have cares? (v. 42.18)

In the article to which “A Hindu” replies, Arakkōṇavāci insists that such declarations of the falsity of the world must be understood in the context of the doctrines of Meykaṇṭār, author of the foundational Śaiva Siddhānta work Civaṉāṉapōtam, and not in the context of Śaṅkarācārya’s theology. That is, Arakkōṇavāci suggests that Tāyumāṉavar follows Meykaṇṭār in devaluing the world in relation to Śiva without denying its ultimate existence, rather than following Śaṅkara in saying that the world is an impermanent illusion. To defend this line of reasoning, Arakkōṇavāci predictably cites Tāyumāṉavar’s praise of Meykaṇṭār in v. 45.2, as well as his supposed critique of Advaita Vedānta at v. 13.10; these are verses which we have already seen are central to the exegesis of the poet within Śaiva Siddhānta circles.

“A Hindu’s” reply to these arguments is multi-faceted. Among his counter-arguments are the claims that 1) Meykaṇṭār’s Civaṉāṉapōtam is actually a monistic work that denies the world’s ultimate reality (p. 20); 2) when Tāyumāṉavar speaks of māyā he denies its ultimate existence, as at v. 2.4 where he explicitly describes it as “non-existence” (illāmai) and at v. 15.1 where he compares it to a hare’s horn and other objects that do not really exist (p. 22); and 3) when Tāyumāṉavar speaks of “the sinners who say ‘we ourselves are god,’” he actually refers to the Buddhists (p. 24, pp. 52-54). The article also supports its reading of Tāyumāṉavar by referring to the social context in which the poetry is read. Following a suggestion that Pāṇumūrtti makes, “A Hindu” maintains that Śaiva Siddhānta monastic institutions like Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai do not formally study Tāyumāṉavar’s corpus, and that this fact demonstrates their theological distance from the poet. On the other hand, since Advaita Vedānta texts are studied in the Tāyumāṉaswamy maṭam in Trichy, it is reasonable to assume that Tāyumāṉavar’s lineage is one

197 poruntu cakam agaittigaïyum poy poyy egru  
pukaraṇapati meyy egrē pōta rēpatt’  
irunpatīy egrı’ iruppat’ aŋrē aŋrōv  
emperumāŋ yāŋ kaivalaiy eytāk kālam
that accepts the doctrine of monism (pp. 71 ff.). Yet another portion of the article responds to several phrases from the poetry that Arakkōṇavāci and Cōmacuntara Nāyakar cite in their works as proof that Tāyumāṉavar acknowledges a distinction between Śiva and the soul. These include statements where Tāyumāṉavar speaks of the soul’s relationship to “primordial stain” (āṇava malam), as at v. 4.6 and v. 4.7. “A Hindu” parries these arguments by resorting to the well-established Advaita doctrine of the two levels of truth: whenever Tāyumāṉavar speaks of the soul’s limitations or distinction from Śiva, he is speaking at the level of māyā, but when he speaks of the non-difference of the Self and Śiva, he describes the ultimate state (pp. 130 ff.).

What is at stake in all of this can perhaps best be observed by examining “A Hindu’s” remarks on the term “Vaidika Śaivism”, which occur toward the very beginning of the article. Arakkōṇavāci had taken Śrīnīvāsa Śāstrikaḷ to task for splitting the terms “Vaidika” and “Śaivism” and maintaining that they denote two different sects. This is precisely the same point Cōmacuntara Nāyakar argues against in the introduction to his Pirahmavityā vikarpa niracanam. According to the Śaiva Siddhāntin, such statements just prove that Śrīnīvāsa Śāstri isn’t a real Śaiva. “A Hindu”, who as I said above may be Śrīnīvāsa Śāstri himself, replies to such remarks in the following manner (pp. 18-19):

Since there is the inclusion of Śaivism within the Vaidika, it is not necessary to divide them separately. Nevertheless, since [Arakkōṇavāci] calls himself a Śaiva and slanders the Veda, Śrīnīvāsa Śāstri speaks of “Vaidika Śaivism” only in order to differentiate [himself] from him. This is a new usage of the term… It appears necessary, for those Vaidikas who do not slander the Vedas, to call themselves Vaidika Śaivas in these times, in order to avoid the misleading conflation of [all] Śaivas with those who slander the Vedas.198

Thus “A Hindu” explains that the term “Vaidika Śaivism” is redundant, since Śaivism is included within the Vaidika. He also highlights the newness of the term, claiming that Śrīnīvāsa Śāstri uses it merely to differentiate himself from non-Vedic Śaivas like Arakkōṇavāci. In other words, the usage of this term is necessary because it helps distinguish those who worship Śiva while remaining in the Vedic path from those who claim to be Śaivas but whose practice is external to the Vedas. There is also an implication in this passage that the Śaiva Siddhāntin

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198 vaitikam eppatil caivam ajam⎧ḥ vittamaiyāl vēru pirippatu āvacyayakam aprāyigum caivam eypu pēr vaittuk koṇṭu vēṭa tūṣaṇān ceykīṅgār ākaiyāl avaripiyum vēru pirintu kolvatarkē śrīnīvāca cāṭrīyār avarkāḷ vaitika caivam eṛāg collopedia. itu niṭṭāna vaiṭkē… caivar eppil vēṭa tūṣakar eṇap porulpati irukkumāṛu vēṭa tūṣakar allāṭa vaiṭikar, vaitika caivar eṛāg colik koḷṭa veṇṭuvaṭi ikkāḷattuṭku āvacyayakam āṭm.
appropriation of Vaidika Śaivism for their own position is a novelty, something not attested to in scripture.

What is revealed in this passage is the remarkable fact that “A Hindu” and Śrīnivāsa Śāstri, assuming they are different people, of course, are also attempting to claim the mantle of Vaidika Śaivism. Tāyumāṉavar has thus become central to the way in which both Śaiva Siddhāntins and Advaita Vedāntins have come to understand their own position vis-à-vis one another. Yet it is no less important to register the difference between the approach of the two sects towards this critical term. “Vaidika Śaivism” is important to the Advaita Vedāntins because it signifies that the Āgamas, and by extension the Tamil scriptures based thereupon, are ultimately subsumed within the Vedic tradition. In other words, Tāyumāṉavar enables them to stake a claim to the local, vernacular tradition of Śaiva worship in which they already participate. At the same time, however, they also want to put some distance between themselves and the term – thus the qualification that Vaidika Śaivism is a neologism – since they do not want to lose their broader claim to universality through the pan-Indic Vedic tradition. I will explore this tension further in the next chapter.

Towards Modern Tamil Religion

In a recent article, Michael Bergunder ([2010] 2011) examines Je. Em. Nallacāmip Piḷḷai’s (1864-1920) assertion that Śaiva Siddhānta is a universal religion. This piece is highly insightful on a number of different levels. It is the first serious attempt to analyze the work of a very important Śaiva intellectual. Bergunder successfully critiques what he calls the “established scholarly narrative of Tamil Saivism in colonial South India” for ignoring this figure (p. 30). He also considers whether the notion of universal religion might have existed in the Tamil tradition prior to Nallacāmip Piḷḷai. Although he ultimately ties this concept to developments within Western intellectual culture in the nineteenth century (p. 77), he speculates on the impact that the local vernacular context might have had on Nallacāmip Piḷḷai’s appropriation of this idea, and acknowledges the need for further research into contemporary Śaiva Siddhānta intellectual traditions (p. 78). He even surmises that prior to figures such as Nallacāmip Piḷḷai, the lines between Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta may have been blurrier than they seem today (p. 78-81).
The present chapter helps to contextualize some of the many important issues Bergunder raises with respect to the formation of modern Tamil religion. Rather than see the concept of universal religion as something developed in the West that is then creatively appropriated by the East, it may be more productive to think about how gestures towards universality already present in the work of figures such as Tāyumāṇavar are being adapted and reworked in the colonial period. It seems counterintuitive to me to deny that such gestures are present in phrases like “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” or “Vaidika Śaivism”. Indeed, this tradition of reflecting upon the universality and the canonicity of Śaivism in the Tamil context appears to be quite old, going back at least as far as the Tirumantiram if not still earlier. Furthermore, it needs to be recognized that the universality invoked in Tāyumāṉavar’s corpus is only one of many that emerged in the precolonial period; someone like Civācāriyar or Civaṉa Muṉivar, for instance, might have had a different notion of how this universality was constituted.

Even before we can begin to answer questions about how the modern Western notion of universal religion gets appropriated in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, then, it is necessary to analyze how these earlier, vernacular conceptions of universality are being brought into a wider conversation about religion in the colonial period. Print culture appears to be playing a fundamental role in this process, bringing earlier traditions of religious reflection to new and wider audiences, and providing novel platforms, such as printed books, treatises, journals, etc., in which these traditions can be debated. Print, in other words, is not just functioning as a medium for bringing in the new, but it is also serving to reinvigorate the old, enabling these vernacular traditions to participate in contemporary debates about the emerging public sphere.

In the case of Tāyumāṇavar, a particularly compelling notion of universality is being taken up by a number of different communities, virtually simultaneously, and is becoming the focus for a major discussion about the nature of Tamil religion. In the course of explicating this poet, these communities, especially the Siddhāntins and the Vedāntins, work out competing narratives of how Tamil religion should be construed. Thus the discussion about Tāyumāṇavar is facilitating a process whereby religious boundaries are coming in greater relief. As we have mentioned, it is the underlying tensions in the poetry itself, the ambiguity between the sectarian and the post-sectarian, or, put another way, between Śaivism, on the one hand, and civam, on the other, that is so productive for these groups as they come to a clearer understanding of
themselves vis-à-vis one another. Each of these sects reinterprets Tāyumāṉavar in its own way, and much of this chapter has been devoted to understanding how they do this. Yet they also follow him as well, preserving the central ambivalence between sect and post-sect in their individual explications of camaracam. It may therefore be that the modern Western notion of universal religion is only the latest addition to what is essentially a complex, ongoing conversation spanning several centuries, at the center of which lies a question about how Tamil Śaivism relates to broader religious contexts.

In closing it is appropriate to make a few brief and somewhat cursory remarks about what appears to me to have been the fate of these three readings of Tāyumāṉavar after the nineteenth century. The Vīraśaiva interpretation, which may ultimately be the closest to Tāyumāṉavar theologically, generally appears to have been overshadowed by the high-volume polemics engaged in by the Siddhāntins and the Vedāntins. This reading of Tāyumāṉavar through the lens of an unmarked, pan-sectarian Śaivism never really goes away, but it does seem to have been relegated to the level of unofficial, oral discourse, where it persists at the interstices of the rigid narratives of Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta. On the other hand, the Śaiva Siddhānta interpretation appears to have become the normative position by and large. This is reflected in much of the twentieth-century scholarship that has been produced on Tāyumāṉavar, which tends to interpret him as a Śaiva Siddhāntin with an unusually capacious sense of religious truth. In this regard, the Siddhāntins may be said to have won the debate with the Vedāntins. As for the latter, their attempts to claim the poet for themselves appear to have been hampered by the qualified way in which they embrace the vernacular Śaiva tradition. I will discuss this issue in greater depth in the next chapter. At the same time, this is not to minimize the popularity that Tāyumāṉavar continues to enjoy among this community. In the 1960s and ‘70s, for instance, the Sri Ramakrishna Math published copies of Tāyumāṉavar’s poems with the commentary of Cuvāmi Citpavāṇantar, and these continue to be in print today. To a certain extent, then, the question of who Tāyumāṉavar really was has never been fully resolved, and the debate over his identity continues to simmer within contemporary sectarian circles, albeit at a relatively low heat. It is the subtle continuation of such local disputes in the seemingly post-sectarian twentieth century to which the next chapter turns.
I wander about Chingleput till evening, exploring its artistic, old-world beauty, and then seek a final glimpse of His Holiness before returning home. I find him in the largest temple of the city. The slim, modest, yellow-robed figure is addressing a huge concourse of men, women and children. Utter silence prevails among the large audience. I cannot understand the vernacular words, but I can understand that he is holding the deep attention of all present, from the intellectual Brahmin to the illiterate peasant. I do not know, but I hazard the guess that he speaks on the profoundest topics in the simplest manner, for such is the character I read in him.\footnote{Brunton ([1934] 1964: 94).}

Such is the esotericist Paul Brunton’s description of Cantiracēkarēntira Carasvati Cuvāmikāḷ (Candraśekharendra Sarasvāti Svāmī, 1894-1994), the sixty-eighth “universal preceptor” (Skt. jagadguru) of the Kāṇci Kāmakōṭi Pīṭha, a major monastic institution (Skt. matha) in the city of Kanchipuram in South India. Brunton, who elsewhere refers to Cantiracēkarēntira as “the spiritual head of South India”,\footnote{See Ibid.: 83 ff. This phrase was initially suggested to Brunton by K. S. Venkataramani.} paints a picture of a Hindu holy man expounding the eternal secrets of the universe to the masses in their native tongue. We may take exception to certain elements in Brunton’s portrayal of this scene: his fetishizing of the “old-world beauty” of India, his romantic depiction of the speaker, his glossing over the social differences amongst members of the audience, his presumption to interpret what is going on despite his admitted ignorance of the language. But what Brunton does capture in this vignette is the fact that Cantiracēkarēntira did deliver lectures in the vernacular to crowds of devoted followers over the course of the twentieth century. These public discourses helped to establish him as the preeminent religious leader of the Tamil Śmaṛta Brahmin community, to whom he is still affectionately known as “supreme teacher” (paramācārya), “great lord” (mahāsvāmī), and “great one” (periyavāḷ[ ]). No more concrete signs of his enduring legacy could there be than the popular printed images of him that are to this day ubiquitous in Tamil Nadu, especially in areas with a large Brahmin presence. These portraits invariably depict the ascetic cloaked in ochre robes, his wiry frame bearing the traditional staff (danda) and rudraksha-seed necklace, his broad forehead smeared with sacred
ash, and his intelligent and often bespectacled eyes peering out from his serious, gray-bearded face.

Who was this man who became, quite literally, one of the most recognizable faces of Hinduism in modern South India? Cantiracēkarēntira, né Svāminātan, was born on May 20, 1894 in the town of Viluppuram in what was then South Arcot district.201 He was the second child of Subrahmaṇya Śāstrī and Mahālakṣmī Ammāḷ, Kannada-speaking Smārta Brahmins whose ancestors had settled in the Tamil country during the Nāyaka period. As a youth he attended the Arcot American Mission School in Tindivanam, where he excelled in his studies. An anecdote recounting his exceptional performance in a school production of Shakespeare’s King John attests to his early rhetorical skills and mastery of English. During this period, Svāminātan’s maternal cousin was selected to become the sixty-seventh head of the Kāmakōṭi Pīṭha, which was then based in Kumbakonam, after the sixty-sixth head had passed away. However, the cousin soon died as well, and Svāmināthan was formally consecrated as the sixty-eighth jagadguru202 on February 13, 1907, when he was just thirteen years old. He spent the next several years engaged in formal Sanskrit study, but also exhibited a keen interest in topics as varied as musicology, photography, math, astronomy, and epigraphy. In 1919 he embarked upon a tour of sacred sites in India that would last twenty-one years, culminating in a visit to Benares in 1934. It was during this time that he began to lecture widely on religious matters. After returning to the South, he devoted the bulk of his time and energy to reviving what he understood to be Vedic culture. Traveling through towns and cities like Kanchipuram (1953-1957) and Madras (1957-1959), he advocated for the construction of Vedic schools (Skt. pāṭhasālās), convened conferences of traditional religious scholars, and organized public recitations of devotional songs. In the early 1970s he gradually began to withdraw from public life, retreating to a small hut near Kanchipuram where he spoke infrequently. In 1994 he passed away at the age of one hundred years old. Since in the Vedas one hundred years is reckoned to be the earthly equivalent of immortality, it may be said that Cantiracēkarēntira, even in his death, continued to promote a Vedic vision of the ideal human life.

201 This paragraph draws upon Mahadevan (1975: 14-71).

202 For a general introduction to the modern tradition of the Šaṅkarācāryas, see Cenkner (1983: 109 ff.). For further information on Cantiracēkarēntira and the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram, see Cenkner (1992).
This chapter is concerned with the scene Brunton describes in the epigraph. What did this “slim, modest, yellow-robed figure” actually say to the audience? What was it about his message that had the crowd so enthralled? While no recordings of that particular lecture are known to exist, Cantiracēkarēntira’s followers fortunately did preserve transcriptions of many other lectures that he delivered over the course of his long life. Many of these transcriptions have found their way into a seven-volume edited collection entitled Teyvattin Kural, or The Voice of God (hereafter, *TK*). This text, which was published by Vāṇati Patippakam between 1976 and 2000, brings together nearly half a century’s worth of public religious teaching and provides a window onto the thought of one of the most influential Smārtas intellectuals of the twentieth century. Given Cantiracēkarēntira’s popularity among Tamil Smārtas, it is not surprising that the *TK* achieved the degree of success that it did; the first volume alone has gone through no less than thirty-five editions, and the collection is still available at major South Indian booksellers like Giri Traders in Chennai.

In Chapter Four, we saw how exclusivist sectarian narratives crystallized in the late nineteenth century around the figure of Tāyumāṉavar. In the present chapter, I am interested in asking what the *TK* can tell us about what is happening to sectarianism as we move into the post-colonial context. Has sectarianism been absorbed into a “deterritorialized” (Roy 2004: 38) modern Hinduism? Or is something else happening to sectarianism in this apparently post-sectarian moment and, if so, what? As in the last chapter, where the term “Vaidika Śaivism” (*vaitika caivam*) was seen to be crucial to the new narratives of religious identity emerging at that time, so in the *TK* it is the term “Vaidika religion” (*vaitikam matam*) that assumes a position of central importance. Indeed, if one were to distill the hundreds of discourses that comprise the *TK* into a single message, it would be that Tamil-speaking Smārt Brahmins must revive the ancient Vaidika religion to which they are the rightful heirs. We will consequently pay much attention in this chapter to how the term Vaidika is deployed in the text.

While Smārtas have long been associated with Vedic orthodoxy in South India, I will argue that the *TK* fundamentally reinterprets what the Vaidika is in its very call to resuscitate and reinvigorate it. Specifically, in the *TK* the Vaidika is no longer strictly identified, as in ancient

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times, with the proper performance of Vedic ritual nor, as in the medieval period, with a
devotionalism rooted in highly specific ritual and sectarian contexts. Instead, the text recasts the
Vaidika as a universal monotheistic religion, albeit one that recognizes the worship of many
deities as forms of the one supreme Self, paramātmā. This recasting necessarily implies a
corresponding decontextualization and universalization of a Smārta religious perspective; in the
TK the Smārta Brahmin is conflated with the social category of “the Hindu”. At the same time,
however, I will also argue that the text’s articulation of the Vaidika is inextricably linked to a set
of local issues broadly concerned with what it means to be Brahmin, what it means to be Smārta,
and what it means to be Tamil. I will examine how the text formulates distinct strategies to
respond to these different kinds of pressures, strategies that coexist alongside one another even
as they fulfill very different functions. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how the TK participates
in a modern universalized Hindu discourse, yet one that remains embedded within an irreducibly
regional and vernacular milieu.

Reading the TK

Before plunging into an analysis of the content of the TK it is necessarily to say a few
words about the form, audience, and editing of the text, as well as how I intend to read it. As a
collection of recorded religious discourses, the TK can be located within a tradition of public
religious discourse in the Tamil-speaking part of the subcontinent that stretches back, in its
modern form, to the arrival of European missionaries. By the middle of the nineteenth century,
and in direct response to the proselytizing efforts of these missionaries, Ārumuka Nāvalar of
Jaffna became the first indigenous religious teacher to adopt this method of conveying religious
instruction.204 In previous chapters we have alluded to the fact that Īcīr Caccitāñanta Cuvāmikaḷ

204 See Hudson (1992b), Bate (2005), and Ambalavanar (2006). In analyzing Nāvalar’s adoption of the form of the
Methodist sermon, Bate (2005: 478) stresses the Śaiva’s radical break from an earlier tradition of public recitation
(piracāṅkam) of devotional literature in the temple. Ambalavanar (2006: 93), on the other hand, sees both continuity
and rupture at play in Nāvalar’s sermons:

Navalar’s insistence on books and preaching, while mimicking features of missionary practice, also fuses
the older forms of Caiva teaching with colonial innovations. Oral communication was central to the
paramparai tradition of an ācāriyar teaching his students, a practice that Navalar defended as fundamental
to the transmission of Caiva textual traditions even into the age of print. But the demand that the preachers
must preach the teaching of books to a public marks Navalar’s transition to the creation of a Caiva public.

We can also interpret Cantiracēkāntira as attempting to create a public of his own, though in this case it is an
explicitly Vaitika public rather than a Caiva one.
and Cōmacuntara Nāyakar also spoke publically on a variety of religious matters. Cantiracēkarēntira continues this tradition, though he appears to be the first figure from the Smārta community to take on public sermonizing in a major way.

The TK is almost entirely addressed to a Smārta Brahmin audience. To be sure, there is no doubt that others also came to hear Cantiracēkarēntira speak; recall Brunton’s assertion that he held the attention of everyone “from the intellectual Brahmin to the illiterate peasant”. Yet as we will see, the text is preoccupied with issues that are of particular concern to the Smārta Brahmin community. Further evidence of the audience is suggested by the fact that the grammatical person used throughout most of the work is the first-person plural; the text constantly refers to “our religion”, “our scripture”, etc. This matter of the audience of the text is important to bear in mind as we proceed, since it is possible that how Cantiracēkarēntira represents himself to Smārtas may be different from the way that he represents himself to non-Smārtas, including Westerners. I will return to this issue in the conclusion of the chapter.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the role of the editor in shaping the discourses as they are presented in the text. The TK was edited by Rā. Kaṇapati (1935-2012), a writer for the Tamil weekly magazine Kalki and a devotee of Cantiracēkarēntira. Kaṇapati compiled the discourses from various sources, including talks that had been previously published in Kalki and other magazines, hand-written letters, recorded interviews, and audiotapes. According to Kaṇapati, the discourses were delivered over a period of forty years, from about 1932 to 1972 (TK vol. 1: 13). Kaṇapati is forthright about having edited the talks to a considerable extent. For example, he tells us that he selected discourses delivered at different times and places and grouped them together into sections according to topic. He also assigns each discourse its own title. Furthermore, while Kaṇapati says that he endeavored to present the discourses exactly as Cantiracēkarēntira had given them, he also admits that he sometimes altered the form and content of the discourses in an effort to make the text read more smoothly. Thus conversations between Cantiracēkarēntira and others are typically reformatted as monologues (p. 16). On occasion, Kaṇapati also added words or even whole sentences when he felt these would assist the flow of a particular discourse, or to fill a perceived gap in Cantiracēkarēntira’s explanation of a particular issue (vol. 3: x-xi). It should thus be clear that the TK is not an exact reproduction of Cantiracēkarēntira’s speech; it rather reflects a complex creative process involving multiple people and several stages of recording, editing, and arranging. While we cannot be sure that every single word in the TK is
his, we can be reasonably confident that the text conveys a sense of what he actually said to audiences during the twentieth century.

The most obvious way that Kaṇapati shapes the discourses is by arranging them into topical sections and subsections. All seven volumes begin and end with a benedictory section (Maṅkāḷārampam and Maṅkāḷāratti, respectively). The middle sections differ for each volume, though several section titles are repeated across volumes, including “Non-Duality” (Atvaitam: vols. 1, 2, 4, and 6), “Religion” (Matam: vols. 1, 2, and 3), “Guru” (Kuru: vols. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7), “Culture” (Panpātu: vols. 1, 3, 4, and 7), and “Society” (Samūham: vols. 1, 3, and 7). Volume Five contains a lengthy section on Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (Śrī caṅkara caritam), and Volume Six contains one on the Saundaryalaharī. Each section generally reads as a coherent whole. However, as Kaṇapati himself states, there is a great deal of repetition of themes across different sections (TK vol. 1: 20). Such repetition is of course to be expected in a work that comprises speeches delivered by a single person over the course of nearly half a century. The repetition also signifies that the TK is not a work that one simply picks up and starts reading from the first page of Volume One to the last page of Volume Seven. Rather, it is a kind of religious encyclopedia; the reader can choose a volume at random, locate in the table of contents a topic of particular interest, and begin reading.

The TK runs nearly seven thousand seven hundred pages, an average of about one thousand one hundred pages per volume. Within this massive text, Cantiracēkarēntira discusses everything from the mythology of the god Kumārasvāmi, to contemporary political corruption, to the intricacies of Vedic prosody. Obviously, it is not possible to do justice to such a large and wide-ranging work in a single chapter. Despite this internal complexity, however, the text is remarkably consistent in terms of its core message regarding the necessity of Brahmīns to revive Vedic dharma. This consistency is only reinforced by the substantial repetition of themes found across the volumes. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus primarily, though not exclusively, on the first volume of the text. This initial volume lays out Cantiracēkarēntira’s fundamental religious vision, which is further elaborated in the remainder of the work. Even within this volume, I focus on what I perceive to be three key discussions relating to caste, sect, and language. By triangulating the concerns with which these three strands of the text are
preoccupied, I would argue that it is possible to grasp the general outlook of the text as a whole.\textsuperscript{205}

**The Duty of the Brahmin**

At the heart of the *TK* is a concern for what it calls “Vaidika religion” (*vaitika matam*). Virtually all of the text’s discourses can ultimately be traced back to this one master concept. Therefore, any analysis of the text would do well to begin by considering what this term means for Cantiracēkarēntira. The most explicit treatment of this topic comes near the beginning of the first volume, in a crucial section appropriately titled “Vaidika religion” (*TK* vol. 1: 161-322). At the outset of this rather lengthy discussion, in a discourse entitled “The Religion Without a Name” (*Peyar illāta matam*), readers are informed that while it is common to speak today of Hinduism (*hintu matam*), this term was first used by persons living outside of India, and is not found in the ancient scriptures themselves (p. 162). Even the names Vaidika religion and eternal dharma (*sanātāṇa tarmam*) are not attested in the texts. Instead, “when one looks at our foundational scriptures, they do not indicate any name for this religion at all” (p. 163).\textsuperscript{206} Although this silence would appear at first glance to signify some kind of lack or defect, it actually demonstrates that this religion is older than all the others, for “it is only when there are many religions that one needs to give a name to one of them in order to distinguish it from another” (p. 164).\textsuperscript{207} Unlike other religions, which were established by historical figures at particular moments in time, the Vaidika has no founder; it is the primordial religion (*āti matam*, p. 164). Its foundational texts, the Vedas, are eternal and authorless (*apauruṣēyamāka*, p. 165). If, he goes one, his audience were to understand the nature of Vaidika religion in this way, “we will attain satisfaction, knowing that we have the great good fortune of being the inheritors of the

\textsuperscript{205} For the interested reader who lacks a knowledge of Tamil, the *TK* is available in English translation under the title *The Voice of God*, published by the Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Peetarohana Shatabdi Mahotsava Trust in 2006. Selections from the *TK* have also been published in English as *The Guru Tradition: The Voice of the Guru* (1991, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidyā Bhavan), *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life* (1995, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidyā Bhavan), and *Introduction to Hindu Dharma* (2008, Bloomington: World Wisdom). The last of these contains some excellent restored color photographs of the *jagadguru*.

\textsuperscript{206} nammuṭaiya āṭāra nūlkalai pārkkumpōtu inta matattukku entap peyarumē kūrippiṭavillai.

\textsuperscript{207} palvēṟu mataṅkaḷ irukkiṟapōtuttaṅ ongiruntu ḫṟṇṟṇṟṟukku vittvācam terivataṅkākap peyar koṭukkāṉṟum.
beginningless religion that follows the Vedas, which came into existence as the very breath of the supreme Self” (p. 166). 208

Cantiracakāntira asserts that this nameless religion was once spread over the whole world, and that traces of it can still be detected in non-Indic cultures. He substantiates these claims by drawing on bits of archaeological findings, anthropological reports, and his own intuitions about the origins of particular words, myths, and rituals. For example, he points to an ancient Egyptian treaty that is said to refer to the Vedic deities Mitra and Varuṇa, and to a picture he once saw in a book that depicts Australian Aborigines dancing with what he perceived to be third eyes painted on their foreheads (in purported imitation of the three-eyed Hindu god Śiva). Other links, some of them rather amusing, are established by apparent phonemic similarities. Thus “Aztec” is said to derive from the Sanskrit word for “affirmer [of the Vedas]” (āstika), and “California” is said to be a corruption of “the hermitage of [the Vedic sage] Kapila” (kapilāśrama), which according to Purānic legend was reached by the sons of Sagara when they dug through the earth in search of the sacrificial horse. Just as Vaidika religion is said to be the origin of the world’s indigenous cultures, so it is said to be the ultimate source for the great world religions that have come to largely replace them. Cantiracakāntira demonstrates this by pointing to the story of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge, which according to him is a misreading of the well-known Upaniṣadic parable in which two birds perch on a pipal tree, the first eating of the tree’s fruit while the second looks on with disinterest. While the Upaniṣadic tale teaches that the supreme Self (the second bird) does not experience the “fruit” of the body’s actions, according to the biblical narrative, which being composed long after the Upaniṣad has forgotten this original meaning, the Self (Adam) eats the fruit and must therefore endure the effects of karma (TK vol. 1: 167-175).

A footnote (see p. 168) to the aforementioned discussion cites a text entitled Hindu Superiority by Har Bilas Sarda, the biographer of Dayananda Saraswati and a prominent member of the Ārya Samāj. Sarda’s work builds upon ideas that had been earlier articulated by Dayananda, drawing on a range of contemporary Western scholarship to argue that ancient Hindu civilization constituted the greatest civilization the world had ever seen. In an important

208 paramātmāviṇ āsvaṇaḥ kavacanāvā śrutakappāṇaḥ abhiññakaḥ ānāti matattī nāsītī śāstantaḥ viśeṣhakaḥ vantirukkum makā pākkiyam namakkā kāṭiyivukkārata nēru pūrrippu atāivōm.
chapter entitled “Hindu Colonization of the World”, Sarda claims that, following the ancient Mahābhārata war, Indians emigrated to the far corners of the earth, bringing with them their Hindu traditions and thus laying the foundation for the subsequent development of the world’s major cultural traditions, from Egypt to Scandinavia to the Americas ([1907] 1971: 113-161). Here the idea that “traces” of Hinduism persist in these cultures is elaborated extensively, and several of the examples Sarda mentions are repeated in the *TK*. As Dalmia ([1997] 2010: 411-413) demonstrates in her study of Bharatendu Harischandra, such ideas were by no means limited to reformist movements like the Ārya Samāj; the notion that Hinduism preceded and influenced Christianity rather than the other way around had, by the late nineteenth century, become part of mainstream Hindu ideology in the Hindi-speaking regions of North India. Cantiracēkarēntīra thus adopts a notion of a Vedic Golden Age that was formulated in the colonial period as part of a Hindu intellectual response to the West, one that adapted the latter’s historicizing methodologies and perspectives but turned them against their source. The point I wish to stress here is that his conception of Vaidika religion is articulated precisely in terms of a modern Hindu discourse that is familiar from other regions of India, one that is primarily interested in asserting the historical primacy and cultural superiority of Hinduism vis-à-vis the West.

Unlike Sarda and Dayananda, however, and more like Harischandra, Cantiracēkarēntīra does not associate his assertion of a Vedic Golden Age with a corresponding call to reform corrupted elements of contemporary Hindu society. His is an invitation to protect, preserve, and revive, not to change. Much of the “Vaidika Religion” section in fact consists of a defense of the institution of caste against the critique of unnamed “reformers” (*cīrtiruttakkārarkal*) who wish to eradicate it. The institution of caste and life-stages (*varṇācrama tarmam*, Skt. *varṇāśrama dharma*), is said to constitute, along with the doctrines of rebirth, divine incarnation (*avatāram*), and the simultaneous unity and plurality of divinity (see below), a defining feature of Vaidika religion. While ethical systems can be found in religions other than Hinduism, these pale in comparison to the comprehensive “sociological foundation” (the English term is used) that caste provides for human life (*TK* vol. 1: 188-189). Cantiracēkarēntīra argues that, in the past, caste was a benign institution that ensured the welfare of society by assigning different tasks to different groups of people. There was no sense of superiority or inferiority among the castes, as all performed the jobs that god had prescribed for them for the good of the world (*lōka*
ksēmrtaṁ), which in turn contributed to their spiritual benefit (ātma ksēmrtaṁkavum, TK vol. 1: 191-192). It is therefore not the persistence of caste in modern times that is responsible for the ills of modern Indian society, but rather its decline. In the absence of caste, people seek employment based merely on their personal inclinations. Driven by an insatiable desire for money, they have become selfish and compete ruthlessly with one another for profit and prestige (p. 193). The sense of unity in diversity that characterized Indian caste society in former times has given way to mutual antagonisms, crime, and a general lack personal fulfillment (pp. 202-205). The irony of all this is that even as Indians rush to achieve a lofty status by imitating America and the Soviet Union, these countries, either despite or because of their riches, are rife with unhappiness and jealousy (pp. 210-211).

At this point in the text the defense of caste is turned around in a remarkable fashion into a devastating critique of the modern-day Brahmin, who since the coming of the British has failed to perform his prescribed duties. As Cantiracēkarēntira puts it, if Brahmins were to ask who is responsible for the decline of caste practices, they would have no one but themselves to blame (pp. 223-224):

The Brahmin abandoned the study of the Veda and the performance of rites that are his duties. He abandoned his duty. Then he abandoned his native place. Having left the villages he came to the city. He abandoned the caste practices that pertained to him as well as their external symbols. He adopted a [Western-style] short haircut. He put on a suit. Abandoning the study of the Vedas that had been enjoined upon him, he fell to the secular studies of the White Man. He fell to the jobs [the White Man] gave him. In addition, he copied [the White Man’s] behavior, dress, and attitudes. Abandoning to the wind the great, lofty dharma that [Brahmins], from the Vedic seers to his grandfather and father, had protected for generations, he, out of a desire for mere money and for the gratification of his senses, fell down into the new education, science, employment, lifestyle, and entertainment of the Western countries. 209

As soon as the Brahmins, who had traditionally been role-models for the rest of society, abandoned their traditional vocation and started to ape the West, other communities followed suit in a disastrous chain reaction of social and moral decay. Everyone now competed with everyone

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209 pirāmaṇaṁ taṁ kaṭamaiyākiya vēta atyayaṇaṭṭaiyum, karmānuṣṭāṇaṭṭaiyum viṭṭāṁ. kaṭamaiyai viṭṭā. appuṇaṁ ūrai viṭṭān. kirāmaṇkai viṭṭu pāṭṭamaṭṭukku vantāñ. taatkūriya ūcāraṇikaḷai, ataṅ veli ataṅyālaṅkaḷai viṭṭān. kirāp vaatukk contag. ēpulsi āṭṭukk contag. taṅkkru ēṛpiṭa viṭṭap pāṭṭpi viṭṭu vēḷaiṅkaḷaṅpīpī pāṭṭipīl pōy viḷùntān. atōtu, avaaṇaṭiya naṭai utai pāṉagai ellāvaṟṟaiyum ‘kāpi’ aṭṭiṭṭaṅ. vaḷiṅvaḷyaṅkā vēṭarīṣikaliliruntu pāṭṭaṅ, appaṅvarai rakṣitā vanta maṅṅamattāṅma tarmattaṅkā kāṟṟilē viṭṭviṭṭu, vēṟṟum paṅṭattacākkākavum intirya caukkiyattukkākavum, putiya mēṇaṭṭuṭa pāṭippu, sayag, uttiyōkam, vāḷkkai muṟai, kēḷkkai iyavṟil pōy viḷuntu viṭṭāṅ.
else, and the Brahmin became the object of distrust and resentment. To make matters even worse, it was at this very moment, when Brahmins were beginning to abandon their age-old duties, that they assumed an air of superiority vis-à-vis other castes, further exacerbating the ill-will that was increasingly directed towards them (TK vol. 1: 224 ff.).

This harsh evaluation of the Brahmin’s current deplorable state is crucial to the TK’s religious vision. For Cantiracēkaṟēntira, the problems of modern Indian society are not attributed, as is often the case in modern Hindu and Hindu nationalist discourses, to the arrival of Muslims in the early second millennium. The relative absence of the Muslim from the text may reflect the fact that Islam was perceived to have never exerted the same kind of influence in South India that it was thought to have done in the North. Rather, the real disaster is said to have occurred much more recently, with the arrival of the British and the subsequent urbanization of the Brahmin. The late nineteenth-century shift of Tamil Brahmins from agrarian villages to Madras and other urban centers has recently been analyzed by Christopher Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan (2014). These scholars demonstrate how Brahmins successfully navigated this transition by abandoning many of the external markers of elite caste status that had, in earlier times, functioned to distinguish them from the rest of society, while maintaining a distinct caste identity by conflating a modern middle-class ethos with “traditional” Brahminical values. According to Fuller and Narasimhan, this strategy enabled Brahmins to take advantage of the new employment opportunities opened up by colonialism and, later, the global economy, at the same time as it facilitated their reinscription as a “middle-class caste” within the emerging Indian nation.

At first glance, it might seem as though Cantiracēkaṟēntira’s words constitute a kind of reactionary response to this transition, an archconservative position out of step with the realities of contemporary Tamil Brahmin society. However, his proposed remedies to the problems of urbanization and Westernization reveal this to be far from the case. Immediately after his critique, in a discourse telling entitled “The Least That Can Be Done” (Atama paṭcap parikāram), he begins to lay out a program for ensuring that the Vedas and Vedic religion are preserved for future generations. Significantly, he never calls for a return to the villages. There is, in other words, an implicit recognition that the urbanization of Brahmins and their transformation into a middle-class caste is at this point inevitable. The effort instead is put into a strategy that would get Brahmins to recommit to the ancestral heritage which they have so easily
forsaken and to thereby address the deep anxiety that this perceived loss has brought about. He thus asks that Brahmins study the Veda and, if that is not possible, for them to at least make arrangements for their sons to do so. Further acknowledging that Brahmins may not want to send their sons for full-time Vedic study and thus deprive them of the material benefits that come with a Western-style education, he asks that at a minimum they arrange for their sons to be invested with the sacred thread (upanayāṇam) at the age of eight and, for the next ten years, to study the Vedas for one hour every day after school (TK vol. 1: 239). In a subsequent discourse he asks for financial support to found traditional Vedic schools (vēta pāṭacālaikaḷ) where students could go to receive proper training in the recitation of Vedic mantras and the performance of rites. He requests every member of the audience donate one rupee a month on the day of his or her birth-star, and promises that in return individuals would receive monthly deliveries of ash and other blessed items (piracātam) from the ritual worship conducted at the Kāñci maṭha (pp. 283-285).

Educating Brahmins about the Vedas is thus of central importance in this program for the revival and restoration of Vaidika religion. A vast amount of the TK consists precisely in educating audiences about elements of Vedic culture. Most of Volume Two, for instance, is devoted to explaining the structure and contents of Vedic literature, including the Saṃhitās and their various recensions, the Upaniṣads, the Vedāṅgas, and the Dharmaśāstras (TK vol. 2: 191-984). This is not entirely an intellectual exercise, however. Cantiracēkarēntira frequently emphasizes that books are insufficient for an understanding of Vaidika religion. Rites must be performed. But even here, the language is that of accommodation and compromise. In a discourse entitled “The Duty of Brahmins” (Pirāmmanar kaṭamai), for instance, he insists that Brahmins must act for the protection of the Veda (vēttattai raksippataṛkākap paṇṇavēṭum, p. 435), and that to do this they must perform the daily Brahmayajña ritual and worship the sage associated with the branch (cākai) of the Veda that it is their family’s duty to study. Yet he immediately qualifies this, saying that if it is not possible to perform the rite then Brahmins must at least chant the Gāyatrī mantra ten times a day at morning, noon, and dusk. On Sundays, when there is no work, they must wake up at four in the morning and chant the Gāyatrī one thousand times. They must also learn to chant the Puruṣasūkta, Śriśūkta, and Śrīrudram, short Vedic hymns with devotional overtones (pp. 435-436). These efforts are to be further supplemented by a range of edifying religio-cultural activities, such as participating in devotional singing assemblies (pajaṇai), contributing to the renovation of temples, attending public readings of the
Purāṇas, and listening to Carnatic music. The program of Vedic revival prescribed in the TK is therefore one that is founded upon routines of part-time study, a highly circumscribed ritual repertoire, popular religio-cultural activities, and an accompanying ethos of self-restraint and moderation. This is therefore a program that is consciously formulated so as to not conflict with the pressing demands of a modern urban lifestyle. Rather, it is meant to imbue that lifestyle with a religiosity and a sense of connection to one’s traditional heritage.

This of course recalls Partha Chatterjee’s insight into the strategic dichotomizing of material and spiritual worlds that, according to him, has characterized nationalist consciousness in India since the colonial period (1990: 237). The TK construes the Vaidika as the “inner” world of the spirit in contradistinction to the modern westernized “outer” world of the city. Given the tendency for the spiritual to be associated with the feminine, it is no surprise that Cantiracēkarēntira repeatedly calls for the “protection of the Vedas” (vēta rakṣanam). The Vaidika is now that which enables the Brahmin to participate in the modern world and reap its material benefits without losing his or her identity. In other words, the text proposes a form of what Brian Hatcher (2008) has labeled “bourgeois Hinduism”. Crucially, brahminhood itself is being internalized here; it no longer consists in an elaborate regimen of external ritual behaviors that serve to establish one’s aloofness from the remainder of society. This kind of ritual self-segregation is simply no longer possible nor even desirable for the majority of Tamil Brahmins. Brahminhood is now defined primarily as an interiorized religiosity. It is thus possible to see here how the text’s notion of Vaidika religion is participating in a post-colonial discourse that is addressing questions of identity vis-à-vis the West and modern secularism, yet that is also rooted in and concerned with the needs and concerns of particular caste community.

**The Tradition of Śaṅkara**

Alongside the institution of caste, the TK refers to several theological doctrines that are said to be distinctive of Vaidika religion, including the theories of karma and rebirth, divine incarnation, and the notion that god, though one, assumes a plurality of forms (TK vol. 1: 176-190). It is this last doctrine that receives the most attention in the text. One of the central ideas that Cantiracēkarēntira repeatedly emphasizes is that although Hindus worship many gods, these are understood to be manifestations of a single supreme being (p. 184):
Another distinctive aspect of our religion is that it proclaims that the single, formless supreme Self comes as many deities in many forms, and enjoins image-worship on behalf of those [deities]. Because of this, others call us polytheists. Speak in this way is pure fallacy. Worshipping one god in many forms is not [the same thing as] thinking that there are many gods.\footnote{arūpaṁāṇa orē paramātmā pala rūpāṅkaḷil pala tēvataikafāka varukirāteṇu colli, avārrukkhā vikkiraka ārātaṇaiyai čṛpaṭṭuttiyirruppatu nam mataṭtin īgnoru pirattiyēka amcam. itaṅgal anniyarkaḷ nammal pala-teyvak kolkaiyēgar (Poly-thesis) [sic] eṅkāṛēkāl. īppatic colvatu cuttat tappu. orē teyvattaip pala rūpattil valipaṭṭuvatu pala teyvāṅkaḷ iruppatāka eṅnuvatākātu.}

This quote makes it apparent that the text’s emphasis on monotheism is responding to criticism that Hinduism is nothing more than polytheistic idol worship, a critique that is especially associated with Christianity. It is no surprise that in the very next sentence, Cantiracēkarēntira goes on to deny that Hindus worship images as god; rather, he says, the omnipresent god is understood to enter into a particular image in order to make himself available to be worshipped by devotees. There is, then, an attempt to rationalize Hindu religious practice by affirming that it is not fundamentally different from other monotheistic traditions.

At the heart of this apologetics is a novel reading of the ritualistic concept known as “chosen deity” (iṣṭa tēvatai < Skt. iṣṭa devatā). This concept is closely associated with a integrative style of ritual worship that has long been associated with the Smārta tradition, i.e. paṅcāyatana pūjā. This “worship of the five sites”, which according to Buhnemann (1988: 49) dates back at least as far as the middle of the first millenium, typically involves the ritual adoration of the five deities Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Devī, and Gaṇapati. In the hagiographical traditions connected to Smārta monastic institutions like the Kāmakoti Pīṭha, this form of worship is closely associated with Śaṅkara’s legendary reform and re-establishment of the six major sectarian traditions (ṣaṅmata-sthāpana), which are centered around the aforementioned five deities plus Subrahmanya. In the paṅcāyatana pūjā, one typically selects one of the five deities as the chief object of worship. The concept of one’s “chosen deity”, therefore, traditionally refers to the practice sometimes known as kathenotheism, or the worship of “one god at a time”.

Cantiracēkarēntira, however, interprets this term somewhat differently. In a discourse entitled “Chosen Deity”, he again states that the supreme Self assumes the form of many gods in order to attract people of different mental attitudes (maṇḍappāṁmaikal) to the path of devotion.
While members of other religions may poke fun at Hinduism for its many gods, “in truth no Hindu who understands the issue thinks that there is more than one god” (unmaiil onrukku mēṟpaṭṭa svāmi iruppatāka viṣayam terinta enta hintuvum ennāvillai, TK vol. 1: 565). Rather, since the supreme Self is too abstract for most people to contemplate, Hindus adopt one of its manifestations as their “chosen deity”, in the understanding that by worshipping that form they will eventually attain the realization that everything, including one’s chosen deity and the worshipper him- or herself, are nothing but the supreme Self (TK vol. 1: 566). What is innovative here is that the notion of one’s “chosen deity” now refers not to the practice of worshipping one god at a time but rather to the worship of one god in many forms. This shift is facilitated by the theology of Advaita Vedānta, which maintains that the phenomenal world of difference is an illusory superimposition on the one reality, known as Brahman. It is important to acknowledge that premodern Advaitins also recognized the gods as forms of the one Brahman. This relationship was expressed in terms of a bifurcation of Brahman into a plurality of superimposed forms “with qualities” (saguṇa brahman) as opposed to the ultimate, undifferentiated reality that is forever “without qualities” (nirguṇa brahman). On a popular level, this recognition was concretized in the notion of the trimūrti, or “three forms” of Brahman as creator, maintainer, and destroyer of the universe. Crucially, however, in the premodern épistème the recognition of oneness only obtains at the level of ultimate truth. At the level of conventional truth, plurality is very real, and persists up until the moment of final realization. This is not the case in the TK, where the apparent plurality of the gods has become an explicit problem that needs to be explained away.

The insistence on monotheism is not just about establishing parity with Christianity; it is also about asserting the relative superiority of Hinduism. Immediately after he denies that Hindus are polytheistic idol-worshippers, Cantiracēkarēntira goes on (p. 185):

An aspect [of their religion] that Hindus should be very proud of is the fact that this religion alone does not cherish an exclusive right [to the truth], to the effect that it is possible for an individual soul (jīvaṉ) to attain salvation only by following this [religion]. Only in our scriptures is seen a catholic outlook which accepts that anyone who follows any religious path will, in the end, unite with the one supreme Self. For this very reason our scriptures do not give a place for converting others into Hindus.  

211 hintu matastarkaḷ rompavum perumaippaṭa vēṇṭiyam amcam, inta matam onṟutāṅ tappai anucarippataṅ mūlamē oru jīvaṉ uyvu peṟa muṭiyum engu oru taṇi urimai (exclusive right) koṇṭṭāṅ koḷḷāmaliruppatēy ākum. yār yār
The monotheism of Vaidika religion is thus more expansive, more inclusive of difference, than that of the Western religions. By pointing toward the absence of a conversion rite, Cantiracēkarēntira underscores both the catholicity of Hinduism and the narrow-minded fanaticism of traditions like Christianity and Islam. He goes on to say, with an air of palpable condescension, that Hindus shouldn’t be angry at Christians and Muslims for their attempts at conversion, since the latter genuinely believe that they are acting for the salvation of others. Nevertheless, this belief is ultimately misplaced, as these religions are theologically inconsistent: while they attempt to convert others to their faith, they cannot account for the millions of people who lived prior to the appearance of Jesus or Mohammad. If, as these religions maintain, people only live a single lifetime, then all those who were born prior to the arrival of these saviors would be doomed to eternal hell, a position that implies god’s cruelty (TK vol. 1: 185-187). The TK’s insistence upon the relative expansiveness of Vaidika religion thus becomes the main line of response against the appeal of conversion. That such a response was deemed necessary to counter the perceived erosion of Hinduism through Christian proselytizing is clear from another discourse entitled “The Oneness of Religions” (Mataṅkalīṇ oṟrumai). There, Cantiracēkarēntira emphasizes that all religions worship the same god, who accepts the worship of everyone regardless of their tradition. Because all religions lead to the same goal, i.e. union with god, converting from one to another is meaningless. Worse still, such an act demeans both the tradition of one’s birth as well as one’s newly adopted faith in addition to god himself, by implying that the deity in the former religion is not all-powerful, and that the deity in the new religion does not extend his grace to everyone (pp. 149-152). Conversion is thus a kind of betrayal of god, a failure to recognize his presence in all traditions.

While the notion of the simultaneous unity and plurality of god is essential to the TK’s engagement with Christianity, it is also invoked in order to articulate the relationship of Smārtism to the traditions of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. This is most apparent in the text’s oft-repeated assertion that Śiva and Viṣṇu are essentially one. In the “Chosen Deity” discourse, for

ententa camaya mārkkattil pōṇālum kaṭaiciyil orē paramāṁviṭam vanu cērvārkal eppatai oppuk koḷṭukira vicāla magappāṅmai (catholic outlook) nam cāstirankaḷilēyē kāṇapphirekkuṟatu. itaṅältāṅ piṟarai hintevāka mata māṟram (Conversation) [sic] ceyya nam cāstirankaḷ iṭam koṭukkavillai.
instance, Cantiracakāntira asserts that one should not denigrate another’s chosen deity since all gods are manifestations of the supreme Self. Purānic stories in which Śiva is depicted as subordinate to Viṣṇu or vice versa are merely meant to inculcate a strong sense of devotion in the hearts of the devotees of one or the other god; they are not meant to denigrate the other deity. Therefore the fighting between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas over whose is the true god is pointless, as both deities are forms of the same ultimate reality (p. 568). This idea is developed further in another string of discourses in the same volume (pp. 708 ff.), where the irreconcilable differences of the Śaivas and the Vaiṣṇavas are contrasted with the all-embracing vision of the Smārtas:

We who accept the conclusion of Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara Bhagavatpāda are not Śaivas; we are not Vaiṣṇavas; we have the name Smārtas. Smārtas are those who follow what is said in the smṛtis, i.e. the Dharmaśāstras. For us Śiva, Viṣṇu, and all the other gods as well are just different forms of the one supreme Self. In this respect there is no relative superiority and inferiority [of the gods]. (p. 710)212

Again the text draws a contrast between an expansive monotheism, on the one hand, and exclusivist monotheisms, on the other, yet the dialogical partner here is not the Western monotheisms but rather the rival sectarian traditions of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Cantiracakāntira repeatedly emphasizes the normativity of the Smārta position by pointing to examples of the unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu in South Indian culture. For instance, he calls attention to divine images that combine elements of the two gods, like Hari-haraṉ and Caṅkara-nārāyaṇaṉ, which “are forms that foster an awareness of unity” (samarasa pāvvattai valarkkira mūrttiкалāka irukkiṟaṇa, TK vol. 1: 714). This awareness is also said to be found in the poetry of the Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva saints (p. 719), in the popular children’s saying, “Hari (Viṣṇu) and Śiva are one; one who doesn’t know this has dirt in his mouth” (ariyum civaṉum ōṇṇu; ariyāṭavaṉ vāyil maṇṇu, p. 714), and in the poetess Avvaiyār’s injunction “Don’t forget Hara (Śiva); devote yourself to Tirumāl (Viṣṇu)” (araṇai maṟavēl; tirumālukku aṭimai cey, p. 720). He also emphasizes the similarity of Raṅkarājā and Naṭarājā, the most exalted forms of Viṣṇu and Śiva in Tamil Nadu, pointing to their similar-sounding names, the fact that both face towards the South, etc. (pp. 727-728; see also vol. 7: 629-682). Variations on this trope could be provided from

212 śrī āti caṅkara pakavaṭ pāṭarkalīṉ cittāntattai ēṛyuk koṇṭirukkiṉ nām caivarum allā; vaiṣṇavarum allā; namakkū smārṭtar ennū peyā. Smirutikaṉ ekkiṟa tarmā cāṭiraiṅkal colvatai anucarikkirvaṅkallē smārṭtarkalē, namakkū civaṉ viṣṇu innū mīṭamuḻḷa ellāt teyvumumē orē paramāṭmēṅi vēvvēṟu rūpaṅkal tāṅ. itil ēṛrat tāḻvē illai.
elsewhere in the text ad nausaem. Clearly, many of the examples he points to suggest longstanding and popular traditions of pan-sectarianism in the Tamil South. We have already explored several expressions of this sentiment in the earlier chapters. What is significant here is that these traditions are now being stripped of any potential social critique and being made to speak for a position of Brahminical orthodoxy.

Specifically, by frequently stressing the unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu, the TK subtly paints its immediate theological rivals, Śaiva Siddhānta and Śrīvaishnavism, as biased and therefore as only partially correct systems that tend toward mutual and irreconcilable discord. It also identifies the Śmārta tradition as a kind of non-sect that includes the other sectarian traditions within itself. Śmārtism, in other words, is here cast as a pan-sectarian universalism that embraces and unifies India’s religious diversity; in short, it is Hinduism. It is known that Cantiracēkarēntira actively promoted this harmonizing of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism by sponsoring events such as the Tiruppāvai-Tiruvempāvai Sangams, in which devotional songs to Viṣṇu and Śiva would be sung.213

Perhaps the most explicit statement of the distinctiveness of the Śmārta position is found in a discourse in the second volume entitled “‘The Tradition of Śaṅkara’” (“Caṅkara campiratāyam”, vol. 2: 119-156). Cantiracēkarēntira begins by lamenting that many young Śmārtas are unaware that they are, in fact, Śmārtas. Instead, they think that they are Aiyars, thus confusing the name of a particular caste with the proper term for those who follow the monistic teachings of Śaṅkara. Even more unfortunately, however, is the fact that many Advaitins are unaware that Śaṅkara saw all gods as the same; instead they think he was a Śaiva (pp. 120-121). At this point, Cantiracēkarēntira relates an anecdote about how the great Japanese Indologist Hajime Nakamura once asked him why he was a Śaiva despite the fact that Śaṅkara does not espouse Śaivism in his commentaries on the Brahmāsūtra and Bhagavadgītā. When Cantiracēkarēntira replies by asking why Nakamura thinks he is a Śaiva, the latter points to the fact that he and the other Śāṅkarācāryas wears ash and performs ritual worship to Śiva in his form as Candramaulīśvara (Skt. Candramaulīśvara, pp. 121-122). Much of the remainder of the

213 The Tiruppāvai and the Tiruvempāvai are Tamil devotional poems respectively dedicated to the gods Viṣṇu and Śiva, traditionally sung by young unmarried girls during the Tamil month of Mārkaḷi (Dec.-Jan.). For further information on the two texts, see Cutler (1979).
discourse consists of the *jagadguru*’s reply to Nakamura, in which he denies that Smārtas are Śaivas.

The substance of this reply is as follows: Prior to Śaṅkara’s incarnation, the dominant tradition was the Vaidika religion, which was opposed by Buddhism amongst several other heterodox traditions. Those who followed the Vaidika religion were called Smārtas, a name that comes from the term *smṛti*, which itself refers to the *Dharmaśāstras*. In the latter texts, no one god is singled out as supreme, and thus Smārtas perform *pañcāyatana pūjā* to all the major deities. Smārtas wear ash not because it is connected to the god Śiva, but because it is connected to the Veda, i.e. because the *Dharmaśāstras* stipulate that ash must be worn. Vaiṣṇavas, including the Viśiṣṭādvaitins and Dvaitins, were originally those who had selected Viṣṇu as their chosen deity; they splintered off from the original Vaidika tradition after the appearance of Rāmānuja and Madhva. Śaṅkara, though denounced as a crytpo-Buddhist by these teachers, in fact revived the ancient Vaidika tradition by putting the final nail into the coffin of Indian Buddhism. He reformed the major exclusive sectarian traditions that had emerged around particular chosen deities, making them Vaidika once again (pp. 122-133). Advaitins came to be seen as Śaivas because many continued to adopt Śiva as their chosen deity even after the split with the Vaiṣṇavas, and because some Smārtas followed the Śaiva teacher Śrīkanṭha to become Śaivaviśiṣṭādvaitins. Yet this does not change the fact that they are not Śaivas, but rather the original Vaidikas (pp. 136-139). It is thus wrong to think that Śaṅkara founded a new system of thought:

Therefore the “tradition of Śaṅkara” was not a newly established [tradition]. It was only the path of the Vedas, i.e. the ancient Smārta tradition. When it began to crumble in the intervening period, it was revived by Śaṅkara with more vital force than before. Therefore it is wrong for someone or other to speak of the “tradition of Śaṅkara”; it would be wrong even if I were to speak of it… There is an expression they use to speak about Jesus Christ, that “he did not come to destroy the old religions, that he came to fulfill them.” The Ācārya (Śaṅkara) too only came to make the ancient Vaidika Smārta tradition firm again, as it was; he did not found anything himself.²¹⁴

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²¹⁴ ātalāl caṅkara cāmpirātāyam erekṣu ọṣru putitāka ērpaṇāvē illai. paḷaiya smārta cāmpirātāyam ṣeqṣa vēta nēriyētā, naṭuṃ cantilamaṇārantapōtu caṅkararāl munṣaiyīta jīvavaktyuētā putuviyirṣētappatattu. ākāyāl “caṅkara cāmpirātāyam” erekṣu yārāvatu cōṅgāl tappu; nānge colliyirūntālētā tappu… iyēcu kīrīstuvaip pārpi, avar ‘paḷaiya māṭamāḷai ajikka varavillai; avarṣaipa pūrtti pāṅṇāvē vantā’ erekṣu coṇṭaćēk colkīrākāl. ācāryāḷum paḷaiya vaitika smārta cāmpirātāyattai ọḷḷaṭṭu stīrpaṇṭutattāy vantārē tavira, tāmāka ongrai stāppikkavillai.
Cantirēkarēntira thus gets quite a bit of mileage out of the doctrine of the simultaneous unity and plurality of god. On the one hand, he uses it to represent Vaidika religion as a monotheism that is comparable to, but also more tolerant and rational than Christianity. On the other hand, he uses it to assert the universality of the Smārta tradition in contrast to the narrowness of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. The recasting of Vaidika religion as a monotheistic world religion in the *TK* is, then, inseparable from the text’s engagement with local sectarian conflicts. I will return to this issue in the conclusion.

**The Place of Tamil Within the Vaidika**

A final theme Cantirēkarēntira raises in the “Vaidika Religion” section of the first volume concerns the relationship between this religion and Tamil culture. This discussion, which is elaborated in other parts of the *TK* as well, constitutes a response to the contemporary Tamil political milieu, which was dominated by nativist claims of an indigenous, non-Āryan, Dravidian cultural identity. At the center of these claims was a utopic vision of an enlightened past characterized by ethical values that were deemed to be distinctively “Tamil”, including egalitarianism, vegetarianism, etc. Central to this cultural and historical narrative was the idea that Brahmins were not originally from South India but rather migrated there from the North, bringing with them the foreign imports of Sanskrit, the Vedas, and caste. These ideas informed a nascent anti-Brahmin political movement dedicated to the empowerment of non-Brahmin Tamils, and led to calls for rejecting the influence of Sanskrit on the Tamil language in favor a more “pure” Tamil register. As Bate 2009 has shown, by the middle of the twentieth century, both this movement and the register associated with it had become naturalized within the populist political arena.

In contrast to this dominant narrative the *TK*, in a discourse entitled “The Vaidika and Tamil” (*Vaitikamum tamiḻum*, *TK* vol. 1: 309-312), maintains that Tamil culture is, and always has been, intimately connected with the Vedas, and by extension with Sanskrit and Brahmins. Cantirēkarēntira claims, for instance, that Tamil kings from the Caṅkam period onward had seen it as their duty to protect the Vedic path, pointing to inscriptions that record their donations

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to Brahmins who had mastered the Vedas (p. 309). He also emphasizes that words connected to Vaidika religion can be found within Caṅkam literature. That these words, such as marai (“Veda”) and vēḷvi (“ritual sacrifice”), are indigenous Tamil words and not tamilized calques of Sanskrit words suggests that the Vaidika is autochthonous in the Tamil land (p. 310):

If Vaidika culture and the performance of sacrifices had not sprung up in and flowed throughout the Tamil country, it would not have been possible for this many lovely indigenous words which reveal [the nature of] that civilization to have appeared.216

This stance is borne out by further evidence from Tamil didactic literature, including the Tirukkural and the works of Avvaiyār, which are said to promote Vaidika customs (TK vol. 1: 311-312). So too, the Āḻvārs and the Nāyaṉmārs repeatedly praise Viṣṇu and Śiva as the object of the Vedas, and describe the temple-towns they visit in terms of the sound of Vedic chanting and the smoke of sacrificial fires that emanate therefrom (p. 312).217

According to the TK, then, “Tamil civilization” is essentially a Vaidika civilization.218 Crucially, this conception of Tamil culture recasts the Brahmin as its foremost representative and natural guardian, rather than as a cultural interloper. The notion of an indigenous Tamil identity apart from Vaidika religion, and by extension from Brahmins, is implicitly denounced as having no basis in historical fact.219 Talk of “Dravidians” and “Āryans” is scathingly and routinely criticized elsewhere in the text as the result of a divisive and fallacious racial theory first introduced by the British in their attempt to divide and rule Southern India (see, e.g. vol. 1: 464; vol. 2: 35, 419).

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216 vaitikap paṇḍāṭum, yakña anuṣṭāṣṭamun tamilnāṭṭil ūrippōyiruntāḷoliya, anta nākariattaik kāṭṭa ittaṇai alakāṇa conta moḷi vārtaikaḷ uṇṭākiyirukka mutiyāṭu.

217 Similar ideas are expressed in the discourse “The Veda and Tamil Nadu” (Vētamum tamilnāṭum, vol. 2: 391-420), which adds more indigenous Tamil words (e.g. caṭṭakku) and literary references to Vaidika culture (e.g. Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai’s reference to Brahminical sacrifices). Among the claims made in this section are that the ancient Tamil grammar Tolkāppiyam refers to Vedic theories of language, and that the Tamil Śaiva saint Tiruṭāṇacampantar debated the Jains because the latter doubted the authority of the Vedas.

218 The Smārtas were not the only ones to make this claim. As Raman (2011) points out, in the 1970s the Śrīvaisṇava literary historian S. Kiruscāvūmi Akīṇkār took pains to show that what had by then become the earliest recognized historical period of Tamil civilization, i.e. the Caṅkam period, was in fact characterized by Vaidika (and more specifically Vaiṣṇava) religion. Like Akīṇkār, Cantiracēkēntira’s discourse needs to be seen as a response to the emergence and canonization of a particular view of ancient Tamil history woven around the Tamil language, the non-Brahmin Dravidian, and the Śaiva religion.

219 See also Volume 7, pp. 45 ff., which explicitly ridicules calls for a “pure Tamil” register, arguing that those who make such appeals are unable to avoid using Sanskritic words.
In affirming the “Vaidika-ness” of Tamil, Cantiracēkarēntira interprets Tamil culture as a regional instantiation of a wider Indic cultural heritage characterized, above all, by the transregionality of the Vedas and the Sanskrit language. This is essentially a further elaboration of the position adopted by the editor of Brahmagyā, which we encountered in the last chapter. However, the TK is staking out a position that is more than just an inversion of the Dravidianist narrative. It is not just that Tamil is Vaidika, there is also a sense in which the Vaidika finds its fullest expression only in Tamil, or at least, in the Tamil country. That is, there is a certain pride that is expressed in being a Tamil Brahmin, rooted in an awareness that Tamil culture is more Vaidika than any other. This theme emerges in a discourse entitled “The Greatness of Tamil Nadu’s Culture” (Tamil nāṭṭup paṇpiṇ perumai, vol. 1: 463-467). Here it is said that more than half of the world’s temples, religio-philosophical treatises, and devotional texts are to be found in India, and among those more than half are to be found in Tamil Nadu (p. 463). Tamil Nadu is thus the most religious place in the whole world. In addition, it is a unique hub where India’s diverse regional traditions meet. Rather than being assimilated to a monolithic Tamil culture, however, these traditions find themselves preserved and revivified (p. 466):

Since the beginning of time the Dravidian land has given a place to all those who came in this way from other lands and from other parts of India, and has established each of those peoples in their very own languages and traditions. Without destroying all these languages and civilizations, Tamil Nadu has, like a ‘refrigerator’ (the English word is used), kept them cool and preserved them. Like a fruit placed in a cooler, literary creations of great people who spoke the languages of other lands have appeared here and been protected from destruction. For example, the Telugu musical compositions of Tyāgarāja were born on this very soil. There is no such cultural production even in the Telugu land. In this way texts of many languages and many philosophies appeared here. This unique quality of intimately associating itself with everything else, while not imposing itself upon others, is a mark of excellence for Tamil Nadu alone.220

Tamil Nadu is thus a microcosm of India, a reflection of the latter’s diverse literary and intellectual traditions. It is also a source of inspiration for those traditions; like a gracious host, it

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220 ātiōkālatiliruntu tirāviṭa tēcāmāṭat unvāru anniya tēcānkaliliruntu pāratattiś piṭa pakutikačiiliruntu vantavarkaļukkellōm iṭam tuṇtu vavaraivaricyv avaravaratu pāṣai, cāmpirāiśvam ivaičaiśēśe nilaippaṭattiyirukkiṭatu. tamiḻntu oru ’rihprijiētār’ (kiḷirtaṇṭap paṭṭi) pōl ellā pāsaičaišiyum ellā nākaviṅkaḷaiyum keṭāmal kiḷirciyīṭaṅ kāttat tuṇtu vantirukkiṭatu. kiḷir cāṭap paṭṭiyil vaiṭta pāḷampōl maṛrap pirateča pāṣaičiarkaḷaṭā gaṅniṃči ilakkiṭa cirūṣṭikaḷum ūṅē keṭāmal rakṣiṅkaṭṭapati tu vantirukkiṭa. utāraṇamākā tiyākarājαιṛig telunkuk kiruṭikal inta man-nil piyantavaiśey. telunku tēcālīśey Īppatiṭṭapati ciruṣṭi ūṅṭaṅvaiḷai. īppatiśey pala pāṣaič kirantaṅkal, pala ciṭtainaṅkal inku uruvāyīga. maṛavaḷ aqaitṭōṭum taṇṇai īḷaiyaṅvīṭuk kontu, taṇṇai maṛavavāriś mītu tiṇṭuś niṟppantikkāmal irukkiṭa oru taṇṭi paṇṭu tirāviṭa tēcattukkē ciṣapāka īruntu vantirukkiṭatu.
helps its guests to thrive and reach their full potential. The source of Tamil Nadu’s power, the
wellspring of its greatness, lies in its special relationship to the Vedic tradition (vol. 1: 466-467): 

From time immemorial, Tamilakam alone has been the home of the Vedic path. The
*Bhāgavata [Purāṇa]* says that Manu, the original ancestor of mankind, lived on the bank
of the Kirutamāḷā which is near the Vaigai [River]. Vedic dharma was born here itself.
Wherever you look [in the writings of] people like the Āḻvārs, the Nāyaṇmārs, Paṭṭiṇattār,
Tāyumāṉavar, Tiruvalluvar, or the scholars of the Caṅkam, who gave us the riches of
*bhakti* and moral treatises that are without peer in the world, they speak in their texts
about the greatness of the Veda of Dravida Nadu. The Cōḷa, Pāṇṭiya, and Pallava kings
filled their inscriptions with records of the grants they gave to Vedic schools and Vedic
scholars. Even the Christian scholar Śrī Vēṭanāyakam Piḷḷai, who belonged to the last
century, has spoken with pride of the fact that temples to god and “temples to Brahman”
(i.e. Vedic schools) abound in Tamil Nadu. You all know that Bhāratiyār has sung,
“Tamil Nadu where the Veda abounds”.221

Tamil Nadu thus constitutes the geographical center of Vaidika religion.

The *TK*’s stance vis-à-vis the idea of Tamil culture is, as we have seen, more complex
than it might at first seem. In a way, the image of the Śmārtta Brahmin as he is constructed in the
*TK* both is and is not Tamil. On the one hand, he is not Tamil, insofar as he is not interested in
the celebration of a distinctive “Dravidian” identity imagined in terms that are explicitly non-
Brahminical. On the other hand, he is Tamil in that he belongs to a linguistic and cultural region
that is celebrated as that which most perfectly embodies the essence of Vaidika religion. The text
thus rejects a regional nationalism in favor of a Hindu nationalism, but its articulation of that
nationalism is inseparable from its lingering affective ties to Tamil.

**The End of Sectarianism?**

Up until now, I have unpacked the *TK* as a text that moves in two different directions
more or less simultaneously. As we have seen, the work not only interprets the Vaidika as a
universal world religion, it also uses this key concept as a way to engage very specific caste,

221 *tongrutṭu* vēṭa neṟiyin vīṭāka iruntiruppattu tamilakamē. maṇṭita kulattiṇ mutalvarāṇa manu, vaikai arukēyuḷa
kirutamāḷā karaiyil vacittatākavē pākavatam kāṟukiru. vēṭa tarmam inkkēyēṭāg piṟantaitu. ulakattilēyē ṣu
inaiyillāta pactic celvattaiyum nīti nūkkālaivum tanta āḻvārkum, nāyaṇmārkum, paṭṭiṇattār, täyumāṉavar,
tiruvalluvar, caṅkappulavar pōṟavarkalum ēnku pāṟṭāllum tirāviṭa nāṭṭīg vēṭattit perumaiyipparrīt tankāl nūkkāḷil
pēcukiṟṟkarī. cōḷa, pāṇṭya, pallava maṃṣar kal vēṭa pāṭacālaikajukkum vēṭa vittukkalukkum tankāl ceṭya
cāsamāṅkālaṅkal keḷveṭuṭukaṅkal poṟṟittu pūṟṟappaiṭintuṅkuṟkāṟkar. ēṇṟa nūṟṟuṇaic eṟṟnta kīṟstuvar pulaṅvarāṇa
śrīvēṭanāyakam piḷḷaiṅkita tamiṅnattit tēvayalankaṟṭu ‘pirammālankaṟṭ’ (vēṭa pāṭacālaṅkai) nīṟintiruppattaiyē
perumaiyōtu kūṟiyirukkāṟ. ‘vēṭam niṟainta tamiṅnāṭu’ enṟu pāṭaiyār pāṭiyatu unkuḷukkut teriyum.
sectarian, and ethnic concerns. In the conclusion, I would like to reflect upon what I see as the wider significance of this internally bifurcated nature of the text. The first observation to be made is that Cantiracēkarēntira’s message struck a chord that resonated beyond the boundaries of the Tamil-speaking Śmārta Brahmin community. In particular, the jagadguru achieved a degree of celebrity amongst Westerners that is fairly uncommon for Hindu religious leaders. As T. M. P. Mahadevan, the great scholar of Advaita Vedānta and an ardent devotee of Cantiracēkarēntira, is quick to point out, Westerners including Paul Brunton, who we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, as well as the anthropologist Milton Singer, the author Arthur Koestler, and even members of the Greek royal family all expressed their admiration for the charismatic renunciate at one time or another (Mahadevan 1975: 16-18). What enabled Cantiracēkarēntira to appeal to these figures was the way he represented himself to them as a legitimate spokesperson for Hinduism. Here what was emphasized was emphatically not the particular, regional, sectarian issues that we have occasionally encountered in our analysis of the TK, but rather the more general issue of “the Vedas” and Vedic religiosity. He thus provided Westerners with what they were looking for, whether that was a voice of authentic spirituality in an increasingly disenchanted modern world (Brunton), or a potential informant who could be tapped for information about the structure of “traditional” Hinduism (Singer).

Brunton describes an interview that he had with Cantiracēkarēntira in the nineteen-thirties in his book In Search of Secret India ([1934] 1964: 90-94). After exchanging formalities, the ascetic asked Brunton about his experiences in India. According to the latter, the ascetic was “very interested in ascertaining the exact impressions which Indian people and institutions make upon a foreigner” (p. 90). The discussion then moved on to current affairs, and Brunton asked when the world’s political and economic troubles would start to improve. In reply, Cantiracēkarēntira affirmed that only when “spiritual understanding” prevails between peoples and nations will wars come to an end (p. 91). This will be brought about by god, who will send a savior to uplift humanity in its time of need. Pessimism is not warranted, as there is “an indwelling divine soul in man which, in the end, must bring him back to God” (p.91). In order to realize this truth, people must endeavor to become more spiritual in their daily lives:

222 During this interview Cantiracēkarēntira spoke in Tamil. His replies were translated into English by his devotee K. S. Venkataramani.
…if there were more men who had found spiritual light in the world, [spirituality] would spread more quickly. India, to its honour, supports and respects its spiritual men, though less so than in former times. If all the world were to do the same, and to take its guidance from men of spiritual vision, then all the world would soon find peace and grow prosperous. (p. 92)

After this, Brunton asks the ascetic where he can find “someone who has high attainments in Yoga and can give some sort of proof or demonstration of them” (p. 92). Thus it is Cantiracēkarēntira who first directs Brunton towards his future guru, the ascetic Ramana Maharishi. It is clear from this brief encounter that Brunton approached Cantiracēkarēntira as a prophetic figure who had unique insight into the workings of the world and of men’s hearts. Cantiracēkarēntira, for his part, obliges the Western seeker by propounding an ethic of Hindu idealism that might counter the rampant and destructive materialism of the world. It is also clear that the jagadguru made a profound impression: Brunton claims to have had a vision of the ascetic shortly after the interview (Ibid.: 95).

Singer is also an interesting case in point because of his significance for the discipline of anthropology. He had gone to Madras to ask how an ancient and literate culture such as India’s would respond to the advance of modernity. Much of his information about Indian culture came from the Sanskritist V. Raghavan, who was a Śmārta Brahmin and a devotee of Cantiracēkarēntira. Raghavan, who might as well have been reading from the TK, represented the Śmārta tradition to Singer as a universal religion that included within it all of India’s religio-cultural diversity. No better articulation of this universality can be found than in Raghavan’s pithy assertion, “I am a museum,” which Singer understood to be indicative of “the catholicity of the Śmārta position” (1972: 138). Ultimately, it was this version of India’s heritage, i.e. Raghavan’s, i.e. Cantiracēkarēntira’s, that Singer recognized as the “Great Tradition” of Sanskritic Hinduism. He would go on to suggest that the inherent flexibility of this tradition enabled it to adapt to a demanding urban environment and new industrializing impulses without completely abandoning its self-identity.

Singer’s study was groundbreaking for its time; it successfully refuted Max Weber’s argument that Hinduism is intrinsically inimical to modernity. Subsequent generations of scholars, however, have taken a more critical stance towards Singer’s notion of the “Great Tradition”. Mary Hancock (1998), for instance, criticizes Singer for accepting Raghavan’s conception of India as a culturally unified Hindu nation. Hancock makes a compelling argument
that even as Singer utilized the information Raghavan supplied him to support civilizational (i.e. area) studies and theories of modernization, Raghavan utilized Singer’s understanding of cultural integration through Sanskritization to espouse a cultural nationalism that sought to naturalize caste differences and see Sanskrit enshrined as the national language of India. While Singer did, as Hancock notes, recognize the existence of alternative conceptions of the “Great Tradition” that did not agree with Raghavan’s, he nevertheless related these disjunctions to the greater inclusiveness of Raghavan’s view versus the partiality (and implied political location) of contestatory views (1972: 79-80). Raghavan was reconstructed in Singer’s text as his double: a scholar whose search for “truth” was not itself “ideological,” that is, generated by political concerns. (Hancock 1998: 359).

Turning back to the TK, we can see how the text’s representation of Smārtism as impartial and post-sectarian feeds into a Western discourse about the essential unity of Hinduism. It may also be understood to contain within it the potential for feeding into a Hindu nationalism, insofar as it is preoccupied with the notion that the Vaidika is native to India. What keeps this Hindutva position at a distance is the text’s affective ties to South Indian Brahminism, the Smārta sectarian tradition, and Tamil. Nevertheless, the possibility for slippage into a Hindutva stance remains great, and this is what is ultimately what is most problematic about Cantiracēkarēntira’s view. In closing, I want to return to a notion that we have already mentioned, namely, the TK’s tendency to emphasize the universality of Smārtism when making comparisons to the West, and to stress the distinctiveness of the Smārta sect vis-à-vis Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions at other points. In order to theorize this disjuncture, it is useful to briefly turn to the example of another internationally renowned “Eastern” religious figure.

In the final chapter of his monograph, Prisoners of Shangri-La, Donald Lopez analyzes the role of the current Dalai Lama in contributing to and accommodating certain ideas about Tibet that have lessened, in Lopez’s estimation, the viability of calls for Tibetan national independence. The bulk of the chapter describes the so-called “Shugden affair”, an incident in which the Dalai Lama attempted to squash the worship of a protective deity named Shugden who is of central importance to the Geluk tradition, the sect of Tibetan Buddhism of which the Dalai Lama is the head. The worship of this clan deity had become an obstacle to the Dalai Lama’s fulfillment of the role he plays in the context of his dialogue with the West as a “Buddhist modernist” and ecumenical leader of the entire Tibetan Buddhist community. As Lopez puts it,
Shugden, a kind of clan deity for the Geluk sect and for a region of Eastern Tibet, having been carried into exile, thus must himself be declared obsolete and be exiled by the Dalai Lama so that Tibetans in exile may develop a national, rather than clan, identity. (1998: 196)

He goes on to criticize the Dalai Lama for denying the importance of the distinctiveness of Tibetan culture, its rootedness within a highly specific geographical landscape, in favor of a universal Buddhist ethic of compassion, which though satisfying Western demands for Buddhist spirituality, hinders the return of a physical Tibet to the Tibetan people.

For our purposes, what is most significant about Lopez’s analysis is his insight that the Dalai Lama plays different roles depending on whether he is engaging with the West or with Tibetans. As he notes, the Dalai Lama’s role as a Geluk hierarch “is rarely seen in the West, conducted, as it is, in the Tibetan language” (1998: 188). In other words, the Dalai Lama represents himself as a universal figure in English, and, at least in part, as a sectarian figure in the vernacular. A comparable situation appears to obtain for Cantiracēkarēntira as well. When engaging the West, he represents himself as a representative of the Hindu religious tradition. In the vernacular, this universality is also present, but it is accompanied by a much more self-conscious assertion of sectarian identity. In the TK, we see Cantiracēkarēntira speaking to Tamil Smārtas as the leader of a Smārta Brahmin sectarian tradition.

The TK, then, is not merely an expression of a monolithic “neo-Hinduism” in the Tamil language. The emergence of a modern universalized Hindu idiom has not, it would seem, rendered obsolete centuries of sectarian habit. Sectarian disputes continue to play out, despite the fact that they may no longer be stressed in “official” representations of Hinduism produced by Hindus in English. We seem to have two separate levels or codes of religious discourse at work here, between which religious actors like Cantiracēkarēntira can switch depending upon the needs demanded by a particular context. On the one hand there is the appearance of a singular Hinduism, which comes into greatest relief when it is necessary to compare religion in India with that in the West. This particular code makes itself felt most clearly in English-language discourse. On the other hand there is the persistence of plurality and local concerns which make themselves present most clearly in the vernacular. Thus from one perspective a singular modern Hinduism appears, whereas from another perspective there are a multiplicity of modern Hinduisms. It is incumbent upon scholars to follow the threads of vernacular sectarianism into
modernity, as it is here that the subterranean fault lines of these many modern Hinduisms can be detected.

Reading the *TK*, one gets the sense that one is entering into a closed circle, a kind of self-contained discourse composed by a Smārta Brahmin, for Smārta Brahmins. This quality of the text no doubt reflects the political condition facing Tamil Brahmins in the mid-twentieth century, to which we have briefly alluded above. The text is, as we have seen, very concerned with preserving a sense of self-identity in a rapidly changing world that often appears hostile to Brahmin interests. Perhaps the final irony of Cantiracakēntira’s reception as a representative for Hinduism, then, is that it coincided historically with a general retreat of Tamil Brahmins from the political arena. It was at this very moment, when the Brahmin community was turning in on itself, that it came be seen by some Westerners as an aloof bastion of meticulously preserved tradition.
Conclusion

One day, while talking of this and that in the course of my lesson Śrī Piḷḷai asked me, “Why did your parents give you the name Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ?” I explained: “Our tutelary deity being Vēṅkaṭācalapati, it is customary in our family for everyone to bear his name”. I inferred from his questioning that he did not at all like the name Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ.

“How have you perhaps got any other name beside this?” he asked. I said, “Everyone at home calls me ‘Cāmā’”.

“Really? Is there any such name?”

“It isn’t actually a name as such. The full name is Cāminātaṉ, they have shortened it like that.”

“Is that so? Cāminātaṉ is such a beautiful name! I think I am going to call you only by that name. You shall also call yourself Cāminātaṉ from now on”.

I agreed to do so. Since that moment, Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ – that is I – has been transformed to Cāminātaṉ. All others started to use that name because Śrī Piḷḷai preferred it. That name has struck [sic] to me – for it was a name which pleased the one who had such great affection for me.

For a few days I had some problems with this change of name. When someone called me ‘Cāminātaiyar’, I did not react, since I did not realize fast enough they were calling me. My ears were used to listen to ‘Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ’ or ‘Cāmā’. And if anyone asked me what my name was, I would begin to answer, ‘Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ’ and then suddenly remembering, I would add ‘Cāminātaṉ’. But as days went by, I indeed got used to my new name. (Cāminātaiyar 1990: 130-131)

We may take this brief exchange as a starting point for recapping some of the central arguments of this thesis. The two speakers involved are among the most well known figures in the history of Tamil literature. The first, the young man who up until then had been known by the name Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ, is U. Vē. Cāminātaiyar (1855-1942), who would go on to systematically collect, edit, and publish many of the earliest surviving Tamil works. The second, referred to in the passage as Śrī Piḷḷai, is Makāvittuvāṉ Tiriciraparam Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai (1815-1876), one of the last great traditional poet-scholars (pulavar) of the nineteenth century and Cāminātaiyar’s beloved teacher in the final years of his life. The passage is taken from Cāminātaiyar’s autobiography My Life Story (Eṉ Carittiram), which he published in serial installments in the popular Tamil weekly magazine Āṉanta Vikaṭan between 1940 and 1942. It refers to an incident that took place in 1871, shortly after Cāminātaiyar had begun his studies under Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai in the town of Mayuram. Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, a devout Śaiva and the leading scholar-in-residence at the major Śaiva Siddhānta monastic institution at Tiruvavatuturai, is unhappy with the fact that his new star pupil is called Vēṅkaṭarāmaṇ, a patently Vaiṣṇava name. He insists
that his student from then on go by Cāminātaṇa, a common epithet for Śiva’s son Skanda and thus a proper Śaiva name.

Recently, Monius (2011) has suggested that the autobiography be read in relation to the historical context in which it was first written and published, arguing that the text functions “to distance as far as possible the Smārta Brahmin author from the arena of anti-Brahman, anti-Sanskrit agitation that had vigorously renewed itself in the Tamilnadu of the 1930s” (p. 591). One of the key ways the text does this is by representing the love of Tamil as a “marker of moral character [that] supersedes religious boundaries” (p. 594). Throughout En Carittiram, Cāminātaiyar portrays Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and even Muslims and Christians as united by a common devotion to the beauty and power of the Tamil language, implying thereby that the Tamil literary tradition transcends sectarian affiliation.  

It is therefore all the more interesting to note those instances in the text, such as that which is narrated in the passage above, where it is possible to see the cracks in this artful presentation of nineteenth-century Tamil social history, in which sectarian issues make themselves felt however briefly. One can see Cāminātaiyar attempting to paper over the moment that Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai asks him to change his name by representing the incident as one of love and acceptance, in which his teacher affectionately inducts him into the inner circle of his close students. The taciturn manner in which this and other such incidents are related in the autobiography encourages the reader to overlook them, an implicit confirmation of Monius’ reading of the text. Yet for the present study what is most interesting about this passage is its suggestion that in the mid-nineteenth century there were ways over overcoming sectarianism through particular modalities of relationship, such as that between teacher and disciple, or that which was formed through a common love of Tamil, or, we might add, that which was constituted by the study of pan-sectarian religious literature. It is precisely these modes of sublimating the sectarian that would come under extreme pressure in subsequent

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223 In a footnote, Monius (2011: 594, n. 17) qualifies her argument by suggesting that at times Cāminātaiyar seems to equate the love of Tamil with Śaivism, especially that of his father, his grandfather, his teacher Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, and his own personal devotion.

224 See for instance the moment when Cāminātaiyar’s father introduces himself to Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷai, giving his personal name Vēṅkaṭacuppaṉ. Piḷḷai’s reply is another clear expression of Śaiva sectarianism (Cāminātaiyar 1990: 112): “Good name, Vēṅkaṭacuppaṉ. A popular contracted form of Vēṅkaṭacuppiramaṉyaṉ. This usage is a support for the hypothesis that it is Lord Murukaṉ who is enshrined on top of Tiruvēṅkaṭalamalai”. Yet this too is glossed over by Cāminātaiyar, who merely states, “There was an unusual gentleness in the way he said this and I was amazed at the way how great matters were revealed in a casual conversation.”
decades through the spread of print culture, the increased access to sacred texts, the rise of modern Tamil literary criticism, the emergence of polemical journals and other such literature as a site for the public airing of sectarian differences, and the careers of figures like Cōmacuntara Nāyakar who claimed to speak for monolithic religious traditions.

Our initial investigation of the Avirōtavuntiyār and its commentary explored a particularly conspicuous strategy for transcending the sectarian within the context of a late precolonial Tamil Vīraśaiva milieu. We saw how Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḍ adopts a universal positionality grounded in the principle of “non-contradiction” (avirōtam) and a corresponding rhetoric of sincerity. Here, doctrine is defined as that which is accepted by all sectarian traditions, specifically the existence of the three Āgamic principles of lord, souls, and bondage. Underlying this minimalist self-definition is a premodern doxographical logic in which one’s own position is related to that of other communities according to a principle of proximate and distant otherness and concentric circles of truth. In Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikal’s commentary, the Avirōtavuntiyār’s theological catholicity was matched by an eclectic literary vision that anthologized verses from works associated with distinct sectarian literatures. This eclecticism, far from being an obscure once-off, was further seen to be prefigured in a fifteenth-century literary anthology by the Śaiva Advaitin Tattuvarāyar. These works pointed to the existence of a late-medieval pan-sectarian Tamil Śaiva literary culture centered on the “knowledge-text” (nāga nūl) metagenre. It was hypothesized that the eclectic universalism found in such texts could be used by new religious communities as a way to carve out a space for themselves within the Tamil context.

These and other more or less contemporaneous works were taken up again in the nineteenth century, as intellectuals associated with a range of sectarian traditions attempted to assert their right to speak for Tamil Śaivism. The primary medium of this new phase of sectarian disputation was print and its primary location was the colonial capital of Madras, which was fast becoming the center of a new vernacular religious public sphere. The pressure to colonize this public arena generated an intensely polemical situation; this was seen first through the commentary of Īcūr Caccitāṇanta Cuvāmikāḷ on the popular Tamil Vedāntic knowledge-text Kaivālīyanavanāntam. Caccitāṇanta interpreted the text to contain a vicious critique of sectarianism that was identified above all with the establishment position of Śaiva Siddhānta. As with the Avirōtavuntiyār, a universalist interpretation of the three principles of world, souls, and
lord functioned to clear a space in which a new claim on Tamil Śaivism could be advanced. By reinterpreting these principles through the lens of conventional and ultimate truth, Caccitāṇanta attempted to reinscribe Śaivism as a monism without altering its fundamental ontological framework.

The advent of a monolithic conception of Tamil Śaivism in this period is closely linked to the emergence of modern Tamil literary criticism. It was in these literary critical works, which generally failed to observe precolonial genre distinctions, that the logic of near and distant otherness that structured the articulation of religious difference was inverted. This inversion resulted in a dramatic expansion of the hermeneutic frame of intersectarian dialogue even as the boundaries between sects came to be extremely sharply defined. The totalizing religious narratives that appeared in this context were visible in Cōmacuntara Nāyakar’s Ācāryappirapāvam. There Nāyakar took up and summarily dismissed the Avirōtavuntiyār’s eclecticism in favor of the hierarchical model of truth advanced in the Civaṅṇacitītyār and similar texts. But the real significance of Nāyakar’s piece is his reinterpretation of the Śaiva saint Tīruṇāṇacampantar as the central hero of a monolithic and universal Śaivism. In a direct response to the perceived threat of Brahminical religion, Nāyakar recast Campantar as a “stainless” superhuman being whose preeminence vis-à-vis Śaṅkara is further reflected in the superiority of Tamil over Sanskrit and the Ādiśaiva temple priest over the Brahmin. While these arguments clearly prefigured those of the Tamil and Dravidian nationalists, they derived not from an engagement with Orientalist scholarship but rather from Nāyakar’s creative reading of premodern texts and his attempt to present a unified account of the Tamil literary “tradition”.

The consolidation in Nāyakar’s writings of a monolithic vision of Tamil Śaivism, one that would eventually be identified as the original and authentic religion of the Dravidian race, can be contextualized as part of a more general fracturing of the vernacular religious public sphere in the later nineteenth century. Evidence for this was seen in the reception of the poetry and persona of the early-modern Śaiva poet Tāyumāṉavar. Tāyumāṉavar appears to have initially been apprehended as a pan-sectarian figure whose poetry embodied the ideals of the “knowledge-literature” metagene. Tamil Vīraśaivas, or scholars with close ties to Vīraśaiva institutions, played a central role in this early phase of his reception in the nineteenth century. Yet by the 1870s a fierce dispute had erupted over the matter of the poet’s sectarian allegiance. This debate played itself out in introductions to printed editions of the poetry and especially in
articles published in vernacular religious journals by figures like Cōmacuntara Nāyakar, Rā. Śrīnīvāsa Śāstrikā, and others. The post-sectarian space evoked by the poet’s phrases “the same taste of Vedānta-Siddhānta” (vētānta cittānta camaracam) and “Vaidika Śaivism” (vaitika caivam) became the pivot around which these proponents of Śaiva Siddhānta and Advaita Vedānta advanced antithetical conceptions of Tamil Śaivism and attempted to demonstrate their universality vis-à-vis one another.

From the perspective of the present, the intense sectarianism of the late nineteenth century appears to have been largely replaced by a modern “Hindu” discourse that would subsume religious differences within a nationalist paradigm closely linked to the ideology of neo-Vedānta. To a certain extent, this was seen in the Teyvattīy Kural, where Cantiracēkarēntira Carasvatī Cuvāmikaḷ interprets the “Vaidika” (vaitikam) to be a universal monotheistic religion. Here the pan-sectarian traditions of earlier centuries were stripped of their implicit social critique and made to speak for a decontextualized Brahminical orthodoxy. Yet it was also seen that this position was beset by anxieties of a decidedly more local nature, including the perceived Westernization of the urbanized Brahmin, the persistent challenge of asserting the universality of Smārtism with respect to the rival sectarian traditions of Śrīvaishnavism and Śaiva Siddhānta, and the problem of articulating the Vaidika’s relationship to the Tamil language and Tamil culture in the wake of Tamil nationalism and the non-Brahmin movement. It was precisely these local and sectarian issues that were elided in the largely English-language interactions that took place between Cantiracēkarēntira and his Western admirers.

The thesis has concentrated on several texts that have attempted to construe, interpret, and lay claim to Tamil Śaivism and also to the associated metagene of Tamil “knowledge-literature”. In so doing, it has attempted to challenge the received historiography of Tamil Śaivism in modernity that would posit a “revival” of Śaiva Siddhānta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was suggested that the construal of Tamil Śaivism as a monolithic religion whose theology is unproblematically identified with a particular interpretation of Śaiva Siddhānta canonicity needs to be seen as a development occurring no earlier than the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is also clear, however, that a great deal of further research is necessary before a more comprehensive picture of Tamil Śaiva intellectual history can be achieved. The received narrative of modern Tamil Śaivism has occluded from scholarly view a vast quantity of vernacular religious literature produced since the time of Umāpati Civācāriyar in
the fourteenth century. Even with respect to Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta in the nineteenth century, solid textual scholarship is available for only a handful or so of important figures. This is to say nothing of the huge amount of material composed outside of a Śaiva Siddhānta milieu, including Vīrāsaiva and Advaita Vedānta literature in Tamil. Research in such areas will undoubtedly add further nuance to our understanding of the genealogy of modern Tamil Śaivism. Nevertheless, it is hoped that by focusing on the hitherto untheorized metagenre of Tamil “knowledge-literature”, this thesis has called attention to an alternative frame for conceptualizing and interrogating Tamil Śaiva intellectual history.

By working through the dynamics of religious reform in colonial modernity with respect to the particularity of the Tamil Śaiva context, it becomes possible to adopt a more critical perspective towards the wider historiography of “modern Hinduism”. As was mentioned in the Introduction, the primary tendency in this scholarship has been to chart the formation of a single modern Hinduism, which is located above all in the Western-gazing neo-Vedāntic discourses of predominantly North Indian elites. Yet this narrative, insofar as it culminates in a Hindu nationalism that denies religious heterogeneity in its own claim to transhistorical authenticity, actually mimics the totalizing logic of Hindutva itself. By effectively ignoring the persistence and continued evolution of vernacular religious traditions this narrative unwittingly confirms rather than challenges the Hindu nationalist’s assertion of a fundamental religious uniformity. It is this mimetic relationship between the historiography of modern Hinduism and Hindutva that permits the two to be correlated, as in Sharma’s (2013: xiv) lament that “there is no distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva”. It is further apparent that a “post-Orientalist” approach, which would see the colonial period a one marked by a radical rupture with precolonial forms of self-understanding and the adoption of Western models of religion, is singularly ill-positioned to begin to address this conundrum.

What is needed in particular is closer attention to the vernacular religious discourses that are being produced in colonial and postcolonial South Asia (and the diaspora). As we have seen especially with respect to the nineteenth century, vast quantities of literature were printed in vernacular journals and other media that dealt primarily with issues related to theology and religious scripture. Much of this literature has been more or less totally neglected, presumably because of its perceived obsession with the past and with the intricacies of textual minutiae at a time when “more important” changes were taking place in the contemporary socio-political
realm. This, however, is a mistake. The vernacular religious public sphere that emerged in the nineteenth century was a crucial site where old conversations could continue even as the form of the discourse itself underwent change. It was in the vernacular press that earlier conceptions of religious universalism and canonicity participated in the broader colonial-era debates that would produce what we recognize today as modern religion in India. Thus the literature produced by the vernacular religious traditions in the colonial period needs to be seen as innovative not merely insofar as it brings in the new, but perhaps even more significantly in the ways that it recasts the old. To ignore this literature is thus to overlook the significant forms of theological and literary historical work that it accomplishes.

This study has attended to the reworking of past idioms, genres, and ideas within the context of a Tamil Śaiva modernity. It has endeavored to remain sensitive to the effective history of the precolonial politics of knowledge even as it appreciates the socio-cultural changes wrought by the colonial encounter. It has thus attempted to deconstruct the historiography of a singular modern Hinduism by calling attention to religious transformations occurring at the regional level. Such an approach has emphasized the persistence of multiple modern Hindusisms rooted in the vernaculars. By tapping into these local conversations, it becomes possible to detect forms of modern Hindu thought that course, like subterranean streams, beneath the monolithic narrative sanctioned by postcolonial historiography and Hindu nationalism.
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