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THE TRANSFORMATION OF TAMIL RELIGION

RAMALINGA SWAMIGAL (1823–1874) AND MODERN DRAVIDIAN SAINTHOOD

Srilata Raman

ROUTLEDGE

The Transformation of Tamil Religion

This book analyses the religious ideology of a Tamil reformer and saint, Ramalinga Swamigal of the 19th century and his posthumous reception in the Tamil country and sheds light on the transformation of Tamil religion that both his works and the understanding of him brought about.

The book traces the hagiographical and biographical process by which Ramalinga Swamigal is shifted from being considered an exemplary poet-saint of the Tamil Śaivite bhakti tradition to a Dravidian nationalist social reformer. Taking as a starting point Ramalinga's own writing, the book presents him as inhabiting a border zone between early modernity and modernity, and between colonialism and regional nationalism, highlighting the influence of his teachings on politics, particularly within Dravidian cultural and political nationalism. Simultaneously, the book considers the implication of such a hagiographical process for the transformation of Tamil religion in the period between the 19th and the mid-20th centuries. The author demonstrates not only that Ramalinga Swamigal's ideology of compassion, *cīvakāruṇyam*, had a long genealogy in pre-Modern Tamil Śaivism but also that it functioned as a potentially emancipatory ethics of salvation and caste critique not just for him but also for other Tamil and Dalit intellectuals of the 19th century.

This book is a path-breaking study that also traces the common grounds between the religious visions of two of the most prominent subaltern figures of Tamil modernity – Iyothee Thass and Ramalingar. It argues that these transformations are one meaningful way for a religious tradition to cope with and come to terms with the implications of historicization and the demands of colonial modernity. It is, therefore, a valuable contribution to the field of religion, South Asian history and literature, and subaltern studies.

Srilata Raman is Professor of Hinduism in the Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, Canada. Her previous publications include the monograph Self-Surrender (Prapatti) to God in Srīvaiṣṇavism (2007), published by Routledge. In addition, she has co-authored two edited volumes and numerous articles on the history of Tamil religion with a specific focus on Śrīvaiṣṇavism and the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta.

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For V. Geetha
Tamil Intellectual –
Best of Friends –
Driving Force behind this Book
and
For Emilia Meenakshi Padmavati

தங்கப்பொண்ணே தாராவே .....

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Note on Transliteration

The Tamil transliteration scheme follows that of the *Madras Tamil Lexicon* and the conventions adopted by Kamil Zvelebil in his *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*. Well-known city names (Chidambaram, Madurai, etc.) and names of figures (Ramalinga Swamigal, Arumuga Navalar) have been given in their standard English spelling with the Tamil transliteration in the first instance. Sanskrit words have been rendered in their Tamil forms when quoted from Tamil texts and sometimes also given along with the Tamil equivalents (*niṭṭai/niṣṭhā*, for example).

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Introduction

Nantaṉār's Song

Let us begin with this image from a 1942 Tamil film: a slightly stocky man stands in the middle of watered paddy fields, his palms folded. All around him men work in the fields, ploughing and planting the paddy seedlings. He starts to sing a song in praise of Śiva-Naṭarāja at Chidambaram (Citamparam), and as he gathers strength the camera pans to the men in the fields and shows them abandoning their work and coming closer to him. Also, the camera now shows us a group of women seated nearby and they too leave whatever they are doing and come over. First they stand around him and then they join in the singing, softly as a chorus, repeating after him lines that he has sung. He sings a song in praise of Śiva that begins with the words, "He is the pure one who has averted desire" (*kāmam akaṟriya tūyaṉ avaṉ*), and the song reaches its climax with the words, "He is himself the Light, the Supreme Light" (*svayam cōti avaṉ param cōti avaṉ*) as the camera pans to the work abandoned by the men and women now grouped around him. The stocky figure, smeared with the sacred ash of Śiva on his forehead, is the actor M.M. Taṇṭapāṇi Tēcikar playing the role of the Śaivite, "untouchable" (*paṟaiyaṉ*) saint (*nāyaṉār*) known as Nantaṉ, whose legend was first narrated in the 12th-century Śaivite hagiographical work the *Periyapurāṇam*.

The story of Nantaṉār, also known as "He who will go tomorrow [to Chidambaram]" (*tirunāḷaippōvār*), is simple enough. Nantaṉār lives in the outskirts of the ancient and prosperous town of Ātaṉūr in the Cōḷa country, in the quarters of the untouchables (*pulaippāṭi*). Though he is one of them, the *Periyapurāṇam* tells us, "he came into the world with the gift of understanding and an unfeigned love for the feet of Śiva".[1] Nantaṉār's love for Śiva crystallizes in the desire to go to the temple at Chidambaram, also known as Tillai, and worship there. But he is constantly aware that this desire of his is improper – an untouchable cannot enter the Tillai temple to worship Śiva-Naṭarāja. He tells himself, though, as his desire increases, that he will go there the next day. Finally, he cannot put off any longer what he wishes to do, and he sets out for Chidambaram. Once he reaches the outskirts of the city, he realizes he cannot go any further.

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> All he could do, with melting heart and hands raised in worship, was to walk in reverence around the walls which marked the city's limits. This he continued to do, both day and night. The thought that he could not enter the city caused the Lord's servant deep distress. But however much he turned it over in his mind, he could think of no way that he could come before the Lord to offer worship. Finally, he was forced to the conclusion that it was his lowly birth that was the root cause of all his trouble, and so he fell asleep worn out with disappointment.[2]

At this point Lord Śiva himself steps in to reward his faithful servant. He appears to Nantaṉār in his dream and advises him to be prepared to immerse himself in a fire and be relieved of his life and unite with him. At the same time he instructs the Brahmans of Tillai to prepare the fire and await Nantaṉār. It comes to pass as the deity wishes. The Brahmans prepare the fire in a pit near the southern wall of the temple. Nantaṉār arrives and enters the flames. "No sooner had he done so than *he was rid of this false, deceptive mortal form.* Instead, he appeared in the form of a virtuous ascetic, with matted locks and sacred thread shining white".[3] Now purified and rid of his outcaste body, Nantaṉār accompanied by the Brahmans enters the temple and, once he has crossed the sacred threshold, vanishes from sight. The *Periyapurāṇam* concludes the story with the words: "Thus, by bathing in the fire, Nantaṉār gained release from this tainted body, and assuming the form of a spotless ascetic attained the feet of the dancing Lord".[4] As several scholars have pointed out, the story as it stands is hardly an affirmation of the equality of all devotees, irrespective of their caste status, within the community of Śaivites.[5] Nantaṉār, at first glance, is an untouchable devotee who too gains the highest access to God, but he does so only after undergoing a fire ordeal and emerging from it transformed. Indeed, it is revealed that his untouchable body was all along a false one while, in reality, he is a Brahman sage. Ebeling summarizes the social logic of the story which could be characterized as follows: an untouchable can certainly enjoy the privilege of access to the highest sacred provided he turns out to be unique among his kind and, in fact, is not an untouchable at all.[6] Yet, the story gained a particularly fresh life in the colonial and postcolonial periods, to be retold again and again, deployed in various ways, as reaffirming an elite Śaiva devotionalism, as a critique of Brahmanical norms, or as a radical Dalit assertion.[7]

The story appears to have exerted a particular fascination for the Tamil film industry in the early years of the 20th century. There were five film versions – two silent versions made in 1923 and one in 1930, followed by two "talkies" in 1933 and 1935. By far the most successful was the version produced by Murugadasa a.k.a Muthuswamy Iyer in which the aforementioned scene appears. Yet, the Murugadasa version of the story in its details is not a story of Nantaṉār of the *Periyapurāṇam* but, mediated by an immensely popular version of it, a musical composition incorporating bridging prose

passages, composed by the 19th-century musician Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār (1811–1881). In his composition Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār not only introduced an entirely new character, Nantaṉār's wicked Brahman landlord, the *vētiyar*, but also produced a distinctly colonial-era Nantaṉār, who battled both Brahmanical injustice and aspects of his own "folk" religious traditions such as the worship of local deities, animal sacrifice, and drinking of alcohol.[8] This is a Nantaṉār who is a socio-religious reformer of the 19th century, who wishes to rid his community of its older traditions of worship and substitute these with a more sanskritized "Hinduism", even while espousing the favourite socio-religious causes of his time such as the banning of animal sacrifice and the endorsement of vegetarianism. It is this Nantaṉār who we see also in Murugadasa's film, singing the same songs for the most part composed by Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār for his *Songs about the Life of Nantaṉār* (*Nantaṉār carittira kīrttaṉaikaḷ*). There is, though, one interesting exception: the song of Nantaṉār which he sings in the fields to lure his fellow peasants. This song, with which I began this section, was composed not by Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār but is an adaptation from one by another great poet and religious figure of the 19th century – Ramalinga Swamigal/Ramalingar (Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ), whose dates, 1823–1874, are roughly contemporaneous with that of Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār. The lyrics of the song reveal it to be a fairly straightforward praise-poem even while the reference to Śiva being supreme light itself might have given one who is familiar with Ramalinga Swamigal's poetic repertoire a jolt of recognition – this was one of his favourite tropes.[9] As one ponders the scene and the song, one is struck by how apposite it is – even as Nantaṉār is calling forth others to join him in a new utopian Śaiva community, his words, for the discerning audience, are those of another religious figure from a non-elite background of the 19th century who did the same. And the resemblances do not just end there but multiply – just as Nantaṉār comes to be reinterpreted again and again to suit the theological and religious reformist agendas of different historical moments, the poet whose words he sings and with whom he is blended in this single scene, comes also to be reinterpreted in diverse ways, between the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, to speak for a new "Dravidian Sainthood".[10] This book is about the recasting of Ramalinga Swamigal, the new guises he assumes in the wake of Dravidian nationalism as much as it is about the recasting of Tamil Śaivism itself in the wake of the Dravidian Movement in Tamil cultural and political history. Nantaṉār's song, his calling forth in the words of Ramalinga Swamigal, encapsulates these multiple agendas.

The Subject

Though we will revisit Ramalingar's life again and again the bare details, as they consolidate in the earliest hagiographical literature, might be quickly narrated: he was born in 1823 in the Tamil country in Marutūr, a small

village near the famous Śaivite religious centre of Chidambaram. His family moved around upon the death of his father and finally came to the city of Madras, then the fastest growing urban centre of the Madras Presidency, when he was still a child. Ramalingar lived the first 30 years of his life in Madras, where he gradually acquired the erudition of a traditional scholar of Śaivite religious texts and classical Tamil literature. Disciples flocked to him, and he was part of a traditional scholarly community. Thus far, it was a conventional life though his hagiographies hint, from the inception, at the unusual and the miraculous which dot this life and presage the greatness to come. In 1858, at the age of 35, Ramalingar decided to leave Madras permanently and commenced on a journey, details of which are unclear, for he seems to have led a wanderer's life before eventually returning to the territory of his birth. He finally settled in Vadalur (Vaṭalūr), in the South Arcot area near where he was born. In 1865, he established there a religious institution, whose tenets superficially reflect the impulses of socio-religious reform movements emerging on a pan-Indian scale at this period: a move away from "ritualism" to a meaning-centred congregational life and the general tendency towards monism reflected in the central religious teaching, about an ultimate divine to be worshipped in an aniconic form as the "Great Light of Compassion", *Aruṭperuñcōti*. Feeding and education of the poor seemed to have become the main social priority. In 1867, he established a charitable feeding house for the poor. The growth of Vadalur as a religious centre in this period and all the activities at the almshouse appeared to have created a need in Ramalinga Swamigal for some solitude. In 1870, he left Vadalur for a small village near it called Mēṭṭukuppam. Nevertheless, in 1872, on the basis of his instructions, a temple was built in Vadalur. Its foundations had the form of an eight-pointed star and it consisted of a central hall in which the community could do daily worship in front of a lamp. The temple was named the *Hall of True Wisdom* (*Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai*). By 1873, though, Ramalingar seemed to distance himself from the organization he had attempted to build up. An important date in the fledging religious organization had been the celebration of the *Kārttikai viratam*, in November, when Ramalingar would deliver a public discourse outside his residence. In November 1873, though, he refused to do so, placing instead a lighted lamp in front of his room door and locking himself inside. During the next three months he emerged from his room only occasionally. January 1874 dawned. On the midnight of 30th January 1874, a Friday, he spoke to some of his close disciples, went into his room, and closed the door, which at his request was not opened for several months. He was never seen again.

The life story of Ramalingar took a different hermeneutical trajectory or trajectories in the century after his disappearance. As in the case of the semi-legendary biography of Nantaṉār, from its earliest rendering, it called forth a certain horizon of expectation common to both its writers and readers – one which functioned within the framework of the life of the holy person

and operated within certain assumptions of sainthood. Thus, one major thread in this book is the examination of the different narratives about his life from some of the earliest ones to those in the colonial moment and beyond which sought to integrate him into both Tamil religious modernity and within a pantheon of Dravidian and nationalist poet-saints and, hence, within pan-Indian socio-religious reform.

Early Hagiographies/Biographies

A central focus of the book, therefore, is the genre of hagiographies and biographies. These narratives are characteristic of holy lives. As one kind of "life-writing", the telling of an exemplary or holy life is seen as a narrative that has its roots firmly in pre-modernity, even while enduring with great persistence in contemporary literature. In speaking of a "Western" tradition of holy lives, or hagiographical literature,[11] Lee (2009:25) sees it as "one of the dominant literary genres in Europe from Late Antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages",[12] even while it persistently evolved to keep up with historical contingency, with religious and political concerns. In South Asia, as two important anthologies and several individual monographs have pointed out, hagiography was the dominant pre-modern genre employed for narrating the life – whether of kings or saints, cultural heroes, or low-caste figures of resistance.[13]

The early Ramalingar hagiographies are rooted in a specific vernacular tradition of hagiographical literature even while sharing some generic elements, or *topoi*, of pan-South Asian hagiographical discourse, which we will discuss in subsequent chapters. Simultaneously, the most significant fact to operate on the hagiographical discourse was that Ramalinga Swamigal expressed his religiosity in literature, in the composition of a vast poetic and somewhat smaller prose corpus. Thus, he was seen, in these early works, as quintessentially a poet-saint. Hence, there were also the specific conventions that operated in the case of the life story of a poet-saint, which demanded that the contours of the life story be strongly guided by the poetic corpus. One might say, in the early hagiographies, that the life explains the poetry but at the same time the poetry provides the only exemplary history of the life, thus creating a circularity where each presupposes the other. But this is the very obverse of the circularity that emerges with Romantic conceptions of the singularity of the work of art and the artist. Rather, the pre-modern hagiography dissolves any singularity in its anchoring of both the poet-saint and his work within concentric circles of others who preceded him in a religious tradition and wrote the kind of poetry he does. It is this anchoring that will come under strain, if not come to be broken, in the transition from older to newer forms of hagiographies-cum-biographies.

In contrast to this mainstream version, there also existed an alternative narrative of Ramalinga Swamigal that had emerged within his own lifetime – a polemical and anti-hagiographical one that questioned both his poetic

and religious credentials. This was the narrative of the anti-hagiography, as I call it, similar to the polemical Sanskrit genre of the *kaṇṭaṉam/khaṇḍana*, revealing of the crisis of Tamil Śaivism in the second half of the 19th century, under the impact of colonialism, a crisis that revolved around issues of canonity, subjectivity, and sainthood. Nevertheless, this latter discourse about Ramalingar remained confined and fought out within a specialized group of scholars, even though it dragged on well into the mid-20th century.

Later Hagiographies/Biographies

The rediscovery of Ramalinga Swamigal in the early 20th century was spearheaded by the *Self-Respect Movement* launched in 1925, by E.V. Ramasami Nayakar, alias Periyar.[14] Speaking of the movement as a radical impulse that assured the Tamil country into new cultural and political paradigms, Geetha and Rajadurai (2008) refer to its propensity to turn the world upside down, a process that led to,

> an energetic mobilizing of men and women across castes and classes, a vision of society that had erupted into rebellion, into acts of defiance, daring and, finally, a time of great churning, when all things were subject to doubt and enquiry, when all matters, however sacred and inviolate were relentlessly interrogated. . . . The oppositional rhetoric and critical energy of the Self-Respect Movement was balanced and sustained in its negative significance by an alternative theory and practice which made it clear the movement's agents sought to destroy only in order to rebuild. Anti-religious attitudes, acts and ideologies were often accompanied by exhortations to rationality and upheld by an abiding faith in the powers of humanity to remake itself.[15]

In this remaking, in the search for a religiosity that could be claimed as specifically Tamil as well as universal, as old as well as new, as rational as well as religious, the figure and writings of Ramalinga Swamigal seemed to offer some significant answers. The later works on his life were written by those who positioned themselves tangentially to the *Self-Respect* critique of religion, particularly its critique of Tamil Śaivism, and by some of those who felt the need to reflect within the parameters of Śaivism, its ideology at this critical juncture. They too sought and found in Ramalinga Swamigal the figure to mediate these articulations. It is variations of this complex response that found expression in the intellectual biography of Ramalinga Swamigal in tandem with other works on Śaiva religion written, in the 1930s, by the Tamil nationalist and orator Tiru.Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār (1883–1953) and the biography of Ramalinga Swamigal written between 1963 and 1964 by Ma.Po. Civañāṉam (1906–1995).

The writings of both Tiru. Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār and Ma.Po. Civañāṉam on Ramalingar mark several shifts in the literary archive. The

first relates to the relationship with the past, the Śaivite past. I had earlier referred to the circularity, the closing-off, the features of the centrality of the poetic corpus, which characterized the early hagiographies of Ramalingar. We will see that the important transition from the early to the latter forms of life-writing lies in the breaking of this circularity. Seeing Ramalinga Swamigal as embedded in a long, Śaivite devotional and poetical tradition, seeing his life as the repetition of that of the semi-mythical poet-saints, the *Nāyaṉmār*, the early hagiographies adopt a strategy of hyper-literalism that faithfully records that Ramalingar acquired a golden body because the poetry said so, that he turned water into oil because the poetry says so. Uncomfortable with this hyper-literalism and impelled towards a historical stance, distancing Ramalingar from the assumptions of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta yet not breaking with it entirely, reformulating it, the newer hagiographies/biographies have to grapple with the problems of the transcendent and the issue of miracles, as we will see, in entirely different ways.

In his deeply insightful book on Catherine Tekakwitha, the "Mohawk Saint", Greer (2005) examines the hagiography of the Iroquois saint as well as the autobiographies and biographies of the French Jesuit missionaries who wrote about her. In studying these intersecting lives, Greer is able to give us a highly illuminating account of early French-Canadian colonial practices, conversion, the encounter between European and indigenous cultures and provide perspectives on both indigenous native cultures and the French Counter-Reformation that interrogates some of the easy stereotypes of the colonial encounter, particularly when this process is viewed through the lens of biographical and autobiographical writings. Greer's work shows us that the writing of a saint's life in this case is a deeply political process, one that necessarily forced French Jesuit Catholicism of the 16th and 17th centuries to question its own assumptions – not necessarily only the theological but even more so, cultural assumptions – about the nature of native Indian religiosity and qualifications for sainthood. I see the significance of Greer's work for my own in illuminating that constructions of sainthood are fruitfully understood as also political processes, by examining the intersection of several genres of texts that draw upon different pasts and postulate different futures to converge on one particular figure and, further, that such constructions lie at the heart of the configuration and reconfiguration of religious traditions at specific historical junctures. Similarly, this study suggests that the transformations that Tamil religion underwent in the period between the 1890s and the 1960s can be better understood from the perspective of different kinds of texts, both theological and hagiographical, centred around someone seen as a holy figure, to emerge in this period.

This book suggests that Ramalinga Swamigal presented the narrators of his life story with new and novel ways of negotiating religion at the specific historical moment of colonial modernity and beyond. These included new understandings of regional and religious identities, of the "public" and

"private", and what came to be seen as the "sacred" and the "secular". Ramalinga Swamigal, the new notions of a Tamil saint that his life implies, is a player upon the stage of a distinctly Dravidian plot that delineates a holy life.

This hagiographical thread is explored almost exclusively in five chapters of this book – **Chapters 1**, **2**, **5**, **8**, and **9**. In doing so, the book speaks of the many different narratives told about Ramalingar and his life – hagiographies, anti-hagiographies, and biographies that are shadowed by memoirs – as comprising, broadly speaking, "life-writing".[16] All these narratives might be seen as forming a kind of literary archive in the sense in which Strohm (2000) speaks of the latter – as "a repository of meanings that await discovery".[17] Building upon Derrida (1996), Strohm speaks of both the conservative or stasis-seeking drive and the progressive and institutive drive of the archive – and it is in the latter sense that the archive "exists as an unstable amalgam of unexhausted past and unaccomplished future. Open towards the future – that is the activities of future interpreters – the archive consists of texts that await meaning".[18] It is here suggested that these texts should be seen as participating in a broadly similar regime for the creation and bestowal of meaning with regard to a holy life, even while seeing such meaning as anchored in different and evolving narrative genres. Also, this archive of life-writing is seen as intertextual: both in the classical sense of having a common repertoire of references, allusions, and echos and in a broader sense of being steeped in an intertextuality that goes beyond the boundaries of the archive itself to the anonymous quotability of the Śaivite religious canon. This intertextuality as well as the shift in usage of genres, which is made possible by the fact that genres cannot be understood as irreducible structural forms but as open-ended and historically contingent sets of conventions, will also enable us to see, through detailed textual analysis, how these narratives are both constitutive of and participate in religious change and in changing religion.

His Thoughts

A second important thread in the book is the exploration of Ramalingar's religious vision with a particular focus on the concept of *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam*, translated as "the conduct of compassion towards living beings", which becomes central to his religious doctrines in the final decade of his life. Studies of Ramalingar's Śaivism thus far, including the most recent monograph by Weiss (2019), explore Ramalingar's doctrines almost exclusively from the perspective of its vague debt to the devotional literature of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta or as somehow constituting a modern and fresh departure from it in the most general terms while not giving us greater insight into specific works beyond the devotional canon that fertilized his thoughts or contributed to his distinct notions of compassion. Yet, the clues to understanding and contextualizing his thoughts are strewn all over his own writings and in the books he published, if one looks for them. By following these clues and foraging in lesser-known works of the Tamil

Śaivasiddhānta and the Tamil Vīraśaiva tradition between the late 15th and the mid-19th century, this book seeks to illuminate the longue durée context of his most radical doctrinal innovations. Simultaneously, the book shows that Ramalingar was not the only remarkable figure of the long 19th century to attempt to offer a new model of Tamil ethics based on the concept of compassion. Placing the renewed interest in compassion within the context of Dalit learning and Dalit claims to soteriological knowledge in the late 19th century, the book demonstrates that compassion takes on a new lease of life in two radically different figures separated by half a century from each other – Ramalingar, and his successor in this regard, the towering Dalit intellectual of the Tamil region in the late 19th and early 20th century – Iyothee Thass Pandithar (Ayōttitāsa Paṇṭitar, 1845–1914). Thus, this thread in the book demonstrates how *cīvakāruṇyam* or compassion comes to be reinterpreted, modernized, and radicalized by two of the most original thinkers in the Tamil religious landscape in the long 19th century. This thread is explored in **Chapters 3 and 4** of the book.

An important by-product of this investigation of Ramalingar's thoughts on compassion is that this book also maps new grounds in the study of Tamil Śaivism. In a departure from scholarship to date on this subject, it traces an important strand of its intellectual genealogy and the doctrinal concerns of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Tamil Vīraśaivism in the crucial period leading up to early colonial modern. In doing so, it moreover shows that by the late 18th century, the various strands of Tamil Śaivism had already moved towards what I call a pre-modern Śaiva consensus and that it was this theological adjustment and coherence that facilitated its emergence as the "one religion" of the Tamil people in the colonial period.

Of Ramalingar it can be said what E.P. Thompson said of William Blake, that "his learning was both more eccentric and more eclectic" than has been understood thus far.[19] One might say that a willed amnesia that was premised on the anticipated and desired newness of modernity, and a discourse of reform, contributed till now to the neglect of some of its vital roots. In order to understand how this willed amnesia worked, as well as how it contributed to both the traditional hagiographies and the modern hagiographies/biographies leading to the changing perception of Ramalingar, one must also consider how Tamil Śaivism transformed itself in the colonial period. This consideration forms the third thread of the book.

The Dravidian Paradigm and Modern Śaivism

Briefly put, there was a radical realignment of what it meant to be "Tamil" at a certain historical juncture between the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. In crucial ways, the realignment can be captured by the genealogy of the term "Dravidian" starting in the early 19th century, when it emerges as part of a binary, oppositional, and mimetic coupling, where the other term is "Aryan". The notion of *Āriyam* as "Northern

Language" (*vaṭamoḻi*) and *Trāviṭam* as "Southern Language" (*Teṉmoḻi*), referring to the Sanskrit and Tamil languages, respectively, has a long pre-colonial history.[20] Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that "Aryan" and "Dravidian" emerged with new connotations in the late 18th to early 19th-century-British Orientalist and missionary scholarship, and first within the parameters of linguistic theories. Thus, the discovery of the Indo-European family of languages, and subsequently the Dravidian, laid the foundations of comparative philology. Pioneers in this field were William Jones in Calcutta, whose discoveries regarding the former were made public in 1786, and Francis Ellis and others, who were part of the intellectual and governmental project that has been called "the Madras School of Orientalism". Ellis had anticipated the independent origin of the Dravidian family of languages (even though he did not use the word "Dravidian") in the early decades of the 19th century.[21] In the first half of the 19th century, the terms "Aryan" and "Dravidian" remained terms predominantly connected to different language groups, and even when associated with different "races" the word "race" was understood most likely as coterminous with "Nation".[22] These relatively benign connotations were to change with the emergence of Aryan theories of race from the second half of the 19th century, where "race" is conceived in increasingly biological and somatic terms.[23] The most influential Orientalist theory of the second half of the 19th century which adumbrated "Dravidian" both as a family of languages and as a "Race" was that of the Irish missionary Robert Caldwell (1814–1891).[24]

Much has been written about Caldwell's impact on Dravidianism.[25] It has been pointed out that Caldwell's own thoughts on the Tamil language followed in the footsteps of an older Protestant concern in South India, with the defence and cultivation of the vernacular as the idiom of the "people", but his "genius lay in appropriating the history of Protestant lingualism to a theory of race and civilization".[26] Caldwell first developed his theories regarding "Dravidian" language and culture in his ethnographic work on the toddy tapping caste, the Shanars, first published in 1849, and subsequently extended his observations to a grand theory of Dravidian language, religion, and culture in his *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages*, published in 1856. In it, Caldwell proposed that Tamil was part of the "Dravidian" family of languages, different and distinct from the Indo-European Sanskrit, with an antiquity and autonomy which rivalled that of the latter.[27] This antiquity, in turn, vouchsafed the existence of an ancient and egalitarian Tamil society free from the fossilizing effects of the caste system, albeit within a society which practised a kind of primitive religion not far removed from demonolatry and Shamanism.[28] The Dravidians, according to Caldwell, had acquired a high civilization as well as the pernicious caste system through their colonization by the Aryans from the north. This colonization, as Caldwell depicted it, was a peaceful process and, in the final analysis, really a form of social and ideological self-colonization of a people who had been duped into accepting both Sanskritic values

and the caste system by some clever Brahmans: "The Brahmans, who came in 'peaceably, and obtained the kingdom by flatteries,' may probably have persuaded the Dravidians that in calling them Sudras they were conferring upon them a title of honour".[29] The enduring impact of Caldwell's work, as Nicholas Dirks[30] has suggested, has been due to its ingenuous combination of philology, race theory, and a theory of cultural imperialism derived from a fierce anti-Brahmanical critique.

The re-imagining of literary history, of the canon of Tamil literature and religion, starting from the late 19th century had as its template this new Dravidian articulation, and we might consider the decisive phase as between the last decades of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. Also, in this period, a master narrative about Śaivism emerged in Tamil literary histories, in literary journals devoted to the translation and dissemination of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, such as *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika*,[31] in polemical tracts in print from the 1860s onwards that sought to defend and reform Śaivism in the light of Christian missionary critique and in the prodigious self-publications of Śaivite men-of-letters on both sides of the Palk Strait. This dominant paradigm of Tamil Śaivism which emerged in the colonial period was premised on sets of binaries of ethnicity, caste, language, and religion – Aryan/Dravidian, Brahman/non-Brahman, Sanskrit/Tamil, Brahmanical religion/Śaivism – which were considered mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. I call this dominant model Neo-Śaivism, following Ramaswamy (1997). Neo-Śaiva discourse, implicitly or explicitly, also fed into the understanding of Tamil literary history and the historiography of Tamil religion as a discipline emerging in the same period. Therefore, it effectively led to a metanarrative that privileged Śaivism as the marker of the authentically religious, the "insider" religion of the Tamils, as Sivathamby has pointed out.[32] The outcome was a Dravidian paradigm of religion, where Śaivism – more specifically the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta – is seen as the original and authentic Tamil religion, the Śaiva canon is seen as constituting the backbone of Tamil literary history and the caste category of Vēḷāḷas, conceived of as a homogenous ethnic group, as the creators and protectors of this Tamil religion. This ethno-linguistic-religious paradigm, in its broadest contours, is what I mean to encompass by the term "Dravidian" in this book. This "Dravidian" paradigm, necessarily, must be considered as a heuristic device for understanding a dominant mode of thinking about Śaivism in the colonial period, linked to Śaivite intellectuals who converged and published in the urban centre of Madras. Dominant in that it came to have greater urban valency than other ways of thinking about Tamil Śaivism which also emerged in the same period in other areas of the Tamil country, and which also participated, through publications and associational activities, in rethinking Śaivism in this period. In **Chapters 6** and **7**, and throughout much of the book, I hope to also draw attention, through an emphasis on the micro-textual and institutional history of colonial Tamil religion

and through a study of the lives and writings of specific social actors, to the many Śaivisms, both urban and semi-rural that flourished in the Tamil region in this period. Neo-Śaivism has been assumed to be a radical and emancipatory discourse, or even a monolithic one, through an uncritical acceptance of its self-representation in some recent studies.[33] This book, in contrast, hopes to render its discourse more transparent by telling the story also of its many iterations, and the omissions and erasures on which it was necessarily premised. Also, it shows how such omissions were necessary to recast Ramalingar as a modern prophet relevant for a Tamil nation.

In general, one might say that, in the decades that followed his disappearance, Ramalinga Swamigal's influence and significance remained confined to the select circle of his devotees, who continued to believe in his transfigured presence somewhere, and in the circulation of his poetry in the Tamil devotional and popular realm where it enjoyed high popularity. This limited popularity is in significant contrast to his status today. The starting point for this current status of Ramalingar is the 1920s and 1930s, when the range of his impact and its significance was to radically change through the consolidation of the "Dravidian" paradigm. Thus, it leads to a historical trajectory by which he, like the Maharashtrian poet-saint Namdev, comes to be seen as a "secular saint", even if not of the Indian nation of, at the very least, the Tamil one. Since this book is about the holy life, or the many holy lives of Ramalinga Swamigal, about what influenced him as much as how he was seen by others, the book is also about doctrinal works that create a genealogy of compassion he could place himself in, as well as the literary genres that tell life stories, and the shifting contours of both under the conditions of colonial modernity. It attempts to trace the lineaments of a textual understanding of Ramalingar as a way of complementing his real and continuing popularity today, evident, if one turns to the performative dimensions of the "practices of memory"[34] and the publics of devotion that have grown up around him and his life. We encounter even today musical events that play and replay his poetry, movies that include his songs, the many activities of urban, popular religious networks, the *Capais*, *Paṇimaṉṟams*, and *Kaḻakams* that are dedicated to discussing and carrying forward what is seen as his work, the innumerable websites dedicated to the propagation and popularization of him and, most spectacularly, the main event of the religious calendar of the organization that functions still in his name, the *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*'s organization of the viewing of the *Aruṭperuñcōti* in the *Hall of True Wisdom* on the date of the *Tai Pūcam* festival, sacred to Murukaṉ, which takes place in January–February, and most recently, the declaration by the Tamil Nadu State Government that Ramalingar's birth anniversary would henceforth be celebrated as *Tanipperuñkaruṇai Day* (Day of Special Benevolence). Through these many iterations, Ramalingar continues to remain the quintessential Dravidian saint. The book traces some of the textual ways by which he has come to be understood and be eventually immortalized within this Tamil landscape.

Structurally, the book is divided into two parts. Part I titled **Retrieving Ramalinga Swamigal** comprises the first five chapters and deals with the early reception of Ramalingar as well as the genealogy of his doctrine of compassion. Part II titled **Recreating Ramalinga Swamigal**, and comprising the remaining five chapters, contextualizes the conditions of colonial modernity under which the hagiographies and biographies were written, leaving us with some final reflections on his legacy as it is understood in contemporary Tamil Nadu.

Notes

1 All direct translations are taken from A. McGlashan, 2006. The story of Nantaṉār is to be found in pages 103–106, based on *Periyapurāṇam* verses 1041–1077.
2 McGlashan (2006:105). The italics are mine.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.:106.
5 For an analyses of the story, see, among several others Vincentnathan (1993:154–179), Pechilis Prentiss (2005), and, most recently, Ebeling (2010b).
6 Ebeling (2010b:469): "Cēkkilār's repeated emphasis on Nantaṉār's uniqueness serves an important purpose in the overall logic of the story. If Nantaṉ was indeed such a special character, his experience cannot be replicated. For Cēkkilār, this is a story about an individual saint, a virtuous brahmin trapped in an untouchable body. While the story demonstrates that there may be such particular individuals amongst the paṟaiyar community, this clearly does not mean that all paṟaiyar are saints in disguise or that they are all endowed with Nantaṉ's special "true love" (meyppariv) for and "understanding" (uṇarvu) of Lord Śiva. If Nantaṉ was indeed special, then his story does not suggest the possibility of temple entry, and hence of upward mobility, for all untouchables. In other words, if Nantaṉ was a brahmin in disguise, the story of Nantaṉār poses no threat to the order of things in the Chola realm with brahmins at the top of the spiritual (and political) hierarchy and untouchables outside the fold of brahmanical Hinduism".
7 Vincentnathan, 1993; Ebeling, 2010.
8 For a detailed analysis of the musical play as both anti-Brahmanical and anti-colonial critique, see Ebeling (2010b:475–481).
9 The song in a *kummi* song to Śiva-Naṭarāja – the *Natēcar Kummi* – of Ramalinga Swamigal's *Tiruvaruṭpā, 4th Tirumuṟai, 31.2964–2970* in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's 1972 edition. On the *kummi* as a literary genre and its history, see Perumāḷ (1982). Seen predominantly as a song form used by women accompanied by hand-clapping and classified under the hypergenre of *pirapantam* (Sanskrit: *prabandha*), its development can be traced from a rural, oral "folk" genre to one that was consciously picked up and popularized in 19th-century literary and "folk" revival by various poets, including Kōpālakiruṣṇa Pāratiyār and Ramalinga Swamigal.
10 I speak of this period as "colonial modernity" but in a qualified sense. Inasmuch as it is a period which is profoundly impacted by the British colonization of India and is responding to this impact, also in a condition of postcoloniality, I speak of certain new impulses – instantiated in the texts under consideration – as those situated in a "colonial modernity". I depart, though, throughout the book, from the assumption that we can understand these changes as *sui generis* and, instead, argue that they can only be fully understood in relation to both the "early colonial modern" (understood as the period between 1750 and 1850, prior to the heyday of British imperialism) and the pre-colonial past.

11 The use of the term "hagiography" to refer to non-Christian narratives of holy persons, along with the borrowing of other, originally specifically Christian terminology such as "saints", "cults" etc., has come to be standard practice in the scholarly study of sacred biography in not just South Asian religions. The legitimacy of this practice arises from an analytical perspective that allows one to extrapolate the most general connotations of these terms while adhering to the strictest stringency in their application and contextualizing them in specific religious, institutional, and literary traditions. Thus, for instance, one general definition of a "saint" in the context of Roman Catholicism, as given in Mulder-Bakker (2002:3–4), is the following:

> [A] saint is a deceased person who once excelled in virtue. A saint is one who possessed faith, hope, and love, demonstrated wisdom and justice, exercised moderation and perseverance. A person who occasionally manifested these virtues can make no claim to sainthood, but only he who persevered through his entire life, to a heroic degree, in *gradu heroico*, under difficult circumstances, and with a cheerful heart. Only he who took true delight in the practice of virtue can be considered for canonization, provided that a few miracles after death revealed the man's saintly ability to intercede with God – the man's ability, yes, for only seldom are women admitted to this select group. After exemplary exercise of virtue and a holy life, the existence of a cult, public veneration after the person's death, is the ultimate indication of sainthood.

Even while the general virtues might be extrapolated usefully for a definition of a holy person in other religious traditions, the very fact that this is a definition employed within the formal framework of canonization must give is one to pause. For the landmark, extraordinary study of saints and popular religion in late Christian Mediterranean antiquity, see Brown (1981). For a brief and thorough survey of the development of the Christian hagiographical tradition and its relevance for methodologies in South Asian hagiography, see Manring (2005:232–235).

12 Moreover, Lee adds (2009:25):

> It covers an enormous time-span, from Latin and Greek texts written by, (and for, monks, to vernacular versions, probably for a lay audience, between the 13th and 15th centuries. . . . They [the lives of saints] generally become more psychologically complex over time, more interested in the saints' conversions and self-doubts than in lists of miracles.

13 See Callewaert and Snell (1994), Arnold and Blackburn (2004), and the writings of Granoff (1983, 1984, 1985, etc).

14 For an account of Periyar's life, see Diehl (1977).

15 Geetha and Rajadurai (2008:289–290).

16 Re. Lee (2005:100), where she suggests that this term might be used, "when different ways of telling a life-story – memoir, autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical fiction – are being discussed together".

17 Strohm (2000:80).

18 Strohm (2000:80).

19 Thompson (1993:xvii).

20 Blackburn (2000:473–474). Blackburn bases some of his evidence for this on an analysis of the *Tiruvaḷḷuvamālai*, a medieval text dating perhaps to around the 10th century. But his observations are also strengthened and corroborated by textual evidence from medieval Śrīvaiṣṇava literature. See also Hardy (1995) and Raman (2007:106–109). Further, the grammatical tradition, beginning with the *Tolkāppiyam* and the commentaries on it, starting with the commentary of Iḷampūraṇar, also lay out this language divide through their discussion

of *vaṭacol/Āriyam* (northern language/words/Sanskrit) and its relationship to Tamil. For a summary of this discussion, see Chevillard (2013).

21 See Trautmann, 1997, 2002, 2006. See also Nehring (2002) on German Orientalism and missionary scholarship in the first half of the 19th century which, simultaneously and independently, came to be identical conclusions, regarding the relationship between the South Indian languages. Re. Trautmann (2009:4):

> On a number of issues, then, entirely new readings of the history of India as a whole emerged from the work of the MSO, readings at odds with those put out by the Calcutta Orientalists. The most spectacular and enduring of these was the 'Dravidian proof' published by Ellis in 1816. The published demonstration that the languages of South India were historically related to one another and, more importantly, were *not* derived from Sanskrit, directly controverted the Calcutta Orientalists. . . . The concept of what came to be called the Dravidian family of languages profoundly altered the view of India's deep history.

See also Trautmann, 2002, 2006.

22 Trautmann (2002:34–35).

23 See Dirks (2001:142–143) and Trautmann, 1997, as well as 2002.

24 On Caldwell's life, Ramaswamy (1997:192–93) remarks:

> Robert Caldwell, born in Ireland in 1814, arrived in Madras in 1838 as a missionary for the London Missionary Society. He spent most of his life in the small town of Idayankudi near Tirunelveli with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and in 1877 he became bishop of Tinnevelly. A fellow devotee, R. P. Sethu Pillai, writes with affection that in the fifty-odd years he worked in Tamilnadu, Caldwell went home on furlough only three times. When he went back to England the third time, his friends there begged him to stay. But he refused. "I have lived all these years for Indians. As long as I am alive, I will toil for them. I will give up my life in their land." And so he did, and when he died in 1891, he was buried in Idayankudi on the grounds of the church that he had himself built.

25 On Caldwell's writings, see Ravindran (1996), Ramaswamy (1997), and Geetha and Rajadurai (1998). For a recent incisive analysis of Caldwell's unforeseeable and idiosyncratic impact on Dravidian nationalism, see Dirks (2001:134–148). For a summary of this evidence, see Raman (2009a).

26 Geetha and Rajadurai (1998:113).

27 Caldwell (1856:1–31).

28 Caldwell (1856:77–79).

29 Quoted in Dirks (2001:140).

30 Dirks (2003:134–148).

31 The *Siddhanta Deepika,* calling itself "a monthly journal devoted to Religion, Philosophy, Literature and Science", was started by J.M. Nallasami Pillai. The subtitle of the journal included the following declaration: "Study of the Agamanta or Saiva Siddhanta and Mysticism, Prognostic Astronomy, Indo-Dravidian Culture etc.". Among its stated aims, mentioned in the very first volume of the journal was that "[g]reater attention will be paid to the language and religion of South India, and the Dravidian philosophy and religion will find their best exposition in its pages" (*Siddhanta Deepika, 1.15*).

32 Sivathamby, 1986.

33 Such as, for instance, the recent study of Vaithees (2015) on Maraimalai Adigal.

34 For such a study of Namdev, see Novetzke [2008]2011.

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Part I

Retrieving Ramalinga Swamigal

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1 *Pulavar* to Prophet. A 19th-Century Religious Life

Ramalinga Swamigal – A Bibliographic Entry

Let us begin by considering a 20th-century lexicographical entry on Ramalinga Swamigal. I quote the biographical section of the long entry in Zvelebil's 1995 *Lexicon of Tamil Literature* that underscores his importance by devoting two pages to him.

> **Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ** (Ramalinga Svami), b. 5.10.1823 at Marutūr (S. Arcot), son of Rāmaiyā Piḷḷai and Ciṉṉammai of vēḷāḷa community. Father was a village accountant and teacher. 1824, his widowed mother moved to Madras to live with her eldest scholarly son Capāpati. As child, Ramalinga was given to day-dreaming and wandering about in Kandasamy Temple. He meditated and began composing songs on the Lord in Tam. Aged 9 he had a vision of god Ṣaṇmukha (Murugan), and while still a boy began to give religious discourses. In 1832, he had a visitation of divine grace (*aruḷ*) and vision of god as pure luminous intelligence. At 12, began visiting Tyāgarāja (Śiva) temple at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr, temple at Tiruttaṇi, and other shrines in Madras region. Although having no desire for wealth or women, he agreed to be married, in 1850, to his sister's daughter but remained celibate. Spent his time composing poems, giving talks, editing old religious texts (→ Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's, *Oḷivil oṭukkam* → Muttaiya Cuvāmikaḷ's *Ciṉmaya Tīpikai*, a guide to spirituality, poems of → Paṭikkācu, etc.); wrote two prose works, *Maṉumuṟai kaṇṭa vacaṉam* (on a king dispensing justice to a cow, based on → *Periyapurāṇam*) and *Jīvakāruṇya oḻukkam* ("Law of Compassion for Life"). 1858 left Madras, for 9 years lived at Karuṅkuḻi nr. Marutūr, daily visiting Chidambaram. 1865 founded Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangam (Society for Religious Harmony in Universal Selfhood) which in 1872 he transformed into Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Satya Sangam (Society for Pure Truth and Universal Selfhood) transcending religions to propagate non-killing, forbearance, tolerance, equanimity, self-restraint, sense-control and universal compassion, which he made the essential steps in seeking god. 1867 he

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> opened a free eating house north of Vaṭalūr, available to all irrespective of creed, caste, country or habits. Moved from Karuṅkuḻi to Vaṭalūr, gave discourses, spiritual advice and benediction. 1870 he moved to the small village of Meṭṭukkuppam and started building the Hall of Wisdom for Universal worship (completed Dec. 1871). Hoisting of Sanmarga Flag took part on 15.11.1872. On 30.11.1874, he entered his *samādhi* room, locked himself in, and instructed his disciples not to open it for some time. He has never been seen since, and the room (opened once by British authorities) remains locked. No one has ever preached in Tamilnad so vehemently against casteism and religious bigotry. *I.* is the first important Tam. Poet of modern times (R. E. Asher), and undoubtedly the greatest Tam. Poet of 19th c., as well as the last great poet in the line of Śaiva *bhakti* poet saints, and of the Siddha school.[1]

This account of Ramalinga Swamigal's life places him within a "secular" literary framework of the history of Tamil literature. As the great Tamil scholar Kamil Zvelebil explained in the Introduction to his *Lexicon of Tamil Literature*, where this entry is featured, he had originally planned to write a literary history but, ultimately, made the decision to put together a lexicon of authors and their works.[2] In this context Ramalingar is seen, first and foremost, as a Tamil poet. Zvelebil tells us

> [T]he Tamil poet . . . has always been in the center of economic, social, political and cultural events, in the very core of the historical movements and changes, whether in the era of primary orality, or in the era of semi-orality, or, at present,[3]

and it is as the greatest poet of the 19th century that he wishes to memorialize and incorporate Ramalingar into the community of those who produce Tamil literature. In keeping with this aim, the life of Ramalingar narrated in this context is one which aims at a new, secular commemoration that tries to eschew references to miracles and the like even while retaining the link between Ramalingar and "Tamil". Yet, the miraculous and the inexplicable constantly and inevitably seep through even this brief entry. In this chapter I engage in the exercise of extending Zvelebil's biographical entry to give a more complete portrait of how we might conceive of Ramalingar the Tamil poet if we fleshed out the details which the entry can only briefly allude to. The chapter, therefore, attempts to give a comprehensive account of Ramalingar's life and works, which is intended to function as a template against the backdrop of which we might understand the partial accounts delineated in the subsequent chapters of the book. In doing so, it moreover shows that any modern narrative of Ramalingar's life continues to constantly grapple with the conundrum of the close interpellation of the "secular" and the "religious" in the biographical representation even if it attempts to underplay this interpellation within the context of Tamil modernity.[4]

The Madras/Chennai Years

Ramalingar was born on the 5th October 1823 in Marutūr, a small town in the South Arcot district of the Madras Presidency, close to the sacred Śaivite centre of Chidambaram.[5] He was the fifth and last child of Irāmaiyya Piḷḷai and his sixth wife, Ciṉṉammāḷ. Two brothers and two sisters preceded him. Irāmaiyya Piḷḷai, as his second caste name indicates, could be theoretically categorized as belonging to the Vēḷāḷar caste, an elite, non-Brahman agricultural grouping linked with the classical traditions of donorship and patronage in the Tamil country.[6] Yet, there are different kinds of Vēḷāḷars and the category was a particularly amorphous and open-ended one through much of the 18th and 19th centuries.[7] It is evident that Ramalingar came from a Vēḷāḷar group that lacked both economic and social prestige. The most convincing evidence for this is the hostility that he encountered later in his life, as we will see, from the elite Śaiva Vēḷāḷars who had hereditary links with the religious heads of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s and from whose numbers these religious figures were drawn. Ramalingar's parents did not come from a caste group that was part of this privileged network. Rather, they were from the karuṇīkar *jāti*, a sub-caste whose traditional occupation was to function as petty scribes or account-keepers for the village and the local temple and who, hence, placed a high premium on basic literacy and math.[8] Ramalingar's father followed this traditional occupation: he eked out a modest living as the village bookkeeper but had to supplement his income by working as a part-time teacher. Teaching, thus, was also seen as a family occupation that the sons were eventually expected to follow. When Ramalingar was still less than a year old, calamity struck the family in that Irāmaiyya Piḷḷai died, and their economic circumstances worsened. Ciṉṉammāḷ appears to have taken the children and gone to live in her native village of Poṉṉēri for a year or two. Not long after this the family moved to Madras in 1825, once the eldest son Capāpati Piḷḷai was old enough to take on the task of becoming the main breadwinner of the family. Capāpati Piḷḷai studied in Madras under the Tamil pandit, Kāñcīpuram Mahāvittuvāṉ Capāpati Mutaliyār and was trained as a *prāsaṅgika* – someone who could give professional religious discourses on the Purāṇas. This was how he earned his living and supported the family. Ramalingar was in the care of this brother and his wife, Pāppātti Ammāḷ. The early biographies are vague on the kind of education he received, but we can assume that it still followed the traditional learning that took place in the *piyāl* or "verandah" schools.[9] Regardless of his formal education he appears to have learnt some of the skills of functioning as a *prāsaṅgika* like his brother and by the 1840s, he came rapidly to acquire the reputation of a man of learning. This also meant striving for recognition among a peer group of poet-scholars, *pulavars*, as well as the support of wealthy patrons. The world of 19th-century Tamil literature was an elite one and uneasily straddled both the still-existent pre-colonial social and cultural structures and the newly emerging colonial ones. Thus, as scholars have pointed out,

the break-up of the Vijayanagar Empire had led to an extraordinary efflorescence in the Maratha Nāyaka court of Thanjavur (Tanjāvūr) between 1675 and 1855, which had, "led to a new literary and historiographical sensibility and thus to a remarkable number of new or reconstituted genres and performing arts".[10] This was to change, it has been suggested (Blackburn, 2003:18, 59, 74), by the end of the 18th century and with rapidity after this, with the rise of Madras as the new colonial centre of trade, patronage, and print culture.[11] But the practices of the *pulavar*s did not drastically change insofar as their status, both literary and economic, still depended on the recognition of peers, (in the form of praise-verses, *ciṟappuppāyiram*, or poems composed in honour of one's literary creations by other illustrious poets) and the patron. Ramalingar too participated, albeit in a modest fashion and perhaps not in the first circles, in Madras in what has been termed, "economy of praise" (Ebeling, 2010a:73–76) and acquired his own disciples. Among them was Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, who joined him in 1849 and remained to become his foremost disciple, editing and publishing his poetic corpus in 1867.

The seeming normality of his life in Madras as a Tamil pandit was underscored by the decision to marry. There is scant information about this event in all the early biographies of Ramalingar. It appears that in 1850, when he was 27 years old, he succumbed to family pressure and married his sister's daughter, his own niece, Taṉakkōṭṭi/Taṉammāḷ. The fate of the bride after this marriage remains unclear since she no longer features in the life story.[12] Nevertheless, it is in the years following 1850 that Ramalinga Swamigal began to leave Madras and undertake long journeys, eventually to abandon the town for a return to the South Arcot district of his childhood. One might conjecture that the need to get away from the presence of a newly acquired and unwanted wife might be one of the reasons for these peregrinations. The travels were eventually reduced by his decision, after 1858, to settle for a while in Karuṅkuḻi, a village not far from his birthplace of Marutūr. He had been befriended there by the village *munsif*, Vēṅkaṭa Reṭṭiyār, who became a faithful disciple. Till well into this stage of his life his thinking as well as his poetry reflected his rootedness in Tamil Śaiva *bhakti:* he had by then composed a great quantity of devotional poetry to Lord Murukaṉ at Tiruttaṇikai and at Kantakkōṭṭam in Mylapore, Madras (the latter at the request of a rich benefactor). Another beloved deity was Śiva-Naṭarāja at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr, and the poems to this dancing god increased once he came to live, after 1858, in the vicinity of Chidambaram. His advice, too, to his closest associates in this period cannot be faulted from an orthodox point of view: he told them to meditate regularly on the Śiva *pañcākṣara* and spoke of the greatness of the sacred ash even as he composed many poems on the greatness of the four principal *Nāyaṉmār*s, Cuntarar, Appar, Campantar, and Māṇikkavācakar. There is no indication at this stage that he would ever come to question his wholehearted adherence to Śaiva orthodoxy.

The evidence for this is the voluminous amount of devotional poetry he composed in the years between 1830 and 1850, devoted overwhelmingly to

the form of Murukaṉ in Kantakkōṭṭam (also known as the Kantacāmi Temple in the Park Town area of Madras) or at Tiruttaṇi and the temple of Tyagarāja at Tiruvorriyūr (now Tiruvottiyur and part of north Chennai). This was also the period marked by a prolific production of poetry – Ramalingar composed 223 poems consisting of 3,000 odd verses in this period. This chapter cannot do justice to this vast corpus and nor is it the intention of this book. Nevertheless, some of its main features must be reflected on if we are to understand the religious trajectory of Ramalingar. This period of his life is also called the *Section on Tiruvorriyūr* (*Tiruvorriyūr pakuti*) in the first comprehensive edition of A. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai. The first two books of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, as the poetic corpus comes to be known,[13] comprises an immense amount of devotional poetry consciously modelled on the canonical corpus of the *Tirumuṟai* and the works that succeed it. The first book consisting of 52 poems is almost entirely dedicated to Murukaṉ in Tiruttaṇikai/Tiruttaṇi, the devotional site near Chennai, which became particularly popular after it comes to be commemorated in the *Tiruppukaḷ* of Aruṇakirinātar (ca. 15th century). In keeping with the trope of the vilification of women (*mātaraip paḷittal*) in the latter's poetry, we find this particular book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* replete with poems of religious misogyny.[14] The second book, consisting of 103 poems, is mainly dedicated to both Tyāgarāja and Murukaṉ at Tiruvorriyūr. The third book, consisting of 27 poems, is the most miscellaneous, including poems to various forms of Ganeśa, the Goddess, and Śiva in the vicinity of Chennai. With the fourth book of 41 poems Ramalingar's attention appears to have shifted to the dancing form of Śiva at Chidambaram. The short fifth book, consisting of 12 poems, concludes with poems to each of the four canonical poet-saints of the Tirumuṟai – Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṉacampantar, and Māṇikkavācakar. It is difficult to gauge which of these poems enjoyed widespread popularity beyond individual verses from within some of them. An obvious example which comes to mind is the much loved verse 8 of the *Teyvamaṇimālai*, which asks Murukaṉ to endow the poet with those virtues that give one the good life or the entire set of ten verses of the *Kantar caraṇap pattu*, which was very popular because of its simple diction and taught to children, set to music.[15] In contrast to these less quoted books of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, which as we will later see was also considered the lesser revelation, the poetic works compiled in the final and sixth book of his corpus came to be regarded as more canonical and were enshrined in various ways within the later publication history of his works and within institutional memory. Before I turn to the latter phase of Ramalingar's life it might be pertinent at this juncture to give a brief history of the publication of his poetic corpus.

The Publication of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*

The attempts to publish the poetry of Ramalinga Swamigal, at least from within the perspective of the religious tradition, took at least seven years, starting in 1860 and culminating eventually in the mythical 1867 edition of Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. This edition was a partial one. It did not

contain the poetry that Ramalinga Swamigal had composed in his youth, on Murukaṉ at Tiruttaṇikai, which would be included, eventually, in the fifth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* nor did it include, at Ramalingar's express wishes, the latest songs that he had sung, which would come to eventually constitute the 6th and final book. This first edition, therefore, contained the collection that came to be seen as the first four books in Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai's edition. In 1880, the second edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* was issued by Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, after Ramalinga Swamigal's disappearance. This edition included the fifth book, which consisted of songs composed both in his early days and in his final phase, grouped together without regard for chronology and with a concern for comprehensiveness. At this point, therefore, the sixth book of the poetic corpus that was considered to contain Ramalingar's more esoteric religious beliefs had still not come out. In 1885, the first edition of the sixth book came out through the efforts not of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār but of other concerned devotees of the movement, and including, for the first time, some of his prose writings, including *The Conduct*. The first complete edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, edited by Piruṅkimānakaram Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār, came out in 1892. Several further editions emerged in the first decades of the 20th century, none of them differing in any substantial way from each other.[16] This was to change with the edition of A. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai brought out between 1931 and 1958. Painstakingly edited over more than two decades and containing detailed annotations as well as new materials this remained the standard edition till it came to be supplemented by Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's chronologically arranged edition of 1972. It is important to note that the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition made an important and drastic change to the ordering of the poetry as opposed to the earlier editions. It established a chronology of the poetry on the basis of Ramalingar's life and the temples he visited and the deities and sacred places invoked – and rearranged the entire poetic corpus on this basis. The number of poems, depending on how individual verses are counted, vary between 5,800 and 6,900 verses. The Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition consists of 5,818 verses. In this monograph, I generally follow the Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai edition for some prose and epistolary works and the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition for other prose works and all of the poetry, unless stated otherwise.

Transitions

The decision not to ever return to Madras fell naturally at this stage: his mother had died sometime in the 1850s, so too another brother Paracurāma Piḷḷai, who had brought him to Karuṅkuḻi, and finally, the brother with whom his relationship had been both the closest and the most complicated, Capāpati Piḷḷai, also passed away in this period. The sense of loss must not be underestimated, but his family, henceforth, was to be the slowly growing band of disciples. Yet, with all the devoted attention he received from them and the frequent exchanges of letters he remained somewhat aloof, and his closest

disciple Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār has commented on his pensive and solitary nature. With the deaths in the family and the move from Madras also came, perhaps, the attenuation of the ties to the more conventional way of life, opening up the path that enabled him to develop his ideology and visions unhindered.

The first necessity was to set up a formal organization to actualize his ideas and in 1865, it came into existence. He named it the *Association of the Egalitarian, Vedic Path of Truth*, (*Camaraca Vēta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*), a name which still showed great indebtedness to his Śaivasiddhāntic background. The term *Camaraca* referred to the notion of equality by this stage in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. To call his organization Vedic *Caṉmārkkam* meant that Ramalingar endorsed the orthodox Śaivasiddhānta view that the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas reveal the same truths and form one seamless continuum in the tradition. Finally, and most importantly, *Caṉmārkkam* in the Śaivasiddhānta is the "path of truth", the highest of the four paths to liberation that is also the path of knowledge, *Ñāṉam/Jñāna*.[17] Further, it is the path assigned to the *nāyaṉār*, Māṇikkavācakar. In naming his organization in this manner Ramalingar was also implicitly inviting a comparison between him and Māṇikkavācakar, who had undergone initiation, *dīkṣā*, not through any human preceptor but received it from Śiva himself, in the guise of one.[18] There is some lack of clarity as to where the organization was physically located, if at all, in the years between 1865 and 1868 and where Ramalingar himself lived in this period. There is in fact some reason to assume that the organization had no institutional basis at this stage.[19] Some accounts state that he moved from Karuṅkuḻi to Kaṭalūr, the bigger town nearby, to the residence of another benefactor Mu. Appācāmi Ceṭṭiyār. In this period he had a public debate with a Brahmo Samāj proselytizer, Sirītaracuvāmi Nāyakar that revealed how far he still was from his later views about the proper mode of religious worship. Nāyakar had preached to a bewildered audience for some days about the evils of idol worship and people asked Ramalingar for his views on the matter. He firmly disagreed with Nāyakar. People might choose to follow the path of worshipping the formless Brahman or the deity in the temple: what mattered was to continue the way one had begun.

The year 1867 was a landmark year for several reasons. In February 1867, after several years of cajoling, some emotional blackmail on the part of his close disciple Iṟukkam Irattiṉa Mutaliyār and the determined effort on the part of others to get him to agree, the first edition of Ramalingar's selected works of poetry was published in four books. It was in his introductory praise-poem titled The Story of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* (*Tiruvaruṭpā varalāṟu*) that the editor, the indispensable Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, laid the foundations for the legend of Ramalinga Swamigal. Vēlāyutaṉār named the compilation *Tiruvaruṭpā*, meaning, "Verses of Divine Grace", a name with identical implications as the compilation of the sacred corpus of Māṇikkavācakar, *Tiruvācakam* and, by extension, of the entire canon of Śaivite poetic corpus, the *Tirumuṟai*. Both these were now to be seen as on par: poetic outpourings, divinely inspired. In the same introduction he gave Ramalingar the

honorific *Great Benefactor Who Radiates Grace* (*Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār*). It is as Vaḷḷalār that Ramalinga Swamigal is most commonly known today. In the same year the *Camaraca Vēta Taruma Cālai*, a charitable feeding house for the poor was founded. Invitations for the inauguration, especially to the heads of the old and venerable Śaiva *maṭha*s, were sent out both by *Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* members and by Ramalingar himself. On 23rd May 1967, the inauguration took place. It is claimed that it was a grand event, the first major public activity of his organization with a gathering of 3,000 people. During this event, which had as its focus the feeding of the poor, sections of a work-in-progress, *The Conduct of Compassion Towards Living Beings* (*Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam*) was read out. This seminal doctrinal text of his, which remained incomplete till the end, was the first clear indication that his religious views had begun to shift ostensibly from traditional Śaiva devotionalism to a more universalistic and activist religion of his own making, the central tenet of which was the feeding of the hungry.

This activist optimism led to the conception in these years of other organizations which did not take root perhaps due to lack of funds. A school which was to teach all age groups, even elderly people, English, Tamil, and Sanskrit was announced in the same year. It was to be called *Caṉmārkka Pōtini*, but there is no record of its functioning. The same can be said of the monthly newsletter called *Caṉmārkka Vivēka Virutti*, which was to propagate the views of the organization. Yet, these appear to have been good years for the *Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*. The almshouse functioned also as the de facto headquarters since Ramalinga Swamigal moved into it and made it his home from 1867 to 1870. His most ardent wish had come into fulfilment in its creation: the poor were regularly fed there irrespective of their caste affiliation. It was during this period of fruitful activity, when Ramalinga Swamigal was successful in a modest fashion and when the publication of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* thrust him into the limelight, that the latter event proved to be a double-edged sword. It involved him in an unpleasant controversy. In some accounts this controversy is seen as solely one between Ramalinga Swamigal and Arumuga Navalar (Ārumuka Nāvalar) of Jaffna, the Śaivite scholar who was involved in a project of rethinking Śaivism in the light of Christian critique and colonial modernity. In other accounts, Navalar is seen as merely the spokesperson for the heads of the prestigious Śaiva *maṭha*s of the Tamil region. All the biographical information to date has been scant and unsatisfactory on the nature of the controversy. This has changed with the excellent archival work of Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (2000). Using original sources, Caravaṇaṉ has shown that several factors contributed to the dispute, which was virulent and prolonged, outlasting even its original protagonists in a second wave that occurred in the early 20th century. The dispute is paradigmatic for the Śaivite situation in the Tamil region in the second half of the 19th century. The expansion of printing and caste and regional sensibilities also had a role in the manner in which it played out and culminated. It was to radically transform Ramalinga Swamigal and complete his transformation into a prophet in the final years of his life.

A Poverty-Stricken Alchemist[20]

When we speak of 19th-century Śaiva reform in the Tamil country no more contrasting figures could come to mind than Arumuga Navalar and Ramalinga Swamigal. There is a great deal of overlap between their trajectories but also some crucial differences that became apparent with time and were reflected in their respective positions on the nature of Tamil Śaivism. Arumuga Navalar (1822–1879) came from a very different social and regional background than Ramalinga.[21] Born into a family of Kārkātta Vēḷāḷas from Nallūr in the Jaffna peninsula of Ceylon, he formed part of an elite social group that had continuous historical links with the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta in southern India. This was a relationship manifesting itself in the emotional ties to the sacred topography of Tamil Śaivism in the mainland, to places such as Chidambaram and Tiruttaṇikai and to the long-standing literary links forged between Tamil scholars on both sides of the Palk Straits. These connections explain Navalar's acceptance among the orthodoxy and his success in southern India after 1849. In July 1849, he came to Madras to acquire a printing press, to be purchased with money donated by wealthy benefactors. His reputation as a Śaivite scholar and a defender of it against Christian polemics in Jaffna had already preceded him. He was warmly received by the heads of the prestigious Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s and given the title "Learned One" (*Nāvalar*) by the head of the Tiruvāvaṭuturai *maṭha*, located in Thanjavur. This was the name by which he, Ārumuka Piḷḷai, was henceforth to be known and his close ties to that religious establishment and others like it stem from that period. Navalar's activities in the years between 1842 and 1864 in Jaffna fall broadly into three interconnected spheres: education, religious reform, and editing/publishing. A school was started, its curriculum devised and study materials written, to a great extent, by Navalar himself. Activities on behalf of Śaivism included the edition and publication on the one hand, of classical texts, and, on the other, of polemical anti-Christian and pro-Śaiva tracts. All of this he pursued with great organizational skill and vigour and came to Chidambaram in 1864 to establish a school along the lines of the one in Jaffna.

This is when his confrontation with Ramalinga Swamigal began, leading to a war of words, conducted through the production of a range of polemical tracts, an overview of which will be presented in Chapter 5. Here, we will look briefly at how the dispute snowballed resulting in some kind of legal action.

The Lawsuit

Navalar's reappearance in Chidambaram in 1869 provoked the irritation of several groups – not just those who were engaged in a polemical war of words with him and his disciples regarding the merits of Ramalinga Swamigal and his poetry – but also the hereditary temple priests, *the dīkṣitar*s – of the Chidambaram temple. His enmity with them had already taken root in his first visit and should be seen in the light of the general antipathy between

Navalar and Śaiva temple priests. Among Navalar's passionately held tenets was a belief in a "pure" form of worship characterized as "āgamic". Knowledge of such worship was to be derived solely from textual sources and bore little resemblance to the actual ritual practice in Śaiva temples, grounded as it is on myriad adjustments between textual and regional and local customs. In this context, his crusade against contemporary temple practices angered the priestly practitioners and alienated temple authorities, as much in Jaffna as in Chidambaram.[22] Alerted to his arrival at Chidambaram the *dīkṣitar*s, under the leadership of Capānaṭēca Dīṭcitar, convened a public meeting within the precincts of the temple to which Ramalinga Swamigal and his coterie were also strategically invited. The role which Ramalinga Swamigal played at this meeting is also recorded. He was requested by the gathering to expound on the meaning of the word "Navalar" and seems to have ingenuously parsed it in several unflattering ways, one of which meant, "one who does not have eloquence" (*nāvu* + *alar*). Confronted angrily by an eminent member of the public, Ramalinga Swamigal appears to have abruptly stopped, sat down, closed his eyes, and fallen silent.[23] It remains unclear whether Navalar was present throughout the meeting, whether he was forcibly dragged to it halfway by Capānaṭēca Dīṭcitar, or whether he came to hear of it later. In any case he resorted to legal action after the event. The case came up before the Kaṭalūr District Court, in two hearings, on 18th and 22nd November 1869. The plaintiff was Arumuga Navalar, the chief accused Capānaṭēca Dīṭcitar. Four other priests were also co-accused on charges of defamation and verbal threats to cause bodily harm. The sixth defendant Ramalinga Swamigal was arraigned on charges of defamation alone. The presiding judge was Mr. Robarts. No official records of the legal proceedings remain and two traditions of what happened in the court proceedings have emerged, which may be characterized as the pro-Navalar Īḻam version and the pro-Ramalingar Tamil Nadu version, respectively. In the latter version, the *dīkṣitar*s play no role at all. This pro-Ramalingar version is as follows: on the day of the court hearing Navalar and the assembled body, including the judge, await Ramalinga Swamigal's arrival. On seeing him enter, all rise instinctively, including Navalar. Seeing the latter's obvious respect for Ramalinga Swamigal the judge decides to dismiss the proceedings.[24] Caravaṇaṉ, though, has collated contemporary accounts of the court proceedings given in periodicals to show, essentially, that the Tamil Nadu version, faithfully reproduced in many biographies of Ramalinga Swamigal, is largely a fabrication. The Īḻam version at least has the merits of having got the main facts right, which are as follows: Navalar was ably represented in his suit by a lawyer from Madras Ji.Pi. Cavuntaranāyakam Piḷḷai, and his version of events was corroborated by several witnesses. The evidence was overwhelmingly in his favour. The judge ruled for him, fining the chief accused 50 rupees for defamation. When questioned, Ramalinga Swamigal denied that he intended to defame Navalar, upon which the charges against him were dropped.[25] The controversy between Arumuga Navalar and Ramalinga Swamigal, generally known as the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy for reasons

explored in Chapter 5, in its first phase, came to an end with these court proceedings and the initial polemical tract war that had accompanied it. It was to be reignited again in the first years of the 20th century, long after the main protagonists had passed away.

"I Have Come in Order to Tell the Truth"[26]

The Ramalinga Swamigal who emerged in prose and poetry after the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy was a different person. After 1870, his organizational activities and discourses show a determined distancing from Tamil Śaivasiddhānta orthodoxy, and he even acknowledged this in public in the *Great Discourse* delivered in 1873. Henceforth, he publicly espoused a millenarian and messianic religion in every sense of both terms[27] – a gathering together of his flock of believers into a this-worldly ideal existence, imminent, part of a greater cosmic plan of which he was the sole prophet, saying that God has raised him to a state where he could impart the truth to his followers.[28] The *Caṉmārkkam* incorporated and superseded the Śaivasiddhānta, becoming a transformative moment in history where one purified oneself through right efforts, cast off the veils of illusion to a point where there would be the physical transformation of one's own body, the obtaining of extraordinary powers including deathlessness and the raising of the dead.[29] The bodily transformations are vouched for by those that have happened to Ramalinga Swamigal's own body, as detailed in his works: in Part 2 of the *Conduct of Compassion towards all Living Beings (Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam)*[30] as well as in numerous poems of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*. His very powers as a *Cittar* and an alchemist, vouch for the integrity of his vision.[31] In these reinterpretations of Śaivasiddhānta and Vīraśaiva orthodoxy one can also see Ramalingar coming home, as it were, as locating himself within the remarkably diverse religious landscape of the region of his birth with its long-standing not merely Śaivite but Islamic, Jain, and Christian histories.[32]

After mid-1870, finding life in the *Taruma Cālai* in Vadalur increasingly congested and inimical to a quiet life, Ramalingar moved to a small village nearby called Karuṅkuḻi. He resided in a building originally used by Vaiṣṇava teachers and now abandoned. This place was named *Place of Siddhi* (*Cittivaḷākam*) by him. He was to remain there till his end. During the period at Karuṅkuḻi, the biographies emphasize, his yogic practices came to be perfected. He is said to have frequently dematerialized himself, disappearing without telling his followers where he was going and how long he would be away. One particular *siddhi* which earned him great fame or notoriety, depending on how one looked at it, was his alleged ability to awaken the dead. Indeed, this was one of the grounds for which the Navalar camp cultivated hostility towards him, considering him a religious conman.[33] This alleged ability also attracted the disbelief of missionaries active at that time in the South Arcot area.[34]

The culmination of the movement would be the coming of the "God of the Great Light of Grace" (*Aruṭperuñcōti Āṇṭavar*). Thus, in letters he wrote that the dead should be buried and not cremated because they would be

raised by "his Father" the Omnipotent God (*kaṭavuḷ*), who would appear in the almshouse that Ramalingar had constructed to raise the faithful dead, a theological turn that seems to have unmistakably Christian overtones.[35] Whether he directly claimed that he himself would raise the dead or not, it is clear that after 1870, Ramalinga Swamigal repeatedly stressed that the dead would be awakened at the very latest with the coming of the God of Light. Thus, on 30th October 1871, he issued a letter to the members of his *Caṅkam* which was to be treated as confidential. In it he laid down the rules for the treatment of the dead which, in effect, denied death and prophesied the afterlife. Spouses were advised against mourning for a dead person, women were not to take on the marks of widowhood, such as putting aside their marriage thread. Most importantly, no death rituals were to be performed. Those who had gathered for the occasion should be fed, that was all. The dead should be buried, not cremated. They would all be revived with the coming of the God of Light himself to the *Taruma Cālai* very soon. His coming would herald the destruction of all religious, scriptural, and caste divisions and the apotheosis of his movement. It appears that Ramalingar had, at first, envisaged that the descent of God would take place in the charitable almshouse which had become the focus of his organization's activities. But the idea also took root that the arrival of God should be anticipated by the creation of a special place: this was the *Hall of True Wisdom* (*Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai*) where, as he later stated, pure Śiva-experience (*cutta civānupavam*) would take place. Thus, in 1871, he made an announcement that he had been asked by God himself to construct a place of worship at Vadalur, which was now to be renamed the "Original or Previous/Northern Chidambaram of Wisdom" (*Pūrvañāṉa Citamparam*).

The building of this place of worship commenced in 1871. The building faced the south. The front portion of the outer hall was named the Hall of Gold (*poṟcapai*) and its back portion, the Hall of Consciousness (*ciṟcapai*), after similarly named structures in the Chidambaram temple. The main hall of worship was called the Hall of Wisdom (*Ñāṉa Capai*). It was built in the shape of an octagon or an eight-petalled lotus. Within it there was a 12-pillared hall that enclosed a smaller space supported by four pillars. In the four-pillared hall, a large mirror was placed with a lamp in front of it. Seven successive veils of different colours hung in front of the lamp. They were said to be the veils of illusion, *māyā*, that had to be lifted to reveal the light. In a later edict, issued after praying for about seven months, Ramalinga Swamigal gave some further instructions about the care of the *Hall of True Wisdom*. In this edict, dated 18th July 1872, he mentioned that only specific persons could enter the hall for purposes of cleaning it and lighting the lamp. Both of these tasks, to be undertaken once in every four days, should be done either by a youth younger than 18 years old or a man older than 72 years, of virtuous disposition.[36] It is not clear exactly what kind of ritual worship, if at all, was done in the early days in this hall. It has been suggested, in some biographies, that the only criterion for worshipping there was to be a vegetarian. There was to be no restrictions in terms of

caste or religion and all traditional forms of *pūjā* were forbidden. All that we learn from the instructions is that the services of a traditional Śaivite priest were not considered necessary for cleaning and maintaining the shrine or lighting a lamp. Hence, it is likely that any āgamic form of worship had probably been dispensed with. On 25th January 1872, on *Tai Pūcam* day, traditionally sacred to Murukaṉ, worship was omit commenced in the hall, and it is in this year that Ramalinga Swamigal produced the writings that outlined his new doctrines. In the first half of 1872, he completed his poem, the *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval*, considered the culmination of his sacred poetic corpus. Soon after he issued four petitions (*viṇṇappaṅkaḷ*). The first petition speaks of how the God of the Gracious Great Light has bestowed not just the great gift of a human body on his followers but has also given them specific instructions to build the special hall of worship. There, he would come soon, as promised, to give them supernatural powers (*siddhi*s) and establish their true path on earth. In the second petition, he speaks of a new mantra, the auspicious mantra (*tirumantra*) to be recited by all his followers[37] and also intimates that he had obtained, successively, the three bodies (the Pure Body, the *Om* Body, and the Body of Wisdom) that, once obtained, conferred bodily immortality. The third petition is an ecstatic affirmation of what God has given him in spite of his unworthiness. In the fourth discourse he further elaborates on the second one, saying he had averted the four hindrances of death, hunger, disease, and fear.[38]

The years 1871–1872 were crucial in several respects. The construction of the *Hall of True Wisdom* gave a foundational basis to a new, religious organization, if not a new religion, even while this religion was still linked explicitly to a religious imaginary that foregrounded Śaivite worship at Chidambaram. The Chidambaram of Vadalur was to be considered the Chidambaram of the future, of a higher wisdom. The God of this religion was also to be subtly distinguished from the God of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. He was the God of Light, the *Aruṭperuñcōti Āṇṭavar* and not the purāṇic or āgamic Śiva just as his own mantra was not a purāṇic or āgamic one but rather one heralding a new potent, religious movement. He was to be worshipped with the minimum of ritual, directly, without the intercession of a priest. While there was to be no caste or religious barrier for participating in this worship there were certain disqualifications, which formed a continuum with temple worship-oriented conceptions of purity and impurity related to women, menstruation, sexuality, and celibacy. It is these conceptions that obviously lay behind the instructions as to who could clean the inner hall. Another criterion was whether one was a member of his organization or not. Thus, Ramalinga Swamigal wrote about and to those who were "our people" and "outsiders" who were not to have privileged access to the *Hall of True Wisdom* or the secret doctrines of the movement. Nevertheless, the need to proselytize and attract new membership on that basis worked against keeping the more remarkable doctrinal revelations secret. Thus, the view that the members of the Pure, True Path (*Cutta Caṉmārkkam*), as all those near and dear to them, would succeed in achieving immortal life by being raised

from the dead was a strong inducement for people to come flocking to him. Further, the *Hall of True Wisdom* had been built on the revelation that the God of Light would come. Ramalinga Swamigal himself, at its inauguration, had issued a notification that alluded to miracles which would take place once the event came to pass, such as the old becoming young again and the dead who were loved or mourned brought back to life. The sense of expectancy must have been great by the end of 1873: news of some imminent great event seems to have spread, forcing Ramalinga Swamigal to issue a public denial on 8th September 1873.[39] This anticlimax was compensated for on 22nd October 1873. On this date the *Caṉmārkkam* flag, in the colours white and yellow, was hoisted outside his residence at Karuṅkuḻi, and he preached what came to be known as the "Great Discourse" (*Pērupatēcam*). The discourse emphasized the importance of an enquiry into the self and God, with Ramalinga Swamigal telling those assembled that they had no time to waste. He goes on to allude to the expectation that seems to be taken for granted among his followers – relating to the coming of God – and assures them that this will come to pass.[40] Yet, he tells them sternly, they are not absolved from responsibility but must make the effort to rid themselves of the veils of illusion. After a devastating and comprehensive rejection of the entire edifice of traditional learning and religions, Ramalinga Swamigal speaks of his own uniqueness as the bearer of a new tradition and a new knowledge. The last sections of the discourse speak of how his own *Caṉmārkkam* is a new moment in history, one which replaces other failed or lost religious moments.

> Further, those who produced the impure *māyā*, the *Cittar*s, who have in this way hidden the real nature of God, have disappeared. Those elders, known as the producers of pure *māyā*, too are not there.[41] There is also no *Caṉmārkkam*. If there had been a *Caṉmārkkam* we would have [experienced] the ineffable experience and asked the imponderable questions. Further, the dead, recovering, would have risen again. Therefore, God has decreed this moment as the moment for asking imponderable questions. Hence, this moment, this time indeed is the time of the *Caṉmārkkam*.[42]

Saying this, Ramalinga Swamigal hoisted the flag of the *Caṉmārkkam*, explaining the significance of its yellow and white colours. He then ended the discourse pleading for its veracity, vouchsafed by God himself but also in despair – as if he did not expect its significance to be understood within his own lifetime.

> Having decided that I have come in order to tell the truth, when I do tell the truth there is no one to understand it. Now that I have hoisted the flag all will come to know the truth. Predecessors have prevented the truth from emerging by burying it in sand. God has revealed this moment, He is revealing it, He will reveal it. All of you, see that you know it.[43]

The corpus of poetic works he produced in this period illuminates his four elucidations (*viṇṇappaṅkaḷ*) and the direction his religious vision took within this latter phase of his life. It forms the sixth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and consists of 144 poems. The long, independent Poem 81 in the book, the *Poem in the Akaval Metre on the Great Light of Grace* (*Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval*), is considered the culmination of his religious vision.

Ramalingar's poetry came to be commemorated in different ways after him and looking at one important example of its later history reveals how and which poems of the corpus came to be considered the most significant. Thus, the walls of the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai* were inscribed sometime in the 1950s, with individual verses from the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and remain monumentalized in this way for contemplation and worship. A small booklet which deals with the history of these inscribed verses tells us that they were chosen by Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, the editor of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* himself and inscribed under the aegis of Kirupānanta Vāriyār (1906–1993), the Vīraśaiva religious figure who spent some time in his life managing the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai* at Vadalur.[44] While we must grasp that the inscribed verses might be the selection of one man, the person who did this, Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, edited the first definitive complete edition of Ramalingar's oeuvre and was perhaps the leading authority on his works at this point of time. The poetry inscribed on the walls of the hall of worship is entirely from the sixth book. Within the sixth book the selection is from 16 poems. Within these poems the single most important poem is Poem 13, *Piḷḷaip peruviṇṇappam*, from which the maximum number of verses, five of them, are inscribed. As we will see in Chapter 3, this is also the poem considered his most autobiographical and one in which Ramalingar describes his religious journey. Thematically, the individual verses deal with those doctrinal features which come to be considered characteristic of the new religious path propagated by Ramalingar. Thus, they speak of the deity within him as if he were Naṭarāja at Chidambaram (verses from Poems 1, 22, 84, 128, 142), but other verses (from Poems 32, 46, 125, and 130) show us that this deity is none other than the *Aruṭperuñcōti Iraivar/Āṇṭavar*, who dwells in the *Chidambaram of the Later/Higher Wisdom* (*Uttarañāṉa Citamparam*) as Ramalingar christened Vadalur (Poem 53). A doctrine of his movement that emphasized strict vegetarianism, the horror of meat eating, and of prohibition of animal sacrifice to gods is also inscribed in the temple walls in three different verses. One of these, verse 71 of the *Aruḷviḷakka mālai*, speaks of those who eat meat as not one's kin (*uṟaviṉattār allar*) but "outsiders" (*puṟaviṉattār*). Two verses refer to a religious doctrine that is of central importance to Ramalingar's charisma as much as it was at the root of controversies regarding him – this is his proclamation that his own body had undergone an alchemical transformation into an immortal and golden one. These are from Poem 101 called *Poṉvaṭivappēṟu*. A third verse dealing with the same theme is verse 6 from Poem 128 called *Uṟṟatu uraittal*, which stresses the same view. Also, there is a set of verses that are meant to remind the person circumambulating the hall of worship of the utopian premises of the *caṉmārkkam*: a verse from Poem 130, *Ulakappēṟu*, rejoices at

all the miracles which occur, including the raising of the dead, when the *Aruṭperuñcōti Aṭiyār*, the God of the *caṉmārkkam* arrives. Three verses from Poem 125, *Taṉittiraṭṭu alaṅkal*, which is a compilation of individual verses grouped together, praise God as the true guru, as the *Aruṭperuñcōti Iraivar*, and of how Ramalingar proclaims the path of *Cattiya Cutta Caṉmārkkam*, which is beyond caste and religion (*cātiyum matamum camayamum tavirntē cattiya cutta caṉmārkka vīti*). Finally, the entire *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval* (henceforth, the *Akaval*) was inscribed on the 12 pillars of the pavilion, named after it, which formed the front portion of the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai*. The significance of the *Akaval* as the *summum bonum* of the core teachings of Ramalingar also containing within it the root *mantra* of the religious tradition seems to have emerged within the circle of his well-wishers perhaps even within his own lifetime. Thus, someone closely involved with his organizations, Ānantanāta Caṇmuka Caraṇālaya Cuvāmikaḷ spoke of the progressive revelation of his writings from the early poetry, which was to be seen as sectarian, Śaivite worship to the sixth book which was to be seen as a post-sectarian revelation of a highest being who transcended specific religions. Within the context of the sixth book the *Akaval* is seen as the outpouring of a divine vision of light that Ramalingar was supposed to have received on the morning of 18th April 1872.[45] By early decades of the 20th century, this view of the *Akaval* as a non-Śaivite and post-sectarian work came to be consolidated in the extensive commentary on it by Cuvāmi Caravaṇāṉanta.[46] In his English *Prelude* to the commentary Caravaṇāṉanta said:

> But we must remember that Sivam mentioned here has no religious connotation to it. Arutsivam means Arutperunjothi. . . . So Sivam means the divine light not only converging into the soul of man but also diverging from there, completely transmuting him into an immortal one in the process.[47]

This new God, a new immortal body for his followers, and a new religion is what Ramalingar clearly saw himself as offering to those who would listen to him by 1972. But he became increasingly disillusioned with those who surrounded him and convinced that he had led a failed movement, in the final year of his life.

"I Opened Shop, There was None to buy my Wares"[48]

Three events seem to have marked the final year of Ramalinga Swamigal's life. The biographies generally suggest that he withdrew into greater and greater seclusion, making himself increasingly unavailable to his followers. Also, he became displeased with the form of worship being undertaken at the *Hall of True Wisdom* and closed it down, taking away the keys so that worship could not continue. This momentous event – for, by doing so Ramalinga Swamigal was abruptly putting an end to the spiritual preparations necessary to herald the arrival of the God of Light – seems hardly to have registered in the biographies, except in a few sentences. Thus, there is no

information about what exactly prompted him to take this drastic step. In the next year, celebrations on the flag-hoisting day, which might have been expected to be grand, were non-existent. He remained in his house in Karuṅkuḻi and placed a lamp outside his door, asking his followers to worship it. The year passed. It is said that on 30th January 1874, he emerged from his room and spent some time talking to his followers. The following words are attributed to him in some of the biographies:

> I opened shop but there was none to buy my wares, so I closed it. Now, I am in this body, hereafter I will enter into all bodies.[49]

The comprehensive Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai edition of his works does not cite these words but gives the following as his final command:

> I am going to stay inside [my room] for ten to fifteen days. Do not see this and lose faith. In case there arises the need to look [in], [I} will appear to no one. God will make it appear to be an empty place. He will not reveal me.[50]

Saying this, he went into his room and was never seen again. This disappearance, perhaps the most intriguing part of his life story, became the pivot around which all the interpretations of him evolved, as the next chapter will show.

Notes

1 Zvelebil (1995:262–263).
2 Zvelebil (1995:xi).
3 Zvelebil (1995:xii).
4 This composite account of Ramalinga Swamigal's life and times is indebted, in great measure but not for its historicization, to several of his hagiographies and biographies of which perhaps the most thorough are those of Francis (1990) and Ūraṉ Aṭikal (1971).
5 At the beginning of the 18th century, the whole of the Tamil country was declared a *subah* or province of the Mughal Empire, nominally subject to the adjacent Mughal province of Hyderabad. In practice, this area called the "payanghat" or "Lower Carnatic" became the centre of an independent, dynastic base. An early 18th-century migrant from Bijapur, Sadatullah Khan (1651–1732) came to be appointed the subhadar of Arcot in 1710. Like other Mughal notables who rose to power in the former Mughal provinces of Awadh, Bengal, and Hyderabad, the new rulers of the Carnatic paid nominal allegiance to Mughal overlordship even while they ruled unfettered, in two dynastic lines, as the Nawabs or the Mughal viceroys of Arcot.

Meanwhile, in the years between 1750 and 1800, the British conducted a series of South Indian campaigns in the course of which they took on and defeated the local warrior elite who exercised power from the Nāyaka period and gradually assumed power over the Tamil country. In 1744, the last of Sadatullah's line was murdered at Arcot, and another lineage installed in their place. These new Nawabs, the Walahjahs, came to rule as the clients of the English East India Company. Although their power and prestige were greatly undermined through the machinations of the British, the family itself survived as titular

rulers of Arcot. By 1801, the entire Tamil country had come under the Company's control through settlement of the Treaty of the Carnatic with the Nawab of Arcot, Azim ul Doula, appointed by the British for the purpose. In 1855, the Nawabi was abolished, and the domains absorbed into the Madras Presidency. Let us recollect that these momentous events, including the *de facto* takeover of Arcot by the English, were no more than 22 years before Ramalinga's birth and well within the lifetime of his parents. After 1808, the southern portion of the Nawab's domains, south of the river Palar, came to be designated, for administrative purposes, as South Arcot by the English.

6 On Vēḷāḷas in medieval Tamil regions, see Champakalakshmi (1996), Heitzman (1997), Ludden (1985:36ff), Stein (1980), and Veluthat (2009).

7 Thus, Bayly [1989]1992:411:

> The Vellalas were never a tightly knit community with strong institutions of leadership and a well-defined caste lifestyle. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Vellala affiliation was as vague and uncertain as that of most other South Indian caste groups. Vellala identity was certainly thought of as a source of prestige, but for that very reason there were any number of groups who sought to claim Vellala status for themselves, or who had adopted the most common Vellala caste title, Pillai. This meant that even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were traders and petty cultivators who called themselves Vellalas, as well as large-scale landholders and literate scribal groups.

8 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, [1971]1976:5, footnote 3, speaks of the karuṇīkars as a kind of Śaiva Vēḷāḷar. The karuṇīkars are undoubtedly the same caste as the Karṇam or Kaṇakkupiḷḷai. Of this group Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol.1, (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, (1909:150), write, "Kannakan is a Tamil accountant caste". In an account thereof, in the North Arcot Manual, Mr. H.A. Stuart writes that they are,

> found chiefly in the districts of North Arcot, South Arcot, and Chingleput. The name is derived from the Tamil word kanakku, which means an account. They were employed as village accountants by the ancient kings. In the inscriptions the word Karanam or Kanakkan occurs very often, and their title is invariably given as Vēlān, which is possibly a contracted form of Vellālan.

On the *karaṇam* culture of South India in the early pre-modern period, 1600–1800, see Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam (2003). On the kaṇakkupiḷḷais and their role in the colonial jurisprudence, see Raman (2012). Sometime in the 19th century, like many caste groups aspiring for social mobility, the karuṇīkars had a mythological caste history, the *Srī Karuṇīkarppurāṇam,* composed that traces their lineage from the sun god himself via his male offspring Cittirakuptaṉ. The text was published in 1909.

9 On the *piyāl* school, see Ebeling (2010), Gover (1873), Hudson (1992a), Raman (2007), and the pioneering work of Vēṇkaṭacāmi (1962).

10 Blackburn, 2003:18. See also Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam (1992) and Indira Peterson's several articles (1992a, 1992b, 2003, 2004) on the cultural cosmopolitanism of King Serfoji II of Tanjāvūr (regnal years: 1798–1832).

11 Somewhat relativizing this view Ebeling (2010a:103–106) has convincingly shown that literary culture continued to flourish in the courts of local rulers and native kings during the course of the 19th century. In fact, Ebeling postulates, at a time when the real powers and financial resources of these rulers were drastically curtailed, the patronage of the arts was still one way of maintaining one's prestige. This would account for the vast amount of courtly literature produced in these various courts – Thanjavur, Ramnad, Sivagangai, and Pudukottai – to name a few of the important centres of patronage.

12 On further speculations regarding Ramalinga Swamigal's wife, see Chapter 5 in this book.
13 On this, see Chapter 2.
14 Compare, for example, Aruṇakirinātar's poem *Arukki metteṉa* on *Tiruttaṇikai* and Ramalingar's *Tiruvaruṭpā*.1.25 *Kuṟai nērnta pattu* for these obvious similarities.
15 This, indeed, was my own first childhood exposure to Ramalingar, when I was taught this song without knowing anything about its composer.
16 On these different editions, see Caravaṇaṉ (2010b).
17 On the genealogy of the concept of *camaracam* in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, see Chapter 8. On the *caṉmārkkam* as the highest soteriological path in it, see Chapter 3.
18 Re. Siddhalingaiah (1979:23–24): Tradition has it that the four samayacaryas in their lives and writings exemplified the four spiritual ways, the satputramārga, dāsamārga, sahamārga and sanmārga respectively. These ways are metaphysically distinguished in the later Siddhānta Śāstras. . . . St. Māṇikka Vācakar's life exemplified Jñāna mārga as he was duly initiated in the manner described in Śāstras by God appearing in the guise of the human preceptor.
19 On this see Chapter 6.
20 It is in these words that Ramalinga is described in the polemical tract composed against him by Arumuga Navalar, *The Refutation of the False Songs of Divine Grace* (*Pōliyaruṭpā maṟuppu*) brought out in 1869. The citation is taken from the edition of Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (2010:706).
21 For excellent English-language studies of Navalar's biography as well as his contribution to the reimagining of Śaivism in the colonial period, see Hudson (1992a, 1992b, 1994) and Ambalavanar (2010). This section on Navalar relies, by and large, on these studies.
22 Re. Hudson (1992a) for the Jaffna Kantacāmi temple in Nallur controversy involving Navalar and the priests of that temple. Caravaṇaṉ quotes Navalar on Chidambaram as follows,

> [Since it is established] that the great sage Patañjali gave the *paddhati* [for the temple of Chidambaram] according to the Vedas and the Āgamas, since the ancient Brahmins of Tillai had *Śaiva dīkṣā*, had understood the Śaiva āgamas and the manner of ritual worship according to these āgamas and since the current priests of the temple do the rituals at the abode of Chidambaram with none of the above [qualifications], their activity in contrary to the words of Śiva, to the Śivāgamas which constitute the body of Lord Nateśa and to the manner of worship of the sage Vyāgrapāda, of the sage Patañjali and the three thousand sages of Tillai. Thus, I gave detailed discourses, taking many examples from the *śāstra*s.
>
> Caravaṇaṉ, 2000:58 [my translation]

23 Caravaṇaṉ (2000:74–76).
24 See Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:456–457) for this version.
25 Caravaṇaṉ (2000:76–85).
26 Ramalingar's words in the *Great Discourse* (*Pērupatēcam*) delivered on the occasion of the flag-hoisting of the *Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* at Mēṭṭukkuppam on 22nd October 1873, at his residence of Cittivaḷākam.
Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷār (1997:549) *: uṇmai colla vantaṉaṉē eṉṟu uṇmai collap pukuntālum terintu koḷvārillai.*
27 See Pessar (2004:2) for a succinct definition of millenarianism as also Schwartz (2005:6028–6038) for a comprehensive overview.
28 Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷār (1997:543).
29 Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷār (1997:548). The ideas of the transformation of the body and the immortality that is thereby obtained in Ramalingar's vision are deeply indebted to the other important strand of Tamil Śaivism, which is Tamil Vīraśaivism. His views were particularly formed by the *Cuttacātakam*, an

18th-century Tamil Vīraśaiva text composed by the guru Kumāratēvar. On this influence, see Chapters 2 and 8.

30 Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷār (1997:178–180).

31 On the relationship between the pan-Indian Siddha traditions and alchemy, see White (1996). It is not insignificant that Ramalingar's millenarianism was also linked to his healing powers. As Schwartz (2005:6031) explains:

> It is hardly coincidental that millenarianism in such diverse contexts as central Africa, western Europe, and north-eastern Brazil has been chartered by homeopathic healers, who best appreciate the dramatic working-through of crisis. Not all healers become prophets, but most millenarian prophets claim therapeutic powers that extend from the ailing human body to the ailing body politic.

32 In terms of its religious diversity the region collectively called Arcot is unparalleled in the Tamil country as well as its social and historical structures (Bugge). First and foremost, there is Chidambaram in the southernmost part of the region, the citadel of Śaivite orthodoxy. The canonical scriptures of Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, which emerged starting in the mid-12th century and continued till the 14th century, were primarily composed in and around Chidambaram, with some of the main teachers such as Maṟaiñāṉacampantar and his prolific disciple Umāpati Civācāriyār inhabitants of the city themselves. The territory had, at the beginning of the 19th century, and even today, the largest population of Tamil Jains, an old community of the Digambara school for whom we have evidence from at least the 8th century. Also, the pre-colonial period saw both Islam and Christianity making great inroads in South India, during the period of the Nāyakas and Poligars. Both religions had put down roots in India much before this time. Yet, as Susan Bayly (1989) has shown in her detailed and fascinating study of South Indian Islam and Christianity between 1700 and 1900, Islam came to occupy a far greater religious space in the Tamil region only in the post-Vijayanagar period. Its expansion with the expansion of Muslim power in the Deccan and the South culminated with the founding of the Muslim *nawabi* or province of Arcot. And, finally, we come to Christianity. The 19th century also saw the expansion of Evangelical Christian missionary activity in the Arcot region. Religious tracts that inculcated virtues and public preaching that dispensed with textual citation and involved an exhortation to believe had been part of the Protestant Christian repertoire in the Tamil country for at least a century before this, having its beginnings in the early 18th century with the establishment of Protestant Christianity in South India – from 1706, when two Protestant and pietist German missionaries belonging to the Dänisch-Hallesche Mission (itself brand new and just founded by August Hermann Francke and hence full of new missionary zeal), Bartholamäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, landed in the east coast of the Tamil country. Their base was Taraṅkampāṭi (Tranquebar), not more than a stone's throw from Chidambaram and the environs that were Ramalinga Swamigal's own home territories.

33 Re. Caravaṇaṉ (2000:64–65) who narrates the story of one of Ramalinga Swamigal's disciples, Tiyākēca Mutaliyār, who later became a follower of Navalar. Tiyākēca Mutaliyār's son died. His daughter-in-law refused to accept the death and demanded that he take her and the body of her husband and leave them with Ramalinga Swamigal's community. Mutaliyār was compelled to accede to her wishes, since she seems to have wholeheartedly believed that her husband would be awakened to life again by Ramalingar. It appears that the longed-for result did not take place even after some time. Tiyākēca Mutaliyār became deeply unhappy with the situation and was compelled to go and bring his daughter-in-law away forcibly from the community. It was after this that he became Navalar's supporter.

34 See Chapter 5 in this book.

35 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (1959b:105): *karuṇai kūrntu eṉatu tantaiyārākiya ellām valla tiruccirrampalak kaṭavuḷ pārvatipuram camaraca vēta caṉmārkkac caṅkat tarumacālaikku eḻuntaruḷi kātcik koṭukkum taruṇam mikavum aṭutta camīpamākav irukkiṉratu. antat taruṇattil cālaikku uriyavarkaḷākiy iruntu irantavarkaḷaiy ellām eḻuppik koṭutt aruḷuvār. itu cattiyam. itu cattiyam.*

36 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:108–109).

37 The mantra recited even today as a mode of greeting by his followers is: *Aruṭperuñcōti, aruṭperuñcōti/ taṉipperuñkaruṇai aruṭperuñcōti* (Great Light of Grace, Great Light of Grace; Unique, Great Compassion, Great Light of Grace.

38 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:115–137).

39 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:529).

40 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:132): *mēlum cilar, "itu āṇṭavar varukiṉra taruṇamāka irukkiṉratē! it taruṇattil muyarci ceyvāṉēṉ? āṇṭavar vantavuṭaṉē peravēṇṭiyatai nām perruk koḷḷappaṭātō?" eṉru viṉavalām. ām ikhtu tām viṉaviyatu nalantāṉ. āṇṭavar varappōkiṉratu cattiyantāṉ.*

41 Re. Sivaraman (2001:234–235):

> *Bindu* is Pure *māyā*, while the impure order of evolution proceeds from *aśuddha-māyā* or *adho-māyā* . . . The conclusive view then can only be that there is one material cause – māyā which in its phase "unmixed" with *mala-karma* is *śuddha-māyā* and in the other phase with this admixture, is *aśuddha-māyā*. Nor does this introduce heterogeneity in the nature of *māyā*. For *śuddha* and *aśuddha* are not mutually opposed. The relation between the two is of one-sided dependence pointing to the nature of the distinction between the two as one of levels.

42 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:140–141):

> *mēlum, itukārum teyvattiṉ uṇmaiyait teriya voṭṭātu, acuttamāyākārikaḷākiya cittarkaḷum maraintu viṭṭārkaḷ. cuttamāyākāriyākiya terinta periyōrum illai. caṉmārkkamum illai. caṉmārkkam iruntāl, aṉupavittariyāta aṉupavamum kēṭṭariyāta kēḷviyum nām kēṭṭiruppōm. mēlum irantavarkaḷ mīḷavum eḻuntu vantiruppārkaḷ. ātalāl, kēṭṭariyāta kēḷvikaḷaik kēṭkumpaṭi āṇṭavar ceyvatu ittaruṇamē. ātalāl, ittaruṇam ikkālamē caṉmārkkak kālam.*

43 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:141):

> *uṇmai colla vantaṉaṉē eṉru uṇmai collap pukuntālum terintu koḷvārillai. koṭi kaṭṭik koṇṭapaṭiyāl, iṉi ellārum uṇmaiyait arintu koḷvārkaḷ. muṉ uḷḷavarkaḷ uṇmaiyait teriyavoṭṭātu maṇṇaip pōṭṭu maraittuviṭṭārkaḷ. it taruṇam āṇṭavarum terivittār. terivikkiṉrār, terivippār. nīṅkaḷ ellōrum uṇmaiyait terintukoḷḷuṅkaḷ.*

44 Vaḷḷalār (2000:5–6).

45 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:500–501).

46 This is the *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval urai viḷakkam* (first published in 1974), followed by an English translation of the same in 1989. Cuvāmi Caravaṇāṉanta (1910–2006) came into contact with Ramalinga Swamigal's teachings at the age of 18 and remained committed to his path till the end of his life.

47 Caravaṇāṉanta (1997: xxiii).

48 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:595). Words attributed to Ramalinga Swamigal, according to an anonymous onlooker, in the final hours of his appearance.

49 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:595): *kaṭai virittōm koḷvārillai, kaṭṭiviṭṭōm. ippōtu inta uṭampilirukkirōm iṉi ellā uṭampilum pukuntukoḷvōm.*

50 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:111): *nāṉ uḷḷē pattup patiṉaintu tiṉam irukkapōkirēṉ. pārttu avanampikkaiy aṭaiyātīrkaḷ. orukāl parka nērntu pārtṭḷyārukkum tōṉrātu. veru vīṭākattāṉirukkum paṭi āṇṭavar ceyvippār. eṉṉaik kāṭṭikkoṭār.*

2 Ramalingar the Master and the *Cittar*

The earliest recorded accounts of Ramalinga Swamigal's life come from either his very own lifetime or the immediate aftermath of his disappearance. They are not many – just three to four scant accounts, but they are clear on a number of issues – the most important of these being about how we are to understand Ramalingar's significance and how we are to place him, his works, and his disappearance within the framework of a specific religious tradition. Written by those directly acquainted with him, or his associates, these writings fall recognizably within the genre of narratives that are called hagiography, about the exemplary holy life.

In South Asia, the literature of founder-based religions, such as that of Buddhism and Jainism, has been a particularly rich field for examining exemplary lives that reflect on the previous lives of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas or the lineage of *Jina*s. A second, significant corpus of texts is that of the *bhakti* traditions and the accounts of the lives of specific religious figures beginning with the later medieval period (ca. 12th century onwards in South India) and moving on to the hagiographic texts of Maharashtrian and North Indian *bhakti* traditions from the 13th century onwards. A third group is the hagiographical literature that concerns the new religious figures and their socio-religious reform movements starting in the late-18th century.

Once it was understood that hagiography was not a historically constructed biography of a life but a form of narrative that might or might not employ historical elements[1] it became possible to move away from the sole focus on its historical veracity, or mining it for its historical features, or to see it as poor history, and to ask the interesting and pertinent questions about the distinctive form of this narrative genre, what made it a genre in its own right and the purposes it might serve. Questions relating to form led to the identification of both the generic and specific elements in the narrative, where the holy life had to be structured as a combination of the paradigmatic and the particular. It could be seen that there were elements of the discourse, within specific hagiographical traditions, that emerged again and again in different narratives and that these might be seen as hagiographic *topoi*, peculiar to a given tradition.[2] This chapter suggests that such paradigmatic motifs are also discernable in the early

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narratives of Ramalingar's life and that these too can be identified through intertextuality, through seeing them as part of an intramural and familiar discourse within a specifically Tamil, Śaivite literary and religious tradition of the life of a holy man. At the same time, narrating a holy life also served several purposes both spiritual and political. If they were vital to establishing the cult of saints as the groundwork of popular religion in Christian late Mediterranean antiquity (Brown, 1981), they seem to have overwhelmingly served to encapsulate and represent the religious and political interests of specific religious groups in South Asia, as modes of sectarian representation and legitimation, at least from the evidence we have for the medieval (from the 12th century onwards) period and beyond. The prevalence of the genre, though, was no guarantee for the success of a particular narrative. If the success of a hagiography or a series of them, constituting part of a canon of a community, was to be measured by the acceptance of the claims of the community in the specific historical contexts in which they seek legitimation, then it was also possible, at least, theoretically, for such claims, as well as for community formation itself, to fail. Pauwels has remarked that we must not allow the hegemony of success of particular hagiographical traditions to completely divert us from the interesting cases of failure, failure to legitimize the charismatic saint, and failure to create a community through hagiography.[3] This chapter suggests that the traces of these kinds of failure haunted the hagiographical tradition around Ramalingar from its incipience, traces that, as we will see, are discernable in their multiple and even contradictory agendas and in the uneasy intermeshing or disjuncture of their paradigmatic and particular features.

In this chapter we will look at four different hagiographical accounts of Ramalinga Swamigal's life. With the exception of the last one considered, all the others must be seen as hagiographical notes or brief summaries rather than full-length accounts of Ramalingar's life. Two of them – the 1882 English account of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār and the 1892 Tamil version of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār – pay scant attention to the life as such but concentrate, almost overwhelmingly on the final event of the life, the disappearance and attempt to frame the life in terms of the latter. A third, Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's 1867 account, that is also the earliest, follows the traditional pattern of a praise-poem. It is only the fourth version, published as late as 1924 but a compilation of much older anecdotes based on oral memories and testimonies, Kantacāmi Mutaliyār's prose account, which is a fully fledged biography. Of these four works there is a clear divide between the 1882 English account and the others. The divide is not just one pertaining to the language but constitutes itself in the attitude towards temporality. While all the other hagiographies circle backwards, taking Ramalingar back to a sacred past, one which, nevertheless, repeats itself again and again, the English account, through its messianic expectations, takes him forward into a new and global religion. We will analyse the hagiographical materials by looking at this anomalous account first.

"The Master" Ramalinga Swamigal

In 1882, Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār (who I also refer to as Vēlāyutaṉār) wrote a remarkable English account of his master's life and death in a *Theosophical Society* publication, *Hints on Esoteric Philosophy*.[4] The narrative begins with the author's statement of belief in theosophy.

"Having come to know", states Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār,

> that the English community, as well as some Hindus, entertained doubts as to the existence of the Mahatmas (adepts), and, as to the fact of the Theosophical Society having been formed under their special orders; and having heard, moreover, of your recent work, in which much pains are taken to present evidence about these Mahatmas pro and con – I wish to make public certain facts in connexion [sic] with my late revered Guru.[5]

The narrative purports, through this opening statement, to present the case of Ramalinga Swamigal as one which proves beyond doubt the existence of such "Mahatma/adepts". A case which should set to rest doubts that others may have regarding the legitimacy of *The Theosophical Society*.

Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, then, goes on to describe Ramalingar and his doctrines in such a way as to establish that he is one such "adept" or "Mahatma" familiar to those who believe in theosophy. The narrative stresses Ramalingar's autodidacticism in the textual traditions of what were conceived of as the two important "races" of colonial India:

> At the age of nine, without any reading, Ramalingam is certified by eyewitnessesto have been able to recite the contents of the works of Agastia and other Munis equally respected by Dravidians and Aryans.[6]

It speaks of the esoteric nature of his "initiation" and his powers of alchemy and extrasensory perception:

> In 1849, I became his disciple, and, though no one ever knew where he had been initiated, some years after, he gathered a number of disciples around him. He was a great Alchemist. He had a strange faculty about him, witnessed very often, of changing a carnivorous person into a vegetarian; a mere glance from him seemed enough to destroy the desire for animal food. He also had the wonderful faculty of reading other men's minds.

Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār proceeds to prepare us for Ramalingar's disappearance by speaking of events which foreshadow it:

> In the year 1855, he left Madras for Chidambaram, and thence proceeded to Vadalur und Karunguli, where he remained a number of

> years. Many a time, during his stay there, he used to leave his followers, disappearing to go no one knew whither, and remaining absent for more or less prolonged periods of time.[7]

The next section of the narrative sums up the doctrines of Ramalinga Swamigal in six main points:

> Though the Hindu people listened not to him, nor gave ear to his counsels, yet the esoteric meaning of the Vedas and other sacred books of the East would be revealed by the custodians of the secret – the Mahatmas – to foreigners, who would receive it with Joy.
>
> 2. That the fatal influence of the Kalipurusha Cycle, which now rules the world will be neutralized in about ten years.
>
> 3. That the use of animal food would be gradually relinquished.
>
> 4. That the distinction between the races and castes would eventually cease, and the principle of Universal Brotherhood be eventually accepted, and a Universal Brotherhood be established in India.
>
> 5. That what men call "God" is, in fact, the principle of Universal Love – which produces and sustains perfect Harmony and Equilibrium throughout all nature.
>
> 6. That men, once they have ascertained the divine power latent in them, would acquire such wonderful powers as to be able to change the ordinary operations of the law of gravity, etc., etc.[8]

This part of the narrative is brought to a close with Vēlāyutaṉār's conclusion that his teacher's aims were identical to and anticipated that of *The Theosophical Society:*

> In the year 1867, he founded a Society, under the name of "Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangham", which means a society based on the principle of Universal Brotherhood, and for the propagation of the true Vedic doctrine. I need hardly remark that these principles are identically those of the Theosophical Society.[9]

He once again clearly emphasizes this theme towards the end of his narrative, where he has Ramalingar express disappointment with the progress of his movement and predict that his real successors would be foreigners coming from Russia and America:

> But to his great disappointment he found among his large congregations but few who could appreciate his lofty ethics. During the latter part of his visible earthly career, he often expressed his bitter sorrow for the sad state of things, and repeatedly exclaimed: "You are not fit to become members of this Society of Universal Brotherhood. The real members of that Brotherhood are living far away, towards the North

> of India. You do not listen to me. You do not follow the principles of my teachings. You seem to be determined not to be convinced by me. Yet, the time is not far off, when persons from Russia, America (these two countries were always named) and other foreign lands will come to India and preach to you this same doctrine of Universal Brotherhood. Then only, will you know and appreciate the grand truths that I am now vainly trying to make you accept".[10]

Vēlāyutaṉār adds his own conclusions to this account:

> This prophecy has, in my opinion, just been literally fulfilled. The fact, that the Mahatmas in the North exist, is no new idea to us, Hindus; and the strange fact, that the advent of Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott from Russia and America was foretold several years before they came to India, is an incontrovertible proof that my Guru was in communication with those Mahatmas under whose direction the Theosophical Society was subsequently founded.[11]

A middle section of the narrative deals directly with the Ramalingar's disappearance:

> When he attained his 54th year (1873), he began to prepare his disciples for his departure from the world. He announced his intention of going into Samadhi. During the first half of 1873 he preached most forcibly his views upon Human Brotherhood. But, during the last quarter of the year, he gave up lecturing entirely and maintained an almost unbroken silence. He resumed speech in the last days of January, 1874, and reiterated his prophecies – hereinafter narrated. On the 30th of that month, at Metucuppam, we saw our master for the last time. Selecting a small building, he entered its solitary room after taking an affectionate farewell of his Chelas, stretched himself on the carpet, and then, by his orders, the door was locked and the only opening walled up. But when, a year later, the place was opened and examined, there was nothing to be seen but a vacant room. He left us with a promise to re-appear some day, but would give us no intimation as to the time, place, or circumstances. Until then, however, he said that he would be working not in India alone, but also in Europe and America and all other countries, to influence the minds of the right men to assist in preparing for the regeneration of the world.[12]

The entire narrative is signed by "Tholuvore Velayudham Mudeliar, F.T.S" and witnessed by two other people, Munjacuppam Singaravelu Mudelair, President of the *Krishna Theosophical Society*, and Kumbakonam Aravamudu Ayangar, Fellow of the *Nellore Theosophical Society*. In addition, the narrative is attested for by G. Muttuswamy Chetty, a judge of the Small Cause Court,

Madras and Vice President of the *Madras Theosophical Society*. The attestation reads: "The official position of Vellaya Pandit[13] [sic] as one of the Pandits of the Presidency College is an ample guarantee of his respectability and trustworthiness".[14]

The first fact to note about this narrative is that it is framed in the form of an attested statement duly signed by two, "respectable" witnesses and vouched for by one further prominent person, in the form of the judge. These legalistic procedures give the narrative the gravity of a declaration made under oath in court, signed by the witness Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. The suggestion, therefore, is that this account is less a hagiographical telling of Ramalingar's life than a sober recitation of certain "facts" on the part of Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. In being framed as a kind of "scientific" narration about esoteric and spiritual matters, Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's account would accord well with one of the professed objectives with which the *Theosophical Society* was founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott in 1875 in New York, which was to usher in a new epoch of both science and religion.[15] It was also the "factual" nature of the narrative which Blavatsky was anxious to stress in her editorial note which prefaced this account:

> While at Madras, we were told that a well-known Tamil scholar, a pandit in the Presidency College, desired to have a private conversation with us. The interview occurred in the presence of Mr. Singaravelu, President of the Krishna Theosophical Society, and of another trustworthy Theosophist, Mr. G. Aravamudu Ayangar, a Sanskritist of Nellore.[16]

Blavatsky continues by hinting at an in-depth and even partially secret conversation which she had with Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār which she cannot fully divulge:

> We are no more at liberty to repeat here all the questions put to us by the interviewer than we are to divulge certain other facts, which would still more strongly corroborate our repeated assertions that (1) our Society was founded at the direct suggestion of Indian and Tibetan adepts; and (2) that is coming to this country we but obeyed their wishes. But we shall leave our friends to draw their inferences from all the facts.[17]

She then concludes by stating that Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār will now provide a simplified version of the narrative he had imparted to her and that such a narrative would be accompanied by the "certificates of respectable living witnesses who heard the Guru prefigure the events, which have had so complete a fulfillment".[18] For Blavatsky, as much as for Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, Ramalinga Swamigal's religious identity becomes explicable through the lens of theosophy – he is one of the theosophical "adepts" or "Mahatmas" who have foreseen or led to the founding of the society.

Prothero's account of the early days of *The Theosophical Society* has shown that Blavatsky had first located these personages in the Near rather than the Far East, and it was Egypt which was first seen as the land from which they originated or which they inhabited. "Adepts" were "a race of spiritually advanced beings" who could manipulate occult powers while "Masters/Mahatmas" were, "members of a secret occult brotherhood who had been entrusted throughout the ages with the task of conserving and propagating the ancient wisdom".[19] Much later, towards the end of her life in 1891, Blavatsky wrote of the "Masters" in an unpublished article:

> One of the chief factors in the reawakening of Aryavarta [India] which has been part of the work of the Theosophical Society, was the ideal of the Masters. . . . All that I was permitted to reveal was, that there existed somewhere such great men; that some of Them were Hindus; that they were learned as none others . . . and also that I was a chela of one of them . . . Their chief desire was to preserve the true religious and philosophic spirit of ancient India; to defend the ancient wisdom contained in its Darsanas and Upanishads against the systematic assaults of the missionaries, and finally to reawaken the dormant ethical and patriotic spirit in those youths in whom it has almost disappeared.[20]

It is as just such a spiritually advanced being, a "Mahatma" skilled in alchemy and with occult powers, who heralds the eventual emergence of theosophy in India that Ramalingar is portrayed in Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative.

Another compelling reason why Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār would seek to associate Ramalingar with theosophy is the professed agenda or aims of the Society as Olcott and Blavatsky formulated them on their arrival in India. The oft-quoted general aims were as follows:

> To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
>
> To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science.
>
> To investigate the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.[21]

Olcott, in particular, in his first Indian lecture at Bombay in 1879, had placed high on his list of reforms the abolition of the caste system, arguing that: "If India is to be regenerated . . . it must be by Hindus who can rise above their castes and every other reactionary influence".[22]

As Prothero (1996) has shown, the theosophical agenda for the uplift of India was particularly attractive to socio-religious, reform-minded, educated Indians. Apart from arguing for the Universal Brotherhood of Man, the society's self-proclaimed religious liberalism,[23] the veneration of the Far East as the source of true wisdom and the antipathy to the Christian proselytizing of

the missionaries with the concomitant message that Hinduism can reform itself from within, through the initiatives of its own "Masters", "Adepts", and "Chelas" accounted for its immediate acceptance and widespread popularity in urban India and, initially, among reform-minded religious leaders such as Dayananda Saraswati. In addition to this agenda for religious reform the Society's aims incorporated social reform, thanks to Olcott's rather than Blavatsky's ethical interests. Thus, at least in theory, the Society espoused women's rights and universal education, caste reform, and the abolition of child marriage.[24] These ideas would explain why someone like Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, a member of the colonial educational system with exposure to the latest debates on social reform, would join the Society in its early days, within four years of it having shifted its headquarters from Bombay to Madras.

It is this new-found allegiance to *The Theosophical Society* that provides the framework for Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative. A lifetime of sole devotion to the Ramalingar cause on his part was now being reinforced by his new theosophical interests. A perceived shift or expansion of loyalty could be justified or even erased by showing that it was no shift of interest at all and that, rather, the Ramalingar movement and *The Theosophical Society* formed one seamless continuum. In his narrative, his teacher expresses deep disappointment with his own movement and with his followers shortly prior to his disappearance. The biographical fact of Ramalinga Swamigal having prevented further worship in his temple seems to indicate, at the least, some dissatisfaction with his followers and the organization which he had created. Now, in Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative, the pupil denies any deflected loyalty by joining the Society his master had predicted would succeed where his own had failed. In doing so, he reaffirms his loyalty to his first and primary allegiance. Thus, his "Master's Disappearance", too, could be plausibly construed as the disappearance of one of the Theosophical "Masters" who no longer manifests himself in India, but continues to do the work of the universal brotherhood elsewhere in the theosophical world.

Further, it is to Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's English language version that we owe the only vivid description of Ramalingar that is striking in its "modern" tone – if by modern we mean a lively and poignant subjective description of a very individual person rather than a holy type.

> In personal appearance Ramalingam was a moderately tall, spare man – so, indeed, as to virtually appear a skeleton – yet withal a strong man, erect in stature, and walking very rapidly – with a face of a clear brown complexion, a straight, thin nose, very large fiery eyes, and with a look of constant sorrow on his face. Towards the end he let his hair grow long; and, what is rather unusual with Yogis, he wore shoes. His garments consisted but of two pieces of white cloth. His habits were excessively abstemious. He was known to hardly take any rest. A strict vegetarian, he ate but once in two or three days, and was then satisfied with a few mouthfuls of rice. But when fasting for a period of two or

> three months at a time, he literally ate nothing, living merely on warm water with a little sugar dissolved in it.

The image of the modestly clothed, tall, spare man with the large fiery eyes and the look of constant sorrow on his face lingers on in the mind's eye and adds depth to all that one learns about Ramalinga Swamigal – his kindness, his timidity, his suffering – from his own poetry. Yet, this description, sympathetic, venerating and yet reticent, filled with affection, remains an exception in the corpus of works produced in this period.

This early narrative about Ramalingar's last days shows us that, from the start, the hagiographers of Ramalinga Swamigal were confronted with the problem of endowing the mysterious disappearance with adequate and coherent meaning. Thus, Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative seeks to produce a definitive explanation which, nevertheless, generates further unresolved questions. It speaks of Ramalingar's increasing disappointment and disillusionment with his followers and the utterance of a final prophecy, which sees as his legitimate successors not his own people but foreigners from afar. The aftermath of the disappearance is also grasped entirely retrospectively, making sense only with the future coming of *The Theosophical Society*. Through an imaginative act, the saint is now transported to Europe and America, as one among the "Masters/Mahatmas" who continues to work for universal brotherhood. The narrative conveys, (however much it attempts to disguise this) the uneasiness felt by a direct disciple of the saint who has experienced his presence and also the events which led up to the disappearance. Yet, it also supplies a definitive answer to the question: what became of Ramalinga Swamigal? It conjectures his permanent residence elsewhere.

Vēlāyutaṉār's English narrative considered here shows us that already in the early days, the hagiographical tradition on Ramalingar had the option of providing one particular interpretation of his significance: to see him as a prophet of the future, heralding universal brotherhood and a global religion. Yet, this messianic interpretation seems to have decisively failed. None of the hagiographies written after Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār took these claims seriously or followed up on this. This may well also have to do with the "messiah problems" that *The Theosophical Society* itself faced in the 1920s that made the likelihood of Ramalingar being one of its "masters" an embarrassing suggestion. It is more likely, though, that the hagiographical traditions relating to Ramalinga Swamigal, embedded as they were in the social and cultural context of a rising Tamil regionalism and socio-religious reform, would actively seek to locate him within a rapidly reconfiguring Tamil Śaiva context.

Three Śaivite Hagiographies

The earliest comprehensive account of the life story is to be found in the lyrical version of Ramalinga's life by Ca. Mu. Kantacāmi Piḷḷai, who had compiled a version of the life based on oral accounts he had heard from Ramalinga

Swamigal's direct disciples. This musical composition was titled *The Song of the Story of Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ* (*Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ carittira kīrttaṉai*) and was published in 1923. Kantacāmi Piḷḷai who was from Kāraṇappaṭṭu, a small village in South Arcot, appears to have been a younger contemporary of Ramalinga Swamigal, as his own account of having been helped by the latter, in his work, shows. In 1924, he had brought out all six sections of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, as the first collected edition and had prefaced this edition with the aforementioned account of Ramalingar's life. Stemming from the same caste group as Ramalingar, Kantacāmi Piḷḷai was a Vīraśaivite and his was the first full-length hagiography to comprehensively anchor the poet-saint within Śaivasiddhānta orthodoxy.[25] This poetic version of the life was converted the very next year after its publication, in 1925, into a prose work titled *Notes on the Story of Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ* (*Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ carittira kuṟippukaḷ*) by, confusing enough, a person with the identical first name, Mōkūr Kantacāmi Mutaliyār.[26] It is this prose version that is dealt with in this chapter. The template for both the earlier poetic and the later prose work was a short, poetic composition that had already come out within Ramalinga Swamigal's own lifetime and had been composed by his closest disciple and editor Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. This was the panegyric which Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār had appended to the 1867 edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*. This short poetical composition of 66 verses (which I allude to briefly here) called *The Story of the Tiruvaruṭpā* (*Tiruvaruṭpā varalāṟu*, henceforth *TV*) provides scant biographical details about Ramalingar[27] or about his disappearance, yet it laid the foundations for the later hagiographical tradition in several important ways. Thus, if Vēlāyutaṉār wrote a legalistic account of Ramalingar's significance for *The Theosophical Society*, he did so in English and in his capacity as someone participating in a cross-cultural encounter. But there is the other Vēlāyutaṉār. He was raised in a pious Śaiva family, received Śaiva initiation from the family guru, Irattiṉa Kurukkaḷ, was trained from a young age as a traditional poet (*pulavar*) by Ramalingar himself, and after the latter's death had a long and illustrious career not just as the Tamil Pandit at the Presidency College in Madras but as the composer of prabandhic works relating to Śaivite themes. These included ten prose renderings (*Vacaṉa nūlkaḷ*) on *purāṇa*s (e.g., *Mārukaṇṭēyap purāṇavacaṉam*) and ritual handbooks (e.g., *Vināyakacaturti viratam*), as well as at least 20 or more poetic works on sacred places such as Tiruttaṇikai (e.g., *Tiruttaṇikaip patiṟṟupattantāti*) and hagiographical poetry on Śaivite gurus (e.g., *Civañāṉapālaya Tēcikar mummaṇikkōvai*).[28] It is this Vēlāyutaṉāṟ who wrote the *TV* as a tribute to his own guru, showing that Ramalingar was part of the illustrious lineage of sacred poet-saints who composed the poetic canon of the Śaivasiddhānta.

Vaḷḷalār

The *TV* is the first work to name Ramalinga Swamigal "The *Vaḷḷal* who manifests/elucidates grace"[29] (*Vaḷḷal:* benefactor; patron, the gracious, generous

king who grants boons; the copious one), – *Aruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷal*, the diminutive of which is Vaḷḷalār, the name by which Ramalinga Swamigal is best known today.[30] Equally definitive was the name that Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār gave to the poetic corpus: he named it "The Verses of Divine Grace" *Tiruvaruṭpā*, and he explains why in verse 35 of his poem:

> Since it exudes great love, engendering grace,
> cutting duality through the rich, lotus feet of the Lord,
> who has at his side the pearl-toothed, fish-eyed lady,
> causing one to live,
> it takes upon itself the name *Aruṭpā*.[31]

This verse, as well as earlier references in the poem, that speaks of Ramalinga Swamigal's birth as one that took place in order to make the Vedas and the truths of the Śaiva āgamas flourish,[32] placed his doctrines squarely within the framework of mainstream Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* and the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta.[33] Thus, the significance of the corpus of poetry is that it points the way to a total surrender at the feet of Śiva, enabling one to become the recipient of his grace. Similarly, the poet also compares the *Tiruvaruṭpā* to the core canonical works of Tamil Śaivism, the *Tirumuṟai*:

> If the great ascetic of Chidambaram,
> with its clear waters and southern groves, makes known
> one poem in the *veṇpā* metre [beginning with the word] "*taṇṇīr*"[34]
> in the lineage of Lord Campantar,
> which [gives] the grace of the sacred book,
> full of the taste of excellent melodies,
> I am without the capacity to digest it.
> [Then] is speaking of it praiseworthy?[35]

In this verse there is a kind of play on the meaning of the words, "the great ascetic of Chidambaram" which, while obviously referring to Śiva-Naṭarāja as the dancing Lord of Chidambaram, refers also to Ramalinga Swamigal himself as the ascetic of the place, Vadalur, which he had, fully realizing the import of his act, named the "Chidambaram of the Higher Wisdom" (*Uttarañāṉa Citamparam*).[36] The verse refers to a specific miraculous incident that takes place in his time at Karuṅkuḻi, when Ramalingar was composing his poetry at dusk and his lamp ran out of oil. He was able to keep the lamp lit, it is alleged, using water as the fuel, thus demonstrating his miraculous powers. Also, the verse speaks of Ramalingar's poetry as chosen by Śiva himself and pleasing to him. The poetry, further, has been composed by the ascetic of Chidambaram in the same metre as that of Tiruñāṉacampantar, in his *Tēvāram, Tirumuṟai, 1–3*. The poem on the whole then places Ramalingar's oeuvre within the canon of Tamil, Śaivite *bhakti* poetry, as a natural successor to the existent canonical corpus of the *Tirumuṟai* and reinforces

this canonization by speaking of him, in other verses, as a Śaivite *bhakti* saint in the line of Tiruñāṉacampantar. The linking of the poet with Tiruñāṉacampantar is the one major thread in the plot. Thus, the reference to Tiruñāṉacampantar's hagiography as it is given in the *Periyapurāṇam* echoes throughout the *TV* and is mimicked in it, particularly in terms of the paradigmatic features of the plot. Tiruñāṉacampantar is considered one of the primary "trio" (*mūvar*) of poet-saints of the Tamil *bhakti* movement. His tale is told in the 12th-century hagiography of the Śaivite poet-saints, the *Periyapurāṇam* (henceforth, *PP*), verses 1899–3154, and it might be worthwhile, at this point, to recollect some of the salient features of his hagiography that find their echoes in the *TV*.[37] Tiruñāṉacampantar was born in the Cōḻa country in the temple town of Cīrkāḻi. The section of the *PP* that introduces his story begins with verses that first praise the Cōḻa country and then the sacred town of Cīrkāḻi, thus in a miniature fashion echoing the structure of the *PP* itself, whose first two sections are a praise of the country (*tirunāṭṭupaṭalam*) and the sacred town (*tirunakarappaṭalam*), respectively. So too, Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār begins his account of Ramalinga Swamigal with praise of the Cōḻa country in which he was born (verse 2) followed by praise of the town, Marutūr (verse 4). Next, just as in the hagiography of Tiruñāṉacampantar, there is the account of the caste into which the saint was born (verse 5). Verses 7–18 speak of the reasons for his birth that has been enabled due to Śiva's grace and here verse 7 is directly indebted to verse 1899 of the *PP* on the reason for Tiruñāṉacampantar's birth.[38] Both Tiruñāṉacampantar and Ramalingar have come to safeguard both the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas. There is a further highly significant and unstated parallel that will come to be greatly emphasized in more detailed hagiographies of Ramalingar. *TV*, verse 21 speaks of how Ramalingar was endowed with divine knowledge without being instructed by anyone, a state for which the hagiographic phrase is "knowing without learning" – *ōtātu uṇartal*. The implication is that he was, so to speak, always like this. Of all the charming, holy features that distinguish Tiruñāṉacampantar from the other poet-saints it is this: that he was a child-saint, bestowed divine knowledge by Śiva and Pārvatī themselves, a knowledge imbibed with the Goddess' breast milk when she fed him as a squalling baby.[39] Implicit in the *TV* is the claim that Ramalingar is the later golden child, gifted by Śiva himself with divine knowledge. Thus, the *TV* in all its brevity experiments with modelling the life of Ramalinga Swamigal along the lines of other more ancient, more established Śaivite poet-saints. It anticipates other works that also do so, even while they would aim at a more detailed and more appropriate paradigm or set of paradigms from the Śaivite hagiographical corpus to give contours to the life story. Even in this corpus of earliest hagiographies, as we will increasingly discover, Ramalingar emerges as a figure that defies clear-cut categorization, who can be made available for multiple appropriations because his life story eludes fixity. This elusiveness becomes particularly marked when the hagiographies come to focus on his disappearance, as the next account does.

"We Shall Obtain the State of Being a Guru"[40]

In 1896, the collected edition of all six books of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* was published with a short biographical sketch of the saint. In this sketch two small sections written by Piruṅkimānakaram Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār titled, "The Vanishing of Piḷḷai's Form"[41] (*Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ tiruvuruvam maṟaintatu*) and "The Splendour of the Liberation" (*Muttivaipavam*) were included that sketch, in some detail, what might have happened to Ramalinga Swamigal once he was seen no more.

The first narrative about the disappearance is as follows:

> Looking with a benign glance of grace at his close friends, after moving from the state beyond bliss (*āṉantātīta*) to the soteriological practice of eternal bliss (*catāṉanta cātanam*) [Ramalingar said], "Dear friends, we have determined to be separated from you for some time. We have also determined to abandon ourselves in the eternally blissful *samādhi* (*catāṉanta camāti*). Within a short period my body will vanish and not be visible to your eyes. This body will not be available for any of you to burn it in the fire or bury it in the earth. Henceforth, after remaining a *cittar* (*siddha*) for 40,000 years, obtaining successfully all the powers (*siddhi*s), losing [myself] in the divine play and, after that, obtaining a *pranava* body, we shall obtain the state of being a guru such as Ñāṉacampantar". Having expressed this resolve, having subtly indicated something, crossing over and standing beyond the five states, including the state of wakefulness, making himself the fodder for divine grace he became totally devoured [by it]. [In this state] with all his categories of existence (*tattva*s) asking for the service of devotion in the path of wanting it, with the *praṇava* itself as his divine form, and the birth of *sahaja* grace, in the Kali Age, in 1874, in the Srimukam year, in the month of *Tai* (mid-January to mid-February), on the 19th day, on Friday, in the early part of the night which had the constellation of Puṉarpūcam, in the Cittivaḷākam residence, in the village of Mēṭṭukkuppam adjoining Vadalur, staying motionless in that *sahaja samāti* of pure consciousness which converts the artificial body into the real body, contemplating the true guru who is the object of his self, conveying his intentions to his friends to lock up the room in which he was sitting, he closed the gate of his senses, entered the state of silence and attained eternal bliss.
>
> In accordance with this guru's commands, the room where he entered that state is kept locked at all times and taken care of by well-wishers. On the southern porch of his house, that vast thing called the "Light of Truth and Knowledge", which has aided to reveal that Great Vaḷḷal who went by the name of Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, which had been established during his lifetime, exists even today and flourishes. Just as this noble person intended, whose attribute is consciousness, when those who

> have the authority to go and open that room permeated by the state of eternal bliss do so, in accordance with his command that if the room were opened and looked at today, one would see nothing in it tomorrow, the room remains empty and pure space.[42]

The most fascinating aspect of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's account of Ramalinga Swamigal's disappearance must be addressed first: that the long and reassuring speech that he gives to his acolytes in this narrative is not mentioned in any of the major biographies that deal at length with his disappearance. Let us take as a biographical standard, which it undoubtedly is, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's 1971 hagiography. It must in some sense be considered the summation of the hagiographical tradition inasmuch as it is meticulous in including all the previous information regarding the holy life. In this hagiography the final words attributed to Ramalingar are two sentences that I have already quoted in Chapter 1. These were:

> I opened shop but there was none to buy my wares, so I closed it. Now, I am in this body, hereafter I will enter into all bodies.[43]

The second statement, quoted both in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's account and in the comprehensive Ā. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai edition of his works, was this final command:

> I am going to stay inside [my room] for ten to fifteen days. Do not see this and lose faith. In case there arises the need to look [in], [I] will appear to no one. God will make it appear to be an empty place. He will not reveal me.[44]

Neither of these short statements provide any clear direction or closure as to what might happen to Ramalinga Swamigal after the disappearance. In contrast, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's narrative is both the longest and the most comprehensive, giving us a very reassuring account of what would become of him and, in fact, the assurance of his eventual return.

A close analysis of this narrative shows us that it builds upon Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's narrative but generates a more complex interpretation of the saint's identity and his teachings. An identity that can only be explained in terms of a combination of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, the Tamil Vīraśaiva, and the pan-Indian *Siddha* as well as the specifically Tamil *Cittar* traditions.

Thus, to begin with, we have the words placed within quotes, attributed to Ramalingar himself. Here, the latter tells his disciples that he is now practising, "the soteriological practice of eternal bliss" (*catāṉanta cātaṉa*). This will lead to the state, very shortly, when he will reach, "the eternally blissful samādhi" (*catāṉanta camāti*). Terminology of this kind is not arbitrary – rather, it is carefully deployed to place Ramalingar and his final state of liberation within a very specific religious tradition without naming it explicitly – this

is the Vīraśaiva one and that too a specific Tamil textual tradition within it, which is the lineage of the ca. 17th–18th-century Kumāratēvar and his seminal work the *Cuttacātakam* (*The Soteriological Path to the Pure State*). Generally speaking, in Vīraśaiva soteriology as it developed in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta as well as Tamil Vīraśaivism particularly indebted to its Andhra and Kannada iterations, the highest kind of liberation is through a kind of yogic devotion to Śiva – a path that is called *Śivayoga* or sometimes *Śivarājayoga*. I deal with this at much greater length in the next chapter. Suffice to state here that the terminology of *sadānanda sādhana* leading to *sadānanda samādhi* and then to the highest state of *sahajā samādhi* is part of the *termini technici* of Vīraśaiva soteriology.[45] But what is very specific here is that Ramalingar does not stop with reaching the state of *sahajā samādhi*, which is the highest state of liberation in the Tamil Vīraśaiva tradition of Kumāratēvar. The hagiography tells us that the *sahajā samādhi* transforms Ramalingar's body. At this point his body will vanish and he will become a *Cittar*. It is only after remaining a *Cittar* for vast eons of time, he explains, will he obtain a *praṇava* body, by which is meant a body composed of the sacred syllable *Om* (also called the *praṇava*). Then, he will become one of the sacred teachers of the Śaivasiddhānta lineage, the *cantāṉa kuravarar*, like Tiruñāṉacampantar. In prefacing his remarks by saying that he will be separated from his friends/devotees for only a little while Ramalinga Swamigal seems to be implying that he will return after obtaining the *praṇava* body. The allusions to this *praṇava* body become clear only when we come to Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's second section titled, "The Splendour of the Liberation" (*Muttivaipavam).*

Here, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār explains:

> This indeed is the greatness of the glance of divine grace obtained by *Vaḷḷalār* who manifests grace. This conveyed [to us] what the real state of liberation is like. The ultimate state of liberation is when the body does not become like a corpse and collapse on this earth but obtains one type of *citti* among the three types. Now, the three types of *citti*s that the body obtains in liberation are the *Citti with Form* (*uruvacitti*), the *Citti without Form* (*aruvacitti)* and the *Citti with Form and Formlessness* (*uruvaruvacitti).* This is to be seen as the greatness attained by our Lord of divine grace [Ramalingar].
>
> In asking how this happened, when our Āḷuṭaiya Nampi, the [saint] Cuntaramūrti Cuvāmi and Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār departed for Tirukkayilai (Kailāśa), this was liberation with form.[46] Men of learning call these the Pure body (*cuttatēkam*), the Golden Body (*suvaṇatēkam*) and the Om Body *(piraṇavatēkam*), respectively. Liberation without Form is when the body of our Āḷuṭaiya Māṇikkavācakar Cuvāmi dissolved with the ether in the Hall of Consciousness [in Chidambaram]. Liberation with Form and Formlessness happens when those elders such as our Āḷuṭaiya Piḷḷai [Tiruñāṉacampantar] mingled with the light or Āṇṭavaracukaḷ [the saint Appar] mingled with the *Śivaliṅga*. Moreover,

> it is this greatness [which led to] Tiruveṇkāṭṭaṭikaḷ, Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ and other elders establishing their bodies as *Śivaliṅga*s. The greatness of this Vaḷḷalār who radiates divine grace, who is skilled in all the powers is also of this kind.[47]

This passage approximates Ramalingar's disappearance to narratives of other holy Śaiva endings – the ending of the life of other poet-saints. It offers us a variety of possibilities about the way final liberation and the attainment of ultimate power, *siddhi*, is effected according to a typology that is not prevalent in the *Periyapurāṇam* itself but comes to be introduced at a later stage in the systematization of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. The examples cited are: Cuntarar (ca. 7th century) and Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār who were contemporaries and were said to have died simultaneously and gone to Kailāśa together for attaining liberation in their human form, Appar (ca. 7th century), who embraced the Śivaliṅga and vanished, Tiruñāṉacampantar (ca. 8th century) melting with the light in the temple at Chidambaram and later Śaivite religious heads such as Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ (ca. 15th century),[48] who is said to have chosen the time of his entering his mausoleum to go into *samādhi* and eventual liberation, along with his disciples.[49] These various kinds of vanishing are categorized into three types of liberation – with a body, without one, or in a state of both.

Finally, the vanishing of a saint, it must be added, is a ubiquitous trope not just in the Tamil hagiographical tradition but, as others have shown, pan-Indian as well as South-east Asian hagiographies.[50] Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār leaves it open as to which of these kinds Ramalinga Swamigal underwent but suggests that so great were his powers that he could have attained any of these.[51]

The various hagiographical strands of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār and Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār, placing Ramalinga Swamigal in a Tamil Śaivasiddhānta/Vīraśaiva/*Cittar* tradition, come together most comprehensively in 1925, in the prose work titled *Notes on the Story of Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ* (*Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ carittira kuṟippukaḷ,* henceforth, *Notes*) of Mōkūr Kantacāmi Mutaliyār. This work, that was to become the standard version of a Śaivite hagiography of Ramalinga Swamigal and is followed also faithfully in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's 1976 version, I delineate it briefly here, paying particular attention to its ending.

The text frames Ramalingar's birth in the context of a prophetic visit that happens prior to it, when his mother, Ciṉṉammaiyār was not yet pregnant with him. A *Śivayogi* comes by one afternoon, tired and hungry, and requests her to feed him. She does so with great reverence and all the honours and, pleased with her, he prophesies Ramalingar's birth and vanishes.[52] Thus, the birth is framed within the context of an incident that presages both the birth of a holy child to virtuous Śaiva parents and functions as a metaphor for what his own religious vision, centred around feeding the hungry, will be about. The narration of the childhood

is replete with miracles: the infant is taken to Chidambaram and laughs in delight at the sight of the divine; he shows precocious learning talent and composes his first major poem at the age of nine; he astounds learned scholars by being able to give discourses on the devotional Śaivite canon with great erudition at a young age.[53] His growth into a respected scholar of Śaiva literature and as a poet in his own right is detailed. The miracles multiply once the narrative moves into the final decade of Ramalinga Swamigal's life, and these include several that become part of the standard hagiographical narratives henceforth: how he transformed sand into *śivaliṅga*s, how he was able to subdue snakes with his calm demeanour, how he was able to foretell the future, cure people of diseases, light a lamp with water instead of oil, convert metal into gold, appear in several places at once, etc. In other words, the majority of the miracles may be grouped under three tropes: Ramalingar as a Śaivite saint, as a healer of diseases, and as an alchemist.[54]

Then we come to the final phase of his life and the activities at Vadalur and Mēṭṭukuppam. The departure of Ramalinga Swamigal is introduced through the narration of the following anecdote:

> Some days before the Vaḷḷalār who manifests Grace closed the gates of the temple he looked at his dear ones and promised, "We will not abandon those who have related to us or those who have later heard of us and loved us. This is a vow, this is a vow".[55]

The use of the phrase, *tirukkāppiṭṭuk koḷḷutal*, is significant: even while it refers to the closing of the gates of his room in Mēṭṭukuppam, it has the connotations of closing the gates of a temple when the deity retires for the night and also, in this context, of a merging with the divine inside the temple that is part of the hagiographic *topoi* of the Śaivite *nāyanmār*, discussed earlier. The text continues that, in December–January of 1874, he started to alternate between shutting himself up in his room at Cittivaḷākam for some days and coming out and giving public discourses on others. Then, comes the final speech and, here again, we see variations on the words attributed to him in the other hagiographies:

> I opened the shop, there were none to buy the wares, I closed it. All of you contemplate, with compassion towards all living beings, this lamp [in front of the door] as God, in order to get grace. Now after two-and-a-half *ghaṭikā*s[56] we will not be visible to your eyes. We will be elsewhere in the world. Then the God of the Light of Great Grace will come. At that time we will accomplish many miracles (*citti*) in this form. We will establish the reign of divine grace. We will grant deathlessness to our people and the state of the ripening [of *karma*] to others. If authorities order the door to be opened during the time I have closed it then God will grant his grace.[57]

Let us note the variations in this last speech in comparison to that reported in Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's earlier version. The main trope remains intact: Ramalinga Swamigal assures his disciples that he will vanish bodily and remain hidden for a while. Earlier, we had a definitive unit of time, an immensely long one of 40,000 years when he would obtain all the powers. Here, we are told that he will remain hidden only till the *God of the Great Light of Grace* arrives. He will then return to perform miracles and grant deathlessness to his disciples.

Yet, there is an interesting further twist to Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's story discussed earlier, if we examine it closely. For, in the light of this literary evidence it can be construed that Ramalingar would have to come back once more and work his goodness on earth before he takes a final Knowledge Body and vanishes. This, indeed, seems to be the implication of the direct quote, attributed to him. Thus, in the first part of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's narrative, attaining bodily immortality and becoming disembodied, Ramalinga Swamigal leaves the world in order to acquire greater powers to become an even greater guru. His very first statement about resolving to be separated from his beloved disciples for only a certain period of time hints at or promises an eventual return. Nevertheless, the account of the disappearance, where the authorial voice takes over, as a *coda* to the tale, ends very differently. In it, Ramalingar crosses the pure *māyā*, takes the *Om* Body as his form, stays in, "the concentration that is natural", (*sahaja samāti*) gets a "real" body, contemplates the true guru within his heart and, in that state of silent concentration (*mauṉa niṭṭai*) he attains eternal bliss (*nityāṉantam*). In this authorial account there is a finality – Ramalinga Swamigal has obtained not just the *Om* Body but the final, real one, he has reached that level of spontaneous meditative concentration, *sahajā samādhi*, which implies he has become liberated in this life, *jīvanmukta*, and, therefore, also become a *cittar/siddha*, "one who is accomplished". No further words need to be spoken since his *samādhi*, for which the synonymous word *niṭṭai/niṣṭhā* is used (implying fixed in or culminating in), has taken him into a silence, a *mauna*, that is a place beyond sound. There will be, henceforth, no speech and no return. This description of the final state of liberation is indebted, as mentioned earlier, to the soteriological path described in the Vīraśaiva *Cuttacātakam*, where the state of "*sahaja niṭṭai*" is arrived at by the self who enters into a form of *Śivayoga* and reaches the ultimate stage of the latter. "It is only in sahaja niṣṭai obtained through Tiruvaruḷ (Grace) that atman reaches the higher pure consciousness where there is no cognition of becoming or non-becoming and atman remains as is (niṉrapaṭiyē nitral as it called in Tamil)".[58]

The Notes, in contrast, takes a dramatically different turn in the final pages of the narrative. If we recollect, it promised us his return in his own words. Its confidence, we discover in the last pages, is underscored by the fact that it frames the return as part of a larger pattern of repeated returns. In other words, even while the word *avatāra* is not mentioned, we are led through the narrative to the *avatāra* paradigm – Ramalingar can return

because he has already returned once. *The Notes* suggests this by continuing the story after the disappearance and narrating several miraculous anecdotes that underscore the promises Ramalinga Swamigal makes to his disciples. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus Ramalingar reappears: In the dream of Kāraṇappaṭṭu Kantacāmi Piḷḷai, curing him of his eye disease; on the road with Cupparāya Paratēci protecting him as he walked in the night; sending messengers to Peṅkaḷūr Vēṇukōpāla Piḷḷai when he lost his way, etc.[59] This conviction of his reappearance is justified by the fact that all the earliest hagiographies were composed or written down on the basis of first- or second-hand anecdotes narrated by those who had actually lived in Ramalinga Swamigal's time – who had known him personally or knew those who had known him personally. *The Notes*, in fact, ends with a long list of such people that it names as those who were the repositories of the chain of oral memories that had gone into the making of its text. It is these first-hand witnesses who are able to shed clear light on the protean lives of Ramalinga Swamigal both past and present.

Typologically, the narratives examined so far fall into the traditional pattern of the sacred stories in the *Periyapurāṇam*. As Ebeling (2010b:474) has cogently argued, the life of the saint moves between two realms – the visible and the invisible with a constant oscillation between the two. At the visible level Ramalingar is born, undergoes various experiences in his life that mark out its extraordinariness for us, performs miracles, and then, ultimately vanishes. The vanishing highlights the invisible level that is also the didactic level – the larger meaning of the saint's life that is nothing but part of the divine plan of Śiva, is revealed, exposed, through the rent in the veil of the visible, by his invisibility even while the movement from the visible to the invisible is mediated by the bodily metamorphosis.

The central trope that binds all the Śaivite hagiographies is the following: that Ramalinga Swamigal was a *Cittar*, and his disappearance is a confirmation of this fact. If we are to examine where this central explanatory trope comes from we would not have far to seek. Both Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār and Kantacāmi Mutaliyār vehemently assert that Ramalinga Swamigal was a *Cittar* because this assertion is made in the poetic corpus itself.

The account of the hagiographies, therefore, derives its legitimacy from Ramalinga Swamigal's own poetry and prose and from his frequent assertions that he had transformed his own body gradually from a Pure (*śuddha*) or Golden (*suvaṃa*) one into an *Om* (*praṇava*) body, culminating in the Knowledge (*jñāna*) Body. Therefore, his was an eventual disembodiment, a dematerialization of the body until it disappears. Ramalingar speaks of this threefold typology of the body in several contexts – both in his poetry, particularly in the final two books, the fifth and sixth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, and late prose writings. Thus, there is no doubt that Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's account of the dematerialization of the body is based faithfully on the account of it given in the first person, in Ramalinga Swamigal's own words as recorded in these works.

"I took on the Indestructible, Divine Body"[60]

In this section I give a brief sketch of the journey towards a non-material body that is charted in the poetic corpus and place it within the context of both a pan-Indian and a specifically Tamil tradition of Vīraśaiva/*Cittar* literature. I begin by referring to specific verses, not more than 20 or so, that deal with the themes of attaining various *citti*s, of the exchange of divine and human bodies and, finally, the achievement of the deathless and immortal body. It is evident that these themes come into prominence only in the final two books – Book 5 (*aintām tirumuṟai*) and Book 6 (*āṟām tirumuṟai*) of the poetry, the final phases of his life, when Ramalinga Swamigal lived at Karuṅkuḻi and Vadalur/Mēṭṭukuppam. The selection of verses, miniscule as it is in a corpus consisting of a total of 5,816 verses, might be considered completely arbitrary and so it is in the light of the entire corpus, but it can be legitimately seen as a representative sample of the incessant themes of the last two books.[61]

Ramalingar speaks of how God revealed himself to him by showing him the "state of deathlessness"[62] and also came and exchanged his God's own body and life-breath with that of Ramalingar's, "Taking, out of love for me, myself, my things and life-breath the Lord gave solely to me, joyfully, his life-breath, his body and his things".[63] This theme of exchanging bodies and life with God gets to be repeated in several other verses of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*.[64] Innumerable verses speaking of the acquiring of a body of light (*oḷi vaṭivam*),[65] an indestructible form (*aḻiyā vaṭivam/uruvam*),[66] utterly pure (*vimala*),[67] a divine form (*tiruvuruvam*),[68] and a golden body or form (*poṉ uṭampu/vaṭivam*) repeat themselves in the sixth *Tirumuṟai*.[69] Certain verses make it clear that the poetic persona has attained immortality, in the sense of deathlessness, "I lost the fear of death, I who have been graciously given, along with power, the boon of non-dying".[70] A verse late in Book 6 sums up several of these themes:

> Sleep, sorrow, fear, affliction – these have vanished, vanished from me. Despondency, sins, *māyā* and darkness – these have burnt, disappeared, completely. Prosperity, grace, intelligence, true love, undecaying body, the true, blissful ardour have come upon me. Worldlings! Know the truth of these words.[71]

Thus, the poetry. The most detailed exposition of the three kinds of bodies referred to in various verses is given in random prose jottings of remarks on various theological issues attributed to Ramalingar and noted down by his friends and devotees.[72] In this, Ramalingar explains the three bodies to be the Golden (*suvaṇṇa*), the Om (*piraṇava*), and the Knowledge (*ñāṉa*) and makes it clear that they are being listed in ascending superiority, with the ascent from the Golden to the Knowledge Body. Once one attains the Knowledge Body one also attains, among other

wondrous facilities, complete pervasiveness (*viyāpakatvam*), the capacity to be visible and invisible at will, and a state of having transcended time (*kālātītam*).[73]

What Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār did not mention in his account of the disappearance is the paradigm of the three bodies which Ramalingar most approximated to and which seemed to have influenced his own vision of what was happening to his own body in the poetic corpus. This was the paradigm put forward in the Vīraśaiva doctrines of Kumāratēvar and, as I have said earlier, in his soteriological text, the *Cuttacātakam*. The core soteriological belief of the *Cuttacātakam* is that true living liberation (*jīvammukti*) is signified by bodily immortality. This happens in three stages as the body moves from its gross body (*sthūla deha*) to its body of the sacred syllable (*praṇava deha*) to the final body called the body of grace where it, in the pure and final stage (*śuddhāvasthā*), becomes the body of grace (*aruḷtēkam*).[74] In Ramalingar there is a slight alteration of this scheme, as we saw in the previous chapter, with the first stage related to acquiring a pure or golden body (*śuddha* or *suvaṇa* deha) and the final body, which Kumāratēvar called the "body of grace" (*aruḷtēkam*) spoken of in Ramalingar as the "body of wisdom" (*ñāṉatēkam*). Further, Ramalingar departs radically from Kumāratēvar in linking such bodily transformation directly to the practice of compassion, as I will show in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, the overall understanding of bodily transformation from matter to a subtle state remains the same as in Kumāratēvar.

The hagiographies, thus, faithfully mirror the poetry. In order to understand what the hagiographies mean when they say that Ramalinga Swamigal is a *Cittar* – we need to step outside this mutually reinforcing paradigm and look to external genealogies of the term *Cittar*.

Siddha Metamorphosis

In her erudite and engaging work on the genealogy of the concept of metamorphosis in Western literature, Marina Warner (2002) distinguishes between two different lineages of the concept – one Greek, the other Judaeo-Christian. The former, epitomized in the work of Ovid, she sees as celebrating metamorphosis as a principle of organic vitality, as an acceptance of the protean nature of life and the fluid boundaries between animals, plants, and humans. The other, the Judaeo-Christian, she sees as signifying the opposite. To paraphrase her in the Judaeo-Christian tradition metamorphosis signifies instability, monstrosity, a theological principle that separates the evil from the good, a realm of hybrids and mutants. Clearly, in the context of these typologies the pan-Indian genealogies of religious metamorphoses fall into patterns more like the Ovidian one, proliferating with a plethora of beings "cyborg-like",[75] human-animal or human-divine. Into this last category also fall the *Siddha*s – those beings with whom Ramalinga Swamigal is identified with.

The genealogy of the term *Siddha* is a long one, in the pan-Indian context. White in his 1996 book, *The Alchemical Body*, traces the historical evolution of the notion of *Siddha*s as semi-divine beings, not historical figures, "but rather demi-gods and intermediaries between the human and the divine".[76] Figures common to several South Asian religious traditions, including the Buddhist and the Jain, the early traditions come to acquire, he suggests, a coherent and systematic soteriology and flourish in the medieval period, between the 11th and 15th centuries. This soteriology depends on a variety of yogic and alchemical techniques to reverse the ageing process and transform the physical body into that of a golden and adamantine one. By the medieval period one could speak of a pan-Indian *Siddha* tradition in the following terms:

> As a common noun, *siddha* means "realized, perfected one", a term generally applied to a practitioner *(sādhaka, sādhu)*, who through his practice *(sādhana)* realized his dual goal of superhuman powers (*siddhi*s, "realizations", "perfections") and bodily immortality (*jīvanmukti*). As a proper noun, *Siddha* becomes a broad sectarian appellation, applying to devotees of Śiva in the Deccan (*Māheśvara Siddha*s), alchemists in Tamil Nadu (*Sittar*s) [etc.].[77]

In his later work, White (2009) refers to also some of the common tropes that are to be found in narratives – in folk as much as in elite traditions – regarding *Siddha*s, also commonly called *Yogi*s/*Jogi*s. These include particularly the ability to stretch the limits of their own physical body to the extent of temporarily abandoning it in order to inhabit the bodies of others[78] and the ability to disappear and reappear at will.[79] These indeed are the tropes to be found both in the poetry and the hagiographies of Ramalinga Swamigal. At the same time, the term *Siddha* has also a shifting trajectory in specific regional traditions. When the Ramalingar hagiographies state that he is a *Siddha*, they also mean something fairly regionally specific about the term.

While the Tamil *Siddha/Cittar*[80] tradition is theoretically linked to the pan-Indian one and owes a great deal of its yogic practices and soteriological goals to traditions that did not originate in South India, its textual and social trajectory has been specific to regional religious developments. As far as the Tamil *Cittar* tradition is concerned there are two fundamental problems which scholars are confronted with when attempting to study it, which also accounts for the astonishingly scant serious scholarship on it till date.[81] One is an issue of authorship and chronology that I will deal with later. The second is an issue of definition regarding which group or groups constitute the Tamil *Cittar*s. Kamil Zvelebil (1973:17–18) addresses this issue in his *Introduction*, proposing, tentatively, three groupings:

1) A group of alchemists and physicians, who have composed in Tamil a vast number of alchemic and medical treatises both in verse and prose, and who belonged to what is termed . . . "Siddha medicine".

2) A group of thinkers and poets who have composed a large . . . number of stanzas in Tamil, more or less based on tantric Yoga in outlook and religious philosophy and practice between roughly the 10 and 15th centuries A.D.; for example, Tirumūlar and his *Tirumantiram* or Civavākkiyar and his *Pāṭal*.
3) A few "Siddha-like" Poets who have been "appended" to the Siddha school by posterior generations, or who called themselves *cittar* without properly belonging to the esoteric group itself: e.g. Tāyumāṉavar (18th century).

Basing himself on this categorization of Zvelebil's, Venkatraman (1990:74–75) gives us the following divisions:

1) The *Sanmārga Siddhas* (10th–11th centuries) comprising almost exclusively of Tirumūlar and a certain Pōka Tēvar, mentioned in verse 102 of the *Tirumantiram*. The *Tirumantiram*, attributed to Tirumūlar is the earliest text in Tamil to mention the *Siddha*s and extensively about the eightfold *siddhi*s.[82] The text is written in a partly esoteric Tamil and some of its doctrines appear to be characteristic of late Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, (*Tirumantiram* is appended to the sacred canon of Tamil Śaivite *bhakti*, it is the tenth book of the *Tirumuṟai*), all of which makes an early date for the text as it currently exists highly unlikely.[83] At the same time, Tirumūlar is also considered a *Cittar*, though the *Tirumantiram* precedes, by several centuries, the earliest poetic *Siddha* writings.
2) The *Jñāna Siddhas* (14th–17th centuries): composers of philosophical treatises along the lines of pan-Indian yogic literature. The literature has been extremely popular in oral circulation for a long time because of the simple diction and humanistic sentiments. This group includes those such as Civavākkiyar, Pattirakiriyār, Paṭṭiṉattār, Pāmpāṭṭicittar, Akappēycittar. Most of their writings are included in the by now canonical work, the *Periyañāṉakkōvai*.
3) The *Kāya-Siddha*s (16th–20th century): composers of works on medicine, alchemy, magic, and yoga. Includes those such as Bhōkar,[84] Pulippāṉi, Koṅkaṇar, Kōrakkar, etc.

In Venkatraman's erudite analysis of the corpus of *Siddha* literature – the only such study of its kind to emerge in recent decades – there is a clear demarcation between the foci and soteriology of the *Jñānasiddha*s and the *Kāyasiddha*s with the *Tirumantiram* standing for a third and unique tradition. He suggests that the *Jñānasiddha*s generally favour the worship of God within the heart. Their terms for this divine indweller include *Śivam*, just as the state of merging with the divine in a non-dual bliss is also called *Śivam*. External ritual, caste, brahminism, scriptural authority – all tend to be mocked and relativized. The body is denigrated as the source of lust, decay, and impermanence. In contrast, the *Kāyasiddha* texts foreground

the worship of the Goddess, are grounded in *Kuṇḍalīnī* yoga, alchemy, and magic, and aim at bodily immortality.[85] Finally, to Zvelebil's fourth group Venkatraman[86] adds *Sufi-Siddha*s such as Pīr Muhammad and Kuṇaṅkuṭi Mastāṉ Cāyipu (both 19th century) and Ramalinga Swamigal.

In both Zvelebil's and Venkatraman's categorization there is one figure whose theology is identified as standing at the cusp of the pre-modern *Siddha* literature and the modern (late-19th–early 20th century) one – this figure is Tāyumāṉavar.

The Return of Tāyumāṉavar

Tāyumāṉavar as the extraordinary poet of the 17th or 18th century merits a monograph of his own.[87] Here, I confine myself to certain aspects of his biography and poetry that enabled the Ramalingar hagiographers to trace a direct line of descent from him to Ramalinga Swamigal. This descent is even literal: Ramalinga Swamigal is seen as the incarnation of Tāyumāṉavar. This motif is first introduced by Murukatāca or Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ (1839–1898), a Śaivite religious poet who was a contemporary of Ramalingar and an ardent Murukaṉ devotee, who had modelled his own poetic corpus consciously along the lines of another great pre-modern poet-saint Aruṇakirināthar (ca. 15th–16th century).[88] Among Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ's contribution to the extension of the Śaivite literary canon into colonial modernity was his compendium of poets called *Pulavar purāṇam*, which was first brought out in print in 1901.[89] In *Pulavar purāṇam* Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ first mooted the idea that Ramalinga Swamigal was none other than Tāyumāṉavar in his former life, a view that comes to be reflected in *The Notes* and, finally, is emphatically endorsed by Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's 1976 biography.[90] Drawing a literary relationship between the two figures, separated by a century or so, was no arbitrary decision. Instead, it must have arisen from the elective affinity between their works – from Ramalinga Swamigal's conscious modelling of his aspects of theology on that of Tāyumāṉavar's. This theology might be characterized as locating itself in the context of several centuries of interaction between Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, Vīraśaiva, and Siddha textual traditions in the Tamil country, foregrounding agnostic and blissful realization of an experiential unity with the Godhead, usually characterized as light, as *Civam*. Indeed, Tāyumāṉavar himself constantly foregrounded the equality, *camaracam* (<*samarasa*), of the Vēdānta, the Upaniṣadic corpus, and the Siddhānta, the Śaivāgamas, seeing both as equally authoritative.[91] In a seminal poem, titled *The Community of Cittars (Cittarkaṇam)*, Tāyumāṉavar identified the *Cittar*s as those who were located in the soteriological space where the two religious traditions met.[92] This was a motif consciously picked up by Ramalinga Swamigal in his own understanding of what made him a *Siddha* and is reiterated many times in the *Tiruvaruṭpā* poetic corpus. The second affinity relates to poetic sensibility. An example from the Tāyumāṉavar's aforementioned poem, *The Community*

of Cittars, would best illustrate what is meant here. In it, speaking of his own nature that stands as an obstacle to liberation, the poet says:

> Only the illiterate are good, are good.
> Learned, yet witless, what I can say about my *karma*?
> What can I say about my wits?
> If good people speak of the conduct of solitary wisdom,
> I would stand firm on the importance of action.
> If a person were to establish action,
> that old wisdom I would declare important.
> When a person learned in Sanskrit comes,
> I would partake as if the discussion were in Tamil.
> Should a learned Tamil scholar come,
> I would utter, thus, a few Sanskrit sentences.
> Can such learning,
> that aims to dazzle, winning over none,
> confer liberation?[93]

There is in this verse, as in a great deal of Tāyumāṉavar's poetry, an interiority, an ironical look at the world of religious scholarship, its specializations and pomposities, the complicated relationship of Tamil and Sanskrit, the weariness, a yearning for a religious space that transcends all this – that was new in Tamil Śaivite religious literature, when it appeared. Shulman (1991:64) sums this up well when he points to the difference the conventionalized idiom of the I-persona in pre-Tāyumāṉavar *bhakti* poetry, often to be seen in the trope of a declaration of inadequacy, sinfulness, etc., followed by declarations of self-surrender to God and the new idiom in Tāyumāṉavar. He says:

> Somewhat unexpectedly, this poet also reveals a remarkably integrated, wider selfhood than the conventionally recalcitrant, inherently false antithesis to ultimacy we have just seen. Everyday consciousness may be a repository of falsehood, almost by definition; but this does not prevent the poet from giving voice to 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. Others have also noted an "autobiographical" emphasis in this poet; perhaps we could restate this as the exploration of subtly shifting, highly personal responses to the contingencies of consciousness and evolving inner experience. This is something new, a poet who speaks, in a confessional mode, with sometimes clashing voices-all equally his own, of a nuanced, fluctuating inner world.

This is a new poetic diction, regardless of how one chooses to interpret it. While I would be reluctant to bring to bear upon it the weight of a discussion

on notions of selfhood and individuality in the pre-modern period, one can at the very least say that the poet is committed here to a mode of sincerity and to an aesthetics of the personal that marks a departure from his predecessors in the literary and religious tradition. It is this literary and religious mode that comes to have a tremendous influence both on Ramalinga Swamigal's best poetry and those who come after him, such as Subramania Bharatiyar (Cuppiramaṇiya Pāratiyār, 1882–1921). It is also this mode of sincerity and the aesthetics of the personal that made the poetry both of Tāyumāṉavar as well as Ramalingar enjoy such a resonance in popular culture in their aftermath.[94]

Hagiographies, Endings, and Conclusions

Finally, we need to look at only the context within which the hagiographies arose – for that matter the ubiquitous context for narrating the holy life of a saint who was also a poet in pre-modern Tamil literature – to understand the nature of the interdependence, where the one genre confirms the other. For the earliest hagiographies arise at the moment of compilation of the poetic corpus itself. The compilation followed a certain logic – inasmuch as the poetic corpus was seen as an autobiographical account, a poetic narration in the first person of the religious journey of the saint, life stories were meant to be no more and no less than an annotation, an explanatory note, to the perceived autobiographical narrative. They were meant to complement and illuminate the poetry, to be faithful to its tropes, and give it a discernable plot that culminated in a soteriological goal.[95] And they were to give us some further biographical details about the saint in the process. So, hagiography and poetic autobiography are seen to be intimately intertwined in the canonization of a poetic corpus and neither were to be seen in this context as genres that conformed to literary conventions but rather as utterly transparent factual, historically located accounts of a saint's words and his life.

Then there is the narrative pattern of two endings. The one is the ending that is repeatedly proposed as the one which Ramalinga Swamigal himself prophesied which might be called the "millennial/millenarial". Using the typology of such millenarial beliefs/movements first proposed by Cohen (1962), Collins (1998:411–412) expands upon its features usefully, enabling us to employ this typology when considering the endings of the hagiographies. Ramalingar promises a return, one in which he will come back with enhanced, extraordinary powers, along with the God of Light, to work new miracles and to raise the dead. This account is most fully developed in *The Notes*. Redolent as it is with the idea of a coming utopia that is collective, terrestrial in the sense of to be realized on this earth and total, in that it would utterly transform life on earth, being a new dispensation – these features give an ending to the hagiographies that is full of promise and even, while open-ended, provide a soteriological closure. At the same time, there is another narrative ending that reconfigures the time of the narratives.[96]

This is the narrative of "*Siddha*-transcendentalism" – to adapt a phrase of Collins – which is both atemporal and non-material. From this perspective Ramalinga Swamigal was and is always outside time and corporeality, always transcendent, and only inserted into history, into a temporal field, to validate a divine plan. He can and does move in and out of it. In other words, he is made into an *avatāra* of some kind. The second sort of narrative ending, from this perspective, is a theophany that makes transparent this transcendentalism and also provides a sense of closure.

We thus see that the earliest as well as the most "orthodox" hagiographies of Ramalinga Swamigal, the ones that emerged within the context of his inner circle, among those who knew him or of him at close hand, were unanimous in seeing him as part of a long tradition of Śaivite poet-saints. One early convention was to relate him directly to the very first trio of poet-saints whose poetic corpus formed the core of the Śaivite *Tirumuṟai*: the *Tēvāram*. In this a parallel that was considered felicitous was one between Ramalinga Swamigal and Tiruñāṉacampantar – both child prodigies, both absorbed into God, in the form of light. The link to Tiruñāṉacampantar was not just on the basis of a mimesis of hagiographical *topoi* but also of a link that Ramalinga Swamigal reinforced through other literary signals in his life. Thus, in 1851, Ramalinga Swamigal had written the introductory praise-poem to an unusual 15th-century text and published it, causing it to become widely popular in the 19th century. This work occupied a controversial position among the orthodox Śaiva Siddhāntins, being considered an "*aikyavāda*", "heterodox" text at least by some.[97] The work was *Absorption into the Final Stage* (*Oḷiviloṭukkam*), whose author was Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal (ca. mid-14th–mid-15th centuries). A fascinating and controversial figure, the biographical information available regarding Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal states that he was first a disciple of Campanta Muṉivar who belonged to the prestigious, orthodox, Śaivasiddhānta lineage of Meykaṇṭār himself. While still adhering to this lineage he was known by the name of Campanta Caraṇālayar. At some point he seems to have abandoned his allegiance to his teacher and founded his own teacher–disciple lineage on the basis that he had received direct initiation from Tiruñāṉacampantar himself. He then called himself – or came to be called – "*The Gracious Benefactor with the Eye [of Wisdom]*" (*Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal*). His main work was the aforementioned *Oḷiviloṭukkam*. It has been suggested that this work was relatively unknown to a wider Śaiva public till Ramalinga Swamigal wrote the introductory praise-poem to it and published it in 1851. It then had a long afterlife, being reproduced as popular *gujili* literature in the 19th century and early 20th century and remains in print, with new editions being brought out even today.[98] In taking this work out of a small circle of connoisseurs who had long appreciated its simple diction, usage of popular folk idiom and beauty, to a wider public Ramalingar aligned himself to Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's lineage, one which claimed direct initiation from Tiruñāṉacampantar himself. The meaning of such direct initiation is highly significant: it signals, at least from

a mid-19th-century perspective, that one need not be legitimized by one of the orthodox Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s that derived their authority from a historically accepted link directly to the authors of the Śaivasiddhānta *śāstra*s and via them to Śiva himself.[99] One may, as a charismatic figure, found one's own lineage through direct, divinely bestowed initiation. That which Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal was assumed to have done three to four centuries earlier, Ramalinga Swamigal did in the 19th century, speaking not just of his religious authority but of a new religion which involved merging with the God of Light, and he claimed the same links to Tiruñāṉacampantar. It is not too much to speculate that Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār bestowed the name Vaḷḷal on Ramalinga Swamigal in order to draw fairly explicit attention to the biographical and intellectual affinities between the two men. An acute awareness of all these connections, at an implicit level, pervades the early hagiographies – hence the persistent connections they draw between Ramalingar and Tiruñāṉacampantar. A slightly later interpretation linked him to Tāyumāṉavar. Both these interpretations were not arbitrary authorial decisions taken by the hagiographers but emerged from an understanding of Ramalinga Swamigal's own writings. Thus, a decisive element was when the poetry came to be compiled and structured in 1867 by Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. This first edition consisted of only the first four books of poetry, a corpus that might be considered almost paradigmatically Śaivite and *bhakti* oriented. This would and did reinforce the interpretation of Ramalinga Swamigal as a *nāyaṉār*-like figure, located in the same galaxy of poet-saints as those whose work comprised the Śaivite *Tirumuṟai*. The first complete edition of the poetic corpus was brought out in 1894, reflecting the religious shifts that marked off the fifth and sixth books from the others. These seemed to lay greater emphasis on Ramalinga Swamigal's *Siddha*-hood and placed him at a somewhat tangential relationship to orthodox Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and more in consonance, implicitly, with both the Tamil Vīraśaiva and *Cittar* traditions. This and his obvious indebtedness to the idiom of Tāyumāṉavar could be utilized within the hagiographical framework to show that, despite the uniqueness of his religious perceptions, he was still as embedded in the orthodox world, one, nevertheless, whose lineage was being reformulated to focus on a few other religious figures after the 14th century, such as Tāyumāṉavar. In an important sense the word that encoded a range of connotations regarding Ramalingar was the word *Cittar* – it enabled a classification of him both within and outside – within Śaivasiddhānta but tangential to orthodoxy, speaking for a more ecumenical version. The veneration of the *Cittar*s in colonial modernity, particularly in missionary accounts where they are seen as the "radicals" of Tamil religion for their caste critique, meant that Ramalingar the *Cittar* could be seen as both a figure tied to the pre-colonial past and one who heralded a utopian future.

In the final analysis, the earliest hagiographies, as the poet-saint himself and his works, are still embedded in discourse that is familiar to all – a

pre-modern discourse of Siddhāntic Śaivism. This was a discourse that negotiated deviations – new claims of charismatic authority, the pull towards monism – by expanding the space for their existence or re-enfolding them within an inclusivistic orthodoxy through some selective appropriation and denial. Such an enfolding was made possible because of the lack of one centralized authority and, instead, several centres or *ātiṉam*s. The mid-to-late 19th century was to shake this traditional world in many ways. Just as the traditional world of the *pulavar*s and their genres of literature were being subjected to new ideas of taste, appropriateness, or relevance, consigned to the status of anachronisms by the mid-20th century, this pre-modern world of Tamil Śaivasiddhānta *ātiṉam*s was rendered, if not anachronistic at least less powerful and just one of many in the public sphere, by the emergence of new voices that spoke for Tamil Śaivism in the context of the colonial encounter with Christianity, Tamil nationalism, and pan-Indian socio-religious reform. Some of these influential new voices could and did initiate discussions on the nature of what constitutes "tradition", religious authority, and who spoke for Śaivism, and they were damning in their historical verdict on Ramalinga Swamigal. In this they sometimes still sought the support and religious authority of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta ātīṉams to lend their views greater authority. Often libellous, scandalous, and damning these other accounts are classic debunking anti-hagiographies, attempting to set right what they claim to be a false record of holy achievements with historical facts. These kinds of writing were in circulation within and just in the aftermath of Ramalinga's own lifetime. Examining the most significant of these narratives, as I do later in Chapter 5, enables us to see the challenges to the hagiographical genre that colonial modernity, the rise of print culture, and the historicization of religious traditions represented.

Nevertheless, even while the majority of these earliest hagiographies seek to represent Ramalingar as the paradigmatic *bhakti* poet-saint, thus anchoring him staunchly within the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, or place him within a *Cittar* paradigm, they do so in a theologically partial way. Intent on establishing his ancient holiness and his direct connections to charismatic, earlier religious figures, it is not their concern to place him in relation to his immediate peers or show how his religious theology might in fact have been forged through his deep familiarity with specific works he had studied deeply. Indeed, to establish his scholarly credentials in any painstaking way would be directly inimical to the hagiographical tropes of his congenital wisdom. This elision of his intellectual history also comes to inform the modern hagiographies and biographies we will examine in subsequent chapters, albeit motivated by entirely different concerns relating to modernity and notions of how one must read an author. Nevertheless, taking a step back from this neglect becomes vital for us to understand how Ramalingar becomes a modern and Dravidian saint and how he escapes the fate to which other Śaivite religious figures of his time were consigned – that of irrelevance and anonymity. His posthumous fate is closely linked with what

is seen as his appeal to compassion. This appeal to compassion, in turn, is seen as what makes him quintessentially modern. Yet, the depth of this appeal cannot be properly gauged and has not been adequately understood in work on him thus far because of the neglect of a vital component of it – its long textual genealogy in Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Vīraśaivism. It is only by understanding this textual genealogy can we even begin to grasp his religious innovation and the radical newness of the old that lay at the kernel of Ramalingar's views on compassion and thus understand fully his religious vision. It is to this textual genealogy of compassion that the next two chapters are devoted.

Notes

1 For the recognition of hagiographies of medieval holy women as a form of "social history", see Bynum (1987). This has pioneered similar perspectives regarding the hagiographies of subaltern figures and is further explored in Chapter 5 of this book.
2 On the typologies of the lives of male versus female saints in South Asia as well as the distinction between the lives of high-caste and low-caste/outcaste saints, see Ramanujan (1982). Ramanujan has argued that female saints tend to invert the normative ideals of womanhood embodied in figures such as Sītā and Sāvitrī. Jackson (1991) in his study of the musician-saint Tyāgarāja proposes 12 recurrent motifs, found also in the lives of other South Indian musician saints. Lorenzen (1995) as also Smith (2000) and Pauwels (2010) discuss the *topoi* to be found in North Indian bhakti hagiographies while Snell (1996) speaks of a pan-Indian formulaic discourse.
3 Pauwels (2010:57).
4 This statement is given as an appendix in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:611–623).
5 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:611).
6 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:611). On historiography of "Aryanism" in the colonial period, see Bryant and Patton (2004) as well as Trautmann (1997, 2005).
7 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:611).
8 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:611).
9 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:613).
10 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:614).
11 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:614).
12 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:613).
13 Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, who was a Tamil Vēḷāḷa by caste, was at this time employed as the second Tamil Pandit at Presidency College, Madras.
14 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:614).
15 On the first pronouncements regarding *The Theosophical Society*, as made by Henry Steele Olcott, see Prothero (1996:49): The society, Olcott proclaimed, would provide a "neutral ground" on which scientists and people of faith could stand side by side.

> To the church it offers proof that the soul is immortal, at once final and irresistible; to science, those mathematical demonstrations of new forces and an unseen universe the lack of which has hitherto sent its votaries adrift in that current whose vortex sucks them into Infidelity, Darkness, and Despair.

16 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:614).
17 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:614).
18 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:615).

19 Prothero (1996:43).
20 Quoted in Johnson (1994:13–14).
21 Quoted in Hastings (1921:304).
22 Quoted in Prothero (1996:76).
23 Referring to this religious liberalism Prothero (1996:59) points to the "critical contradiction inherent in theosophy, which proclaimed as its chief dogma the unity of all religions yet clearly preferred some religions (the religions of Asia) over others (Christianity)".
24 Prothero (1996:77–78).
25 See Chapter 7 for the pre-modern trans-sectarian consensus between the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Tamil Vīraśaivism. Further, see also the same chapter for Kantacāmi Piḷḷai's active role in supporting Vīraśaiva monastic institutions such as the Ñāṉiyār maṭālayam at Tiruppātirippuliyūr/Kaṭalūr in the early decades of the 20th century.
26 See Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:i–viii) for biographical details regarding these two men.
27 His caste and parents are named in one verse (v. 4), and the names of those who patronized the publication of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* are given towards the end of the poem in verses 57–61.
28 For a detailed account of Vēlāyutaṉār's life, see Tirunākēcuvaraṉ, n.d. For a brief synopsis, see Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār (1912) as well as Iraviccantiraṉ (2016:36–44). For a list of the works he composed, see Veṅkaṭacāmi (1962:224).
29 The epithet *Aruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷal* with the word *pirakāca (<Skt: prakāśa)* permits this twofold meaning.
30 *TV, v. 28:*
taṉitturaitta irāmaliṅkat taṉimaṟai ātarittuiṉtār
iṉitta ***aruṭpirakāca vaḷḷal*** *eṉa iṉitētti*
aṉittam aṟṟār cila aṟavar antō eṉpōṉ maṟantu
maṉittaṉ eṉak koṇṭoḻintār malavāḻvil cila maṟavar.
31 *TV, v. 35:*
aḷavāta pēraṉpu corintaruḷai viḷaivittut
taḷavārum nakaikkayaṟkaṇ taiyaliṭaṅ koṇṭapirāṉ
vaḷamārum kaḻalmalarō iraṇṭaṟuttu vāḻvikkum
uḷavālē aruṭpā eṉṟorunāmam pūṇṭatuvē.
32 re. *TV,* v.6: *maṟai viḷaṅka ākamavāy maikaḷ viḷaṅkac caivaneṟit*
tuṟai viḷaṅka
In order that the Vedas might flourish, the truths of the [Śaiva] āgamas and the way of the Śaiva system flourish. . .
33 The canonical corpus of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta consists, first, of the twelve poetic compositions, collectively called the *Tirumuṟai.* Of these, the first seven texts, composed by those poet-saints considered the three first preceptors of the community, are collectively called the *Tēvāram.* The eighth book of the poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar contains the *Tiruvācakam* and the *Tirukkōvaiyār.* This is followed by three more books of poetic compositions, of which the tenth book is the *Tirumantiram,* and the twelfth is the 12th-century hagiography called the *Periyapurāṇam.* In addition, the canon includes the 14 *Meykaṇṭa Śāstra*s (or Śaivasiddhānta *Śāstra*s), which are the theological treatises of mainstream Tamil Śaivism. For a standard treatment of the texts of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, see Dhavamony (1971) and Siddhalingaiah (1979). Pechilis Prentiss (1999:134) sees the emergence of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta in the context of the compromises undergone by Sanskrit Śaivasiddhānta under the influence of Advaita Vedānta and the Muslim incursions of the 13th century.
34 The verse from the *Tiruvaruṭpā* that might be referred to here is the final verse of Book 4, which is also a complete poem in itself called *Aruḷviḷakka Mālai* and contains this word.

35 *TV, v.44:*
paṇṇīrmac cuvaimutirnta tiruppaṉuval aruṭpayaṉait
taṇṇīreṉ ṟoruveṉpāc campantap pirāṉvaḻiyil
teṇṇīrtteṉ kūṭalvarum citamparamā muṉiterittāl
uṇṇīrmai oṉṟumilēṉ uraippatumōr pukaḻāmē

36 There is a third figure as well who is alluded to in this verse by the phrase, "the great ascetic of Chidambaram". This seems to have been one Chidambaram Swamigal, the religious head of the Madurai *ātīṉam*, said to emerge from the guruship of Tiruñāṉacampantar, who composed a poem in praise of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* called *Tiruvaruṭpā makimai* in which he refers to Ramalingar as "he who has the nature of having made a water lamp glow" (*taṇṇīr viḷakkeritta taṉmai*). On this, see Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:311).

37 See Dhavamony (1979:59) for a brief summary of the hagiography.

38 Re. *Periyapurāṇam,* verse 1899 in Jakannātaṉ (2007:15), where the reasons for the birth of Tiruñāṉacampantar are referred to:
vētaneṟi taḻaittōṅka mikucaivat tuṟaiviḷaṅka
pūtaparam paraipoliya. . . and compared with the aforementioned citation of *TV,* verse 7.

39 *Periyapurāṇam,* verses 1964–1967.

40 Words attributed to Ramalingar in Piruṅkimāṉakaram Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār's account of the disappearance. The 1896 edition of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār which contains this account (Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār, 1896:23–24) has some typos which have been corrected in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's extracts from this account in his 1971 hagiography. Hence, I use the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ version for this chapter, unless otherwise stated.

41 Ramalingar was called, at various stages of his life, Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai, Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ, Ramalinga Swami, etc.

42 *Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ tiruvuruvam maṟaintatu* in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:176–178): *iṅṅaṉamāka āṉantātīta nilaiyiliruntu catāṉanta cātaṉamuṟṟut tamatāpta naṉparkaḷait tiruvaruḷ nōkkāl nōkkik kaṭaikkaṉittu aṉparkāḷ! yām uṅkaḷaic cilakālam viṭṭup pirintirukkaveṇṇaṅkoṇṭuḷḷōm. catāṉanta camāti niṭṭai kūṭa niccaiyittuḷḷōm. eṉṉatu carīram ciṟitu kālattuḷ uṅkaḷ kaṇkaḷukkut tōṟṟātu maṟaintupōm. ikkāyattai uṅkaḷil yārālum, akkiṉiyiṟ ṟakikkavāvatu, maṇṇil camāti vaikkavāvatu kiṭṭātu. iṉi nāṟpattārāyira varuṭa kālam cittarāy amarntiruntu sakala cittikaḷum cittikkap peṟṟu ānantat tiruviḷaiyāṭṭil ayarntiruntu ataṟku mēl piraṇavatēkiyāki ñāṉacampanta kurutva nilaiyaip peṟuvōm eṉṉuṅ kuṟippai veḷiyiṭṭuc cuṭṭāmaṟ cuṭṭikāṭṭip piṉpu, cākkiramutaliyav aintavattaiyuṅ kaṭantu niṉru tiruvaruṭ kṛpā nōkkattiṟkut tammaiyuṇavākki muḻuvatum viḻuṅkappaṭṭavarāy tattuva muḻuvatum iccaivaḻip paṇṇi kēṭkap piravaṇamē tiruvuruvākac cakacavaruḻ piṟakka vaṭalūraiyaṭutta mēṭṭukuppak kirāmattil cittivaḷākat tirumāḷikaikku kaliyāptam 1874-il srīmuka varuśam tai mācam 19 nāḷ cukravāram puṉarpūca nakṣatiraṅ kūṭiya pūrvarāttiriyil ceyaṟkaiyuṭal iyaṟkaiyuṭalākat tirivupaṭuñ ciṉmāttira cakajacamātiyil acaivaṟa niṉṟu, tamatātmārtta caṟkuruvaic cintittu, tām amarntirunta avvaṟaiyai mūṭip pūṭṭikkoḷḷat tamataṉparkkuk kuṟippuṇarttip pūṭṭacceytu, tāmun tamatintiriyak katavai mūṭi mavuṉa niṭṭai kūṭi nittiyāṉantamuṟṟaṉar.*

ikkurunātar kaṭṭaḷaiyiṭṭa vaṇṇam ivar niṭṭai kūṭiya tiruvaṟai nāḷatu varaiyiṟ pūṭṭappaṭṭu apimāṉikaḷāl pēṇappaṭṭu varukiṉṟatu. ittirumāḷikaiyiṉ takṣiṉa mukappil srī citamparam irāmaliṅka piḷḷaiyeṉṉum piḷḷait tirunāmam pūṇṭa vaḷḷaṟ perumāṉ tōṉṟun tuṇaiyāy irunta kālattiṟ ṟāpittu vaitta cattiya ñāṉa tīpam eṉṉum ōr akaṇṭam iṉṟum viḷanki ōṅki varukiṉṟatu. intaccitkuṇap peruṅtakaiyār muṟ kuṟippiṭṭa vaṇṇam catāṉanta niṭṭai kūṭiya avvaṟaikkup pōyp pārkka atikāram uḷḷōr tiṟantu pārkkaiyil "iṉṟivvaṟaiyait tiṟantu pārppīrēl nāḷaikkoṉṟum irukkakkāṇīr" eṉṟiṭṭa kaṭṭaḷaiyiṉ vaṇṇam avvaṟai veṟumaiyāyc cutta veḷiyāyt tulaṅkukiṉṟatu.

43 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:595): *kaṭai virittōm koḷvārillai, kaṭṭiviṭṭōm. ippōtu inta uṭampil irukkiṟōm iṉi ellā uṭampilum pukuntukoḷvōm.*

44 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:111): *nāṉ uḷḷē pattup patiṉaintu tiṉam irukkappōkiṟēṉ. pārttu avanampikkaiyaṭaiyātīrkaḷ. orukāl parka nērntu pārttāl yārukkum tōṉṟātu. veṟu viṭākattāṉ irukkum paṭi āṇṭavar ceyvippār. eṉṉaik kāṭṭikkoṭār.*

It must be noted that even while Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ does not include this long passage of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār in his hagiography he does include it in his account of the disappearance that came out in 1976, the same year that the second edition of the hagiography was printed. The discrepancy can be explained by the fact of Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's own reluctance, expressed explicitly in the appendix to his hagiography, to consider the possibility of Ramalinga Swamigal's return. Seeing Ramalingar as in the direct lineage of the great poet-saints of antiquity who merged with the divine and did not return, he concludes his observations by saying that there is no question of Ramalinga Swamigal returning and that any such speculation is futile (Ūraṉ Āṭikaḷ, 1976b:643).

45 See the discussion of the soteriology of the ca. 15th-century Vīraśaiva text, the *Śivayogapradīpikā*, in Powell (2017:4): The soteriological goal of its yoga system, like other medieval Yogaśāstras, is the attainment of the stone-like supra-mental state of *samādhi* (also known as *sahajā, unmanī,* or *amanska*), described by the author in Vedāntic terms as the oneness of the individual (*jīvātman*) and the supreme soul (*paramātman*) (*ŚYP* 3.48)

46 Depending on the context the word *Citti* (< Sanskrit *Siddhi)* needs to be translated either as "power/s" or as "liberation" in this passage.

47 *Muttivaipavam* in Ūraṉ Aṟikaḷ (1976:178–179): *ikhtaṉrō tiruvaruṭ pirakāca vaḷḷalār tām peṟṟa tiruvaruṭ kirupā nōkkattaruṭpēṟu. itu uṇmaiyāṉa muktinilaiyiṉṉateṉpatuṇartti ṟṟu. eṅṅaṉameṉṉiṉ, tēkam piṇaviyalāki immaṇṇilē viḷātu mūvakaic cittiyuḷ ōr vakaic citti peṟṟu niṟpatē muṭivāṉa muttinilaiyeṉṟavārāyiṟṟu. iṉi muttiyilēyun tēkam peṟum mūvakaic cittiyāvaṉa, uruvacitti, aruvacitti, uruvaruvacitti eṉpaṉavām. ituvē nam aruṭperuñcelvarkaḷ aṭainta perum pēṟāy kāṇka. evvāṟeṉiṉ emmaiyāḷuṭaiya nampikaḷākiya cuntaramūrtti cuvāmikaḷum cēramāṉ perumāṉ ṉāyaṉārum tirumāṉiyōṭun tirukkailaikkuc ceṉṟatu pōlvaṉa uruvac cittiyām. avai cuttatēkam eṉavum, cuvaṇatēkam eṉavum, piraṇavatēkam eṉavum vaḷaṅkuvar mēlōr. aruvac cittiyāvatu, emmaiyāḷuṭaiya māṇikkavācaka cuvāmikaḷ tirumēṉi ciṟcapaiyilē paramākācamākak kalantu niṉṟatu. uruvaruvac cittiyāvatu, emmaiyāḷuṭaiya piḷḷaiyār mutaliyōrkaḷ cōtiyiṟ kalantatum, āṇṭavaracukaḷ civaliṅkattuṭ kalantatum pōlvaṉavumām. piṉṉum tiruveṅkāṭṭaṭikaḷ, ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ, mutaliya pala periyōrkaḷum tammuṭalaic civaliṅkamāka niṟuttiyatum ituppaṟṟiyēyeṉka. iṅṅaṉamē cakala citti vallārāṉa ittiruvaruṭ pirakāca vaḷḷalār pēṟṟuṅ iteṉṟu kāṇka.*

48 On Ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ and his writings, see Chapter 3.

49 For an account of Ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ's eventual departure from the world, see Ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ (1904).

50 See Lorenzen (1995) on this trope in the hagiographies of North Indian *nirguṇī* saints and Werth [1998]2001 for this motif in the Sufi cults of Pakistan. See Florida (1995) for the vanishing Islamic saints of Indonesia. See Dobe (2015) for the disappearance of both Rāma Tīrtha (1873–1906) and Sundar Singh (1889–1929) and the hagiographical topoi relating to this.

51 In his account of these three *cittis* Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:572) makes it clear that he sees Ramalinga Swamigal as having attained the formless *citti,* thus approximating Māṇikkavācakar.

52 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:3).

53 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:4–6).

54 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:6–38).

55 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:52): *tiruvaruṭpirakāca vaḷḷalār* ***tirukkāppiṭṭuk koḷvataṟkuc*** *cila nāḷaikku muṉ tamatu aṉparkaḷai nōkki, "nammōṭu kūṭip paḷakiyiruntavarkaḷaiyum piṉ kēḷviyāl virumbukiṉṟavarkaḷaiyum kaiviṭa māṭṭōm. āṇai, āṇai", eṉṟu uṟuti kūṟiyaruḷiṉār.*

56 A *ghaṭikā* (Sanskrit) being the same as the Tamil *nāḻikai* and referring to a time unit of 24 minutes that constitutes the traditional single unit of measurement.

57 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:54).
58 Murugesa Mudaliar (1972:4).
59 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:55–57). The disappearance and reappearance of Ramalinga Swamigal is also narrated in a biographical note, printed as the preface to an edition of the *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval*. This note was composed by E. Ṣaṇmuka Piḷḷai and he writes that Vaḷḷalār, ever since his disappearance, currently appears as a visible, protective figure for those who are mature souls and as an invisible help to others.

Ṣaṇmuka Piḷḷai (1891:8): *inta meyñāṉa cittiyanupavap perumāṉ taṟkālam pakkuva āṉmākaḷukkuttōṉṟun tuṇaiyāyum maṟṟaiyarukkut tōṉṟāt tuṇaiyāyum tiruvaruḷ ulakavatikāram celuttik koṇṭirukkiṟār.*

60 The citation references can be understood as follows. The book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* is followed by the song number and the number of the individual verse in the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition.

Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.40.3896.ll.3): *koṇṭēṉ aḻiyāt tiruvuruvam. . .*

61 The poetic corpus of *the Tiruvaruṭpā* consists of 5,814 verses of which the verse division, in the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition is as follows: Books 1–4: 3,028 verses of traditionally anchored Śaivite devotional poetry possibly composed in the period when his main residence was Madras; Book 5 consisting of 237 verses composed between the period 1858 and 1867, when he resided mainly at Karuṅkuḻi and, finally, Book 6 consisting of 2,551 poems composed in the last seven years of his life, 1867–1874 – when he resided in Vadalur and Mēṭṭukuppam.

62 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:5.1.3038.ll.6): *cākānilai kāṭṭi*
63 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.87.4672.lls.1–4):
eṉṉaiyum eṉ poruḷaiyum eṉ āviyaiyum
tāṉ koṇṭiṅkeṉpāl aṉpāl
taṉṉaiyum taṉ poruḷaiyum taṉ āviyaiyum
kaḷittaḷitta talaivaṉ taṉṉai
64 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.32.3802; 87.4672; 129.5522; 141.5704, etc).
65 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.94.4745.lls.3–4):
uṟṟēṉ ekkālamum cākāmal ōṅkum ***oḷivaṭivam***
peṟṟēṉ uyarnilaip peṟṟēṉ

See also 6.38.3870 for the same theme.

66 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.40.3900.lls.1–2):
kaṇṭēṉ kaḷittēṉ karuṇait tiru amutam
uṇṭēṉ ***aḻiyā uram*** *peṟṟēṉ*

See also 6.38.3867 and 40.3896.

67 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.49.4013.lls.1–4):
maruḷ nēṟi cēr ***malavuṭampai aḻiyāta vimala***
vaṭivākki *ellāñ cey valla cittām poruḷait*
taruṇam atu terinteṉakkut tāṉē vantaḷitta
tayānitiyē
68 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.87.4671.ll.3): *immaiyil eṉtaṉṉak aḻiyāt* ***tiruvaṭivam*** *tantāṉai*
69 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.38.3866.ll.3): *cittiyelām pōtittuṭampaiyum poṉṉuṭampākki*

See also 6.57.4096, 4150; 101.4832, 4833; 128.5482, etc.

70 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.40.4731.ll.3–4):
vayattoṭu ***cākā varamum eṉ taṉakkē***
vaḻaṅkiṭap peṟṟanāṉ *maraṇa payattai viṭṭoḻittēṉ*

See also 6.107.4903 on the same theme.

71 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:6.5455.lls.1–8):
tūkkamum tuyarum accamum iṭarum
tolaintaṉa tolaiṉtana eṉaiviṭṭ-
ēkkamum viṉaiyum māyaiyum iruḷum
erintaṉa oḻintaṉa muḻutum
ākkamum aruḷum aṟivum mey aṉpum
aḻivurā uṭampum mey iṉpa

ūkkamum eṉṉaiyē uṟṟaṉa ulakīr
uṇmai ivvācakam uṇarmiṉ

72 Pālakiruṣṇap Piḷḷai, Ā (1959c:61–104).
73 Pākiruṣṇap Piḷḷai, Ā (1959c:93).
74 See, for instance, the summary of this doctrine of the three bodies in verse 22 of the *Cuttacātakam*:
viṉaiyiṉil eṭutta ivvuṭaṉ mēlum viṉai uḷateṉil iṅkē akalum
viṉai ilateṉil iṅkivvuṭaṟāṉē viṉai aṟum ōr mayamāki
viṉai uḷavuṭal pōṟṟa māttiramāy viḷaṅkiyē ventuṟu puripōl
viṉaiyilāp paramamuttiyil veḷiyāy vimala nallaruḷatāy viṭumē.
75 On the cyborg, see Haraway (1991). On the *yogi* as cyborg, see Alter (2004). On the animal-human equation in classical Hindu thought, see Doniger (2011).
76 White (1996:3).
77 White (1996:2).
78 White (2009:161–166).
79 White (2009:248–253).
80 Venkataraman (1990:2–3) points out, rightly, that, in the absence of a separate letter for aspirated consonants in Tamil, the word *Cittar* in Tamil can stand both for the Sanskrit *Siddha* and derivates of *Cit* meaning consciousness. It is in the latter sense, he suggests, that the word *Cittar* is used in the *Tēvāram* and not to mean the *Siddha/Cittar* traditions.
81 For a summary of the handful of scholarly works in English, of which the most substantial is that of Venkatraman (1990), see Little (2006). There exists, as Little (2006:22) shows, a vast number of popular Tamil reproductions and accounts of the lives and poetic corpus that grows exponentially each year.
82 *Tirumūlar Tirumantiram (n.d.)*, *mūṉṟām tantiram, aṭṭamācitti,* pp. 710–779.
83 Goodall (1998:xxxvii–xxxix) has succinctly summed up the arguments on the dating of Tirumūlar:

> Scholars of Tamil generally place Tirumūlar earlier than seems plausible given the syncretistic content of the *Tirumantiram* (see particularly *Tantra 4*, which embraces even Tripurasundarī and the cult of the Śrīcakra) . . . . The grounds for placing Tirumūlar early (see Vaiyapuri Pillai, 1988:78, footnote 1) appear to be that the eight-century poet Cuntarar venerates a certain Tirumūlaṉ and the much later hagiographer Cēkkiḻar identifies this Tirumūlaṉ with the Mūlaṉ who claims authorship of the *Tirumantiram* (stanza 68). Vaiyapuripillai suggests that the *Tirumantiram* was probably written in the first quarter of the eight century AD (1988:77–78); . . . The fifth of the nine *mantirams* of Tirumūlar's *Tirumantiram,* entitled *Cuttacaivam* deals principally with the four paths of *jñāna, yoga, kriyā,* and *caryā,* and we find represented there most of the views of the four characteristic exclusively of the late South Indian Śaiva Siddhânta . . . there are other features of Tirumūlar's work which are also otherwise found only in the works of late South Indian neo-Siddhāntikas, notably the emphasis on the role of devotion and the (often reiterated) preeminence of Nandin, the transmitter of all knowledge.

84 It is in the scholarly study of the *Siddha* figures relating to this category and on *Siddha* medicine in the Tamil region that some of the most interesting scholarship has emerged in recent times. See Hausman (1996), Little (2006), and Weiss (2009).
85 Venkatraman (1990:76–165).
86 Venkatraman (1996:10).
87 Manninezhath (1993:5) arrives at the dates of 1602–1662 on the basis of tracing the religious lineage of the Maunaguru *ātīṉam* that Tāyumāṉavar was said to belong to, on the basis of manuscripts found in the records of the Dharmapuram *ātīṉam.* Zvelebil (1995:656) summarizes the conflicting evidence that leaves undecided whether it could be the 17th or 18th century. Shulman (1991)

prefers to see Tāyumāṉavar's poetic sensibility as characteristic of the new ethos and notions of selfhood emerging in 18th-century Nāyaka-era Tamil Nadu.

88 For a short literary biography of Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ, see Zvelebil (1995: 651–652).

89 On the *Pulavar purāṇam,* see Subramania Aiyar (1969:109–110).

90 *Pulavar purāṇam, Kaṇkaṇtapulavar carukkam, vs.21:*
taṇṭamiḻ vaṭalūrāṉ muṉṟāyumāṉavaṉēyeṉṟu
maṇṭarūr malarkoṇṭuṟṟa vañcuka maṭiyēṉeṉṟum
viṇṭatēvoruvaṉuḷḷāṉ veṟum poyāṉ viḷampilēṉ meyt-
toṇṭartāṭṭukaḷumāyāc cūriyātiyaruñcāṉṟē.
See also Kantacāmip Piḷḷai (1970:50) and Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:635–637).

91 See Manninezhath (1993).

92 Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai ([1937]2010:149–162): the last two lines of each verse of this ten-verse poem constitute a refrain which goes: *O Wise Community of Cittars who have obtained the good space of equality of the Vēdānta and Siddhānta!*
Vētānta cittānta camaraca naṉnilai peṟṟa
vittakac cittar kaṇamē.
For a more detailed discussion of *camaracam* in Tāyumāṉavar, see Chapter 8.

93 Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai ([1937]2010:161).
kallāta pērkaḷē nallavarkaḷ nallavarkaḷ
kaṟṟum aṟivillātaveṉ
karmattai yeṉ collukēṉ matiyaiy eṉ collukēṉ
kaivalya ñāṉanīti
nallōr uraikkilō karmamukkiyameṉṟu
nāṭṭuvēṉ karmam oruvaṉ
nāṭṭiṉālō paḷayañāṉam mukkiyameṉṟu
naviluvēṉ vaṭamoḻiyilē
vallāṉ oruttaṉ varavun trāviṭattilē
vantatā vivakarippēṉ
vallatamiḻaṟiñar variṉ aṅṅaṉē vaṭamoḻiyiṉ
vacaṉaṅkaḷ ciṟitu pukalvēṉ
vellāmal evaraiyum maruṭṭiviṭa vakaivanta
vittaiyeṉ mutti tarumō

94 In his autobiography U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar (1950) speaks of how the children in his village would wander around singing the songs of Tāyumāṉavar. On the popularity of Ramalingar's songs, see also Chapter 6.

95 On how the hagiographical genre first emerges in the Tamil, Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition in the 12th century in this kind of context with these kinds of aims, see Raman (2007:101–126).

96 See Collins (1998:281–282).

97 For the Śaivasiddhānta views on *aikayavāda*, see Umāpati Śivācārya's 14th-century text, *Saṃkalpa Nirākaraṇam,* Sections 3–4, where there is the exposition and refutation of *aikyavāda.* In Umāpati's understanding the *Aikyavāda* position, though Śaivite, may be summarized as follows: there are three entities, *Pati, Paśu,* and *Pāśa. Pati* is Śiva as Parameśvara, *Paśu* is the myriad souls, and *Pāśa* is *māyā* and *karman.* In other words, the *Aikyavādin*s do not accept the third source of bondage central to Śaivasiddhānta, which is *āṇava mala.* But the greatest divergence, according to Umāpati, lies in the conception of final liberation, *mukti.* For the *Aikyavādins, mukti* is achieved when the soul, purified of all its impurities through the grace of God as the Guru, is in a state when its consciousness (*aṟivu/cit*) merges with that of Śiva's, in complete and undifferentiated union. From the Śaivasiddhānta point of view, this view of liberation seemed to approximate dangerously to that of the *māyāvādā*/Kevalādvaita of Śaṃkara and, indeed, it is immediately after his refutation of the latter that Umāpati deals with and dismisses *aikyavāda* in the *Saṃkalpa Nirākaraṇam.*

98 For details of the author, his biography, and the text, see Aruṇācalam (2005b:152–165). Ramalinga Swamigal's praise verse on the text may be unpacked as follows. The text he says, goes beyond the threefold path of Śaivasiddhānta to arrive at the fourth, *jñāna*. It reconciles the paths of the Āgamas and the Vedas. It teaches one about the 36 *tattva*s and their nature. Its 15 topics include the following: the teacher, the disciple, *pati, paśu, pāśa,* the nature of the instruction, the nature of ripeness, the return (*nivarti*) from right conduct (*caryā*), ritual (*kriyā*), and yoga, the elucidation of non-attachment, the nature of asceticism, the nature of grace, the nature of those who have conquered decay, and the nature of the final state. For further details of this text, see Chapters 3 and 6.

99 The only detailed English language scholarly study of the primary Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s and *ātīnam*s is that of Koppedrayer (1990). In it she suggests that the evidence for a Meykaṇṭār lineage – the one to which Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal allegedly belonged to – is very late, the epigraphical evidence going no further back than the mid-15th century (Koppedrayer, 1990:152–153).

3 The Context of Compassion

The Message

In 1980, G. Vanmikanathan, an erudite and learned scholar as well as a devotee of Ramalinga Swamigal, produced a slim volume for the Sahitya Akademi's *Makers of Indian Literature* series titled *Ramalingar*. This was four years after the publication of his monumental work *Pathway to God trod by Saint Ramalingar* for another central government organization, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Sahitya Akademi book attempts to condense the essential Ramalingar for a pan-Indian audience as opposed to the more extensive study published prior to it. *Ramalingar* begins with a chapter titled *The Psyche of Ramalingar* in which Vanmikanathan describes with eloquence what he sees as the protagonist's defining characteristic, his compassion:

> Cries of lamentation on the occasion of the death of people, the harsh cry of the kestrel, the howls of packs of dogs, the reverberation of earth-shaking steps of people leaving a cloud of dust behind them, disputations in a loud voice, thunderous knocking at doors, to all these harsh and hostile vibrations, Ramalingar's heart responded even as a highly sensitive seismograph does to the slightest tremor of an earthquake. It is no wonder that such a highly sensitive person had a unique empathy with all creatures. He quaked with distress at the sight of disease of hunger even of strangers. His heart broke on witnessing the poverty of people. The fibres of his heart were wrung on even merely seeing the weariness of people. Compassion was the life-breath of Ramalingar.[1]

If one were to cite, in his vast corpus of poetical and prose works, verses which have the most circulation even today and are widely known among the general Tamil public, (who may not even know that it was he who composed them), we might refer to certain single verses culled from the large corpus and repeated in various anthologies and contexts. Among these, for instance, we can speak of two beautiful and lyrical verses, verses 2 and 3 from the longer work, the *Aruḷviḷakka mālai*, beginning with the verse *Kōṭaiyilē iḷappāṟṟi*, on how nature is permeated in all its aspects by the spirit

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of God.[2] Similarly, there is another single verse that has become famous and is considered to encapsulate Ramalingar's unique emphasis on compassion. It is verse 62 from the long 133-verse poem *Piḷḷaip peruviṇṇappam* and quoted without fail in every biography of Ramalingar:

> I withered whenever I saw wilting crops.
> My heart throbbed,
> seeing the destitute,
> lean from hunger,
> begging from house to house,
> hunger unsatiated.
> My heart quivered,
> looking at those suffering from a lengthy affliction,
> in front of me.
> Seeing those with incomparable pride,
> poor, with hearts worn out,
> I grew lean.[3]

This profound empathy with the poor, with the hungry, is considered also to be his lasting legacy to the Tamil people. Many if not most of the significant modern biographies[4] of Ramalingar regard this compassion and the ethical position that undergirds it in Ramalingar's writings, encapsulated in the phrase, "compassion towards living beings", or *cīvakāruṇyam*, as unique to his religious vision.[5] In the context of modern works we might cite Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1971) and Vanmikanathan (1976) as the most authoritative of the works engaged in understanding and framing Ramalingar within his religious vision, with the latter much indebted to the former. Of the two, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's monumental work of retrieving, classifying, and framing Ramalingar's life and works has become the standard narrative and the source for all later works. In his biography of Ramalingar, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ places the discussion of *cīvakāruṇyam* within what he has characterized as the fourth phase of the former's life, "The Section on the Chidambaram of Higher Wisdom (*Uttarañāṉa citamparappakuti)*, which is seen also to encompass Poems 44–47 of the sixth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*".[6] In this section Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ begins with a discussion about hunger in Tamil literature, showing that this is not a new topic but a concern shared by other Tamil "Literary Greats" prior to Ramalingar such as Auvaiyār and Tiruvaḷḷuvar.[7] He says that Ramalingar's work, *The Conduct of Compassion Towards Living Beings* (*Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam*), is entirely about the torture of hunger and the greatness in getting rid of it. Saying this, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ quotes entire sections of this composition and concludes by saying that there has been none since Ramalingar who have spoken about these topics as impressively as he.[8]

While engaging deeply with him, as we have previously seen, the writings of Ūran Aṭikaḷ and those after him place Ramalingar within three kinds of genealogies: a genealogy of Tamil "Literary Greats" and a forerunner of a modern

form of poetic expression which sees its apotheosis in Subramania Bharatiyar considered the outstanding Tamil poet of the 20th century; a genealogy of Tamil Śaivite poet-saints of whom the culmination is Tāyumāṉavar, as we saw in the previous chapter; or, finally, as someone unique whose final poems, as anthologized in the sixth book, and the prose, place him at the start of a genealogy of Modern Tamil Śaivism. In this context *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ramalingar comes to usually be seen either as part of an ancient Tamil/ Śaivite ethics given new prominence by him or entirely his new legacy to Tamil religion. It is the aim of this chapter to enable us to rethink particularly the last two genealogies of Ramalingar by contextualizing *cīvakāruṇyam* in two ways. First, through an investigation of its textual genealogy through the examination of texts that had profoundly influenced him and which are of more recent origin than *Caṅkam* literature, by showing that *cīvakāruṇyam* acquired a new lease of religious life between the 16th and 19th centuries. Second, by showing that *cīvakāruṇyam* became the preoccupation of not just Ramalingar but of more than one of his contemporaries, particularly for those preoccupied with providing an alternative ethical framework to that of Brahmanism in general or to its caste-based ethics. Finally, in tracing the discourse of *cīvakāruṇyam* before and in Ramalingar's time this chapter attempts to show that he was very much embedded in Śaiva discourses that flourished and received recognition in his time and also thereafter but which have come to be elided and ignored or insufficiently understood and explored both in his hagiographies and biographies and within the context of a Dravidian nationalist framework. Elided in the traditional hagiographies because of the typology of sainthood he was considered to exemplify, ignored in the modern studies because of their reliance on the former to contextualize his writings, and then building upon this understanding to proclaim him the prophet of a Śaiva modernity unencumbered by a recent historical past or even his own present.

Nevertheless, Ūran Aṭikaḷ gives us a signpost on the road to the contextualization of *cīvakāruṇyam* by rightly pointing out that Ramalingar's soteriological path in its broad features, within which *cīvakāruṇyam* might be called the lynchpin, emerges out of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. Thus, before we contextualize *cīvakāruṇyam* we need to see that it is embedded within a gnostic soteriology that gave rise to an entire genre of works that began to focus on this specific concept. In order to understand the broad contours of this soteriology we have to make a brief excursus into the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkal* and then to those works which either preceded or emerged at the same time as Ramalingar's own writings.

Relationship Between Knowledge (*jñāna*) and Salvation (*mokṣa*) in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta

The concept of *cīvakāruṇyam* emerged in the context of a textual tradition of what I will call *svānubhūti* texts of Tamil Śaivism which concentrate on the path of knowledge to salvation. In order to comprehend the reason for a

steady emergence of these *svānubhūti* works, and their significance and the conceptual framework in which they are embedded for Ramalingar, we will have to take a step back and see how they rely upon the framework for liberation provided by the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. In this we are best aided by the doctrines laid out in their comprehensive form in the *Civañāṉacittiyār* (henceforth, *Cittiyār*) and the main commentaries on it, which come to be consolidated by the 16th century.[9] In the *Cittiyār* we have a detailed delineation that knowledge, *ñāṉa*, is the only means to final liberation – thus conferring upon the gnostic path a status of prestige that makes it also the most aspirational one.

The significant sections of the *Cittiyār* for our purposes are *Sutra*s 7–9 on the means to salvation (*cātaṉa iyal*) and particularly *Sūtra* 8 within these. Here, we might begin with verse 269, in Sūtra 8, where the *Cittiyār* says that the good paths (*naṉmārkkam*) to attain Śiva are fourfold: the true path (*caṉmārkkam/sanmārga*), the path of the friend (*cakamārkkam/sakhamārga*), the path of the good son (*caṟputtiramārkkam/satputramārga*), and the path of the servant (*tātamārkkam/dāsamārga*). It adds that these are also called the paths of knowledge (*ñāṉa/jñāna*), *yoga*, rites (*kiriya/kriyā*), and ritual observances (*cariyai/caryā*).[10] The states of liberation of these fourfold paths are to abide in the same place (*cālokkiyam/sālokya*), to be in proximity (*cāmīppiyam/sāmīpya*), to have the same form (*cārūppiyam/sārūpya*), and to be in intimate union (*cāyucciyam/sāyujya*) with Śiva, respectively. Of these, says the verse, the liberation attained through the path of knowledge, *jñāna*, is the ultimate liberation (*ñāṉattāl eytu mutti muṭiv eṉpar*).[11] The next two verses deal public ritual activities (*cariyai*) and private ritual observances (*kiriyai*), respectively. The first is with helping care of and doing work related to Śaiva temples while the second is daily worship at home. Of interest to us are the following two verses which deal with yoga and *jñāna*, respectively. In verse 272, the yoga described is explicitly called the eightfold yoga (*aṭṭāṅkayōkam*) but, in fact, it differs entirely in the final stage and goal of liberation from that of the classical system attributed to Patañjali. What is described is breath retention leading to control of the senses and eventually the process of driving the breath through the central channel of the body to release the nectar in the head, which then floods the body of the yogi with bliss. But this cannot be the final liberation since it does not lead to union with Śiva. Thus, this yoga has to be kept separate from the highest liberation or *mukti* which is about union with Śiva and attaining a state of Śiva-ness, through the best path, which is *śivayoga*.[12] This highest path, the *caṉmārkkam*, is described in verse 273 of the *Cittiyār*:

> In the *caṉmārkkam* one understands all the arts,
> Purāṇas, Vedas, śāstras, religious systems –
> regards as lesser the contents of many paths,
> and seeks, as superior,

the knowledge of the good path
that knows *pati, pacu* and *pāca* and shows the Supreme Civaṉ.
And further on that path attaining Civaṉ,
such that knowledge, its object and the knower don't exist,
they who have that greatness of such knowledge, will obtain Civaṉ.[13]

In his commentary on this verse, Maṟaiñāṉacampantatēcikar tells us that once one unites with Śiva there is the bliss in the state of mind of equivalence (*camaracīyapāvam/samarasīyabhāva*) with him.[14] The next two verses elaborate further on the components of the path of knowledge which involves learning (*ōtal*), hearing (*kēṭṭal*), making heard (*kēṭpittal*), and reflecting upon (*cintittal*) the works of knowledge (*ñāṉanūl*). In terms of stressing the significance of this path, we have verse 278, which states categorically that the Vedas, Āgamas, and Purāṇas are all united in declaring that salvation is attainable only through the path of knowledge.[15] Then we have verse 281, which describes eloquently what happens when knowledge and intelligence are reined in through the path of knowledge, allowing for Śiva's grace to operate:

Removing the ignorance of knowing,
and knowing, without doing so, through Grace,
the intelligence within the intelligence,
seeing without seeing, without joining with
or fading through the internal organs,
If you stay, melting yourself –
undivided Civaṉ himself will separately appear,
appearing himself as all the distinctions of the cosmos,
making them non-existent through the path,
and standing, will show himself as the Unsupported One.[16]

Finally, there are some verses on how the person who has gone on this path and succeeded in performing *śivayoga* might comport him or herself and how they might behave. Here, I will cite just verse 283:

Those who are steady in knowledge on this earth
have neither good nor bad,
want for nothing,
have no conduct, nor vows,
nor the rules of the stages of life.
They don't contemplate nor have mental impurities,
are not bound by appearances,
nor flesh.
Without activity, qualities, distinguishing marks, lineage,
assuming the qualities of children, the mad or the possessed,
they might well learn to dance, along with singing.[17]

In summarizing the main features of the path to liberation which is the most prestigious in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta by the late 14th century, as exemplified in the *Cittiyār*, we see that it is called the true path, *caṉmārkkam*; that it is the only one of the fourfold āgamic paths that guarantees liberation without rebirth; that it involves a form of *śivayoga* culminating in a state of union with Śiva in his highest impersonal form as Śivam; that this state is also called "steadiness in knowledge" (*ñāṉaniṭṭai/jñānaniṣṭhā*), a dissolving (*kuḻaital*) or a state of equivalence (*camaracīpāvam*) or of direct experience (*anupūti/anubhūti*); that it is vouchsafed by the grace of Śiva himself; that in this state one goes beyond discriminatory knowledge that involves the separation of the knower, the known, and knowledge to non-discriminatory knowledge which is accessible only in a higher state of absorption with Śiva[18] and, that finally, the person who has entered into and reached the highest state of this path experiences a living liberation that also liberates them from normative social conventions, leading to a shedding of caste and kinship ties and the identity that comes from them and causing them to behave like those who are not responsible to the normative world – such as children, the mad, the possessed – making them disarming, puzzling, mysterious in their spontaneity.[19]

All these features of the *caṉmārkkam* come to be explored in innovative and fascinating ways in the literature that takes this path as its focus after the 14th century, which I call the *Uraiyāṭal* literature, to which I now turn.

The *Uraiyāṭal* Texts of Tamil Śaivism: the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*

Some traditional commentators and scholars have seen the textual genealogy of these works as having their starting point in the *Tiruvuntiyār* and the *Tirukkaḷiṟṟuppaṭiyār*, both of which are traditionally considered to pre-date the *Civañāṉapōtam*. The textual lineage of these works is seen to continue via 14th-century works like the *Tukaḷaṟupōtam* of Cīkāḷi Ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ to the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* in the 15th century.[20] This is a plausible textual genealogy, at least in terms of doctrinal development, for reasons I will address later.[21] In addition, I suggest that this sub-genre of texts, which I call *Uraiyāṭal* works for reasons I will shortly explain, continues after the early 15th century in works such as the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram* in the latter half of the 15th century, the *Vairākkiyatīpam*, *Niṭṭānupūti*, etc., in the 17th century, the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* in the early 19th century, and the *Cīvakāruṇya viḷakkam*, *Svānupūti viḷakkam*, and the *Pūṇānantōtayam* into Ramalingar's own time in the 19th century, to name just some of the works that would fall into this group.[22]

To understand the context of such works we need to grasp that, in general, the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, post-14th century moved decisively to produce soteriological-oriented works that focused overwhelmingly on the gnostic path. One might call such works in general *anubhūti* texts, a reference to their ultimate goal, which is the experience of Śiva in a state of absorption. Nevertheless, within this broad genre there was much variation. We have works, for instance, which are also about the *caṉmārkkam* but

follow the path laid down by the *Cittiyār* and are concerned with elucidating the āgamic, doctrinal position on the *caṉmārkkam* and are sometimes even just translations of sections of the Āgamas on this topic. Works that would fall within this category would include those such as the *Piracātatīpam* (*Prasādadīpa*), *Piracāta akaval*, *Piracātacaṭkam* (*Prasādaṣaḍka*), etc.[23] In contrast to these more doctrinally oriented elucidatory works, we have other texts of which the first intimations might be found in the *Tiruvuntiyār* but which come to have a clear-cut, post-*Cittiyār* Śaivasiddhānta model in the *Tukaḷaṟupōtam* of Cīkāḻi Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ.

I call these *Uraiyāṭal* works because they set up a narrative structure premised on a conversation or dialogue (*uraiyāṭal*) between a guru and his disciple or, for instance, between the heart (*uṇarvu*) and the mind (*aṟivu*) in order to explicate the path of knowledge. Some of their characteristic features can already be found, as mentioned, in the *Tiruvuntiyār*. Very early on, in the *Tiruvuntiyār* (ca. 12th century), for instance, we see in brief many of the features that come to be explored extensively in other *Uraiyāṭal* texts. We have very little historical information about its author except what is said in the penultimate verse 45 of the composition, which says that those to whom these utterances of Uyyavantāṉ (*uyyavantāṉ urai*) are available will realize the Ultimate Reality (*uṇmai uṇarntār*). It is a fairly brief work of 45 stanzas, structured as the teaching of an enlightened teacher to a student, sometimes addressed as such in the vocative as *māṇava*, on the nature of liberation. The methods of attaining this state are described briefly and cryptically. Thus, verse 22 seems to hint at some kind of breathing technique when it says, "skill (*āṟṟal*) is the [ability] to merge consciousness within consciousness (*karuttai karuttiṉil āṟṟuvatu*), after having transformed the winds/breathing (*kāṟṟai māṟṟi*)". Verse 26 is similarly enigmatic: "There is overflowing nectar (*moḷḷā amutu*), if within you, the thought of inner and outer is severed (*uḷḷum puṟampum niṉaippaṟil uṉṉuḷḷe*)". In verses 30 and 31 there seems to be a scepticism expressed towards the domestic life, towards renunciation as well as towards other religions (*maṟṟaya camayaṅkaḷ*). Nevertheless, from verse 32 onwards the poem moves decisively towards offering a Śaivite path of liberation, which involves reaching and going beyond the *turiyā* state (v. 32). It also adds, in verse 34, that those who have this experience, women and men, behave like ghosts – *peṇṭir piṭipōla āṇmakkaḷ peypōla*. Thus, the text exemplifies some of the themes which we saw as crucial to the *caṉmārkkam* doctrines that come to be elucidated in the *Cittiyār*.

The innovator in terms of these *Uraiyāṭal* texts was undoubtedly Cīkāḻi Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ whose *Tukaḷaṟupōtam* (*The Knowledge that Severs Falsity*) enjoyed, from early on, such a high status within the Tamil *Śaivasiddhānta* canon that there is strong evidence it was originally included in the 14 works of the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkal*, in lieu of the *Uṇmaineṟi viḷakkam*, whose authorship by Umāpati Śivācāriyār remains disputed.[24] Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ's four important works, the three *iraṅkal* works (*Celkālattiraṅkal*, *Varuṅkālattiraṅkal*, *Nikaḷkālattiraṅkal*) as well as the *Tukaḷaṟupōtam* are marked by a simplicity of

diction and structure which we can see as a forerunner of both the *Uraiyāṭal* works and the *Cittar* literature and beyond.[25]

We might be able to understand in some broad sense how these texts continued to evolve after the *Tiruvuntiyār* if we look in detail at one of these works separated from it by more than half a millennium, and of great importance to Ramalingar, undoubtedly influencing in explicit ways his own compositions. This is the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* of Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ, possibly composed in the first half of the 19th century. This was also the second of the *Uraiyāṭal* texts, after the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, that he published in 1857. The first edition of the work was published by Ramalingar in 1857, with no information regarding the author or the provenance of the work. In 1907, a second edition was published together with a gloss and commentary of Kāñcīpuram Irāmāṉanta Yōkikaḷ, followed by two further editions in 1970 and 1997. Starting from the second edition the frontispiece of the work contains the information that Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ belonged to the teacher-disciple lineage of the Vīraśaiva Kumāratēvar *ātīṉam* based in Vriddhachalam.[26] In his study of the Tamil Vīraśaiva *ātīṉam*'s and *maṭha*s Ūran Aṭikaḷ tells us that the 20th incumbent of this institution, Cokkaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, went to the Kumāratēvar *maṭha* in Tirumutukuṉṟam in order to study under Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ, who was known to be a very learned scholar at that institution. Cokkaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ subsequently composed a work, the *Periyanāyakiyammai piḷḷaittamiḻ*, a work which dates itself, from within the text, to the Śāka year 1811, which makes it 1889 in the Gregorian calendar.[27] From this internal evidence we can reliably assume that Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ and the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* can be dated to the first half of the 19th century, making him, more or less, a contemporary of Ramalingar.

The *Ciṉmayatīpikai* is a long philosophical poem of 114 verses, constructed as a dialogue between the heart (*neñcu*) and intelligence (*aṟivu*), where the heart is mired in transmigratory life and ignorance and has to be led by the intelligence on the path of salvation in stages by the intelligence. Thus, in a variation of the predominant *Uraiyāṭal* work, where the dialogue is between the enlightened teacher (*ñāṉakuru/ ñāṉācāriyaṉ*) and the disciple (*māṇavaṉ*), we have the allegory of the heart and the mind. In composing this allegorical work, Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ was following on the footsteps of another important Vīraśaiva work, the 17th-century *Vairākkiyacatakam* of Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, which is an allegory of a similar dialogue between the heart (*maṉam*) and discrimination (*vivēkam*). For reasons which will become clear in the next sub-section, Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ's writings and the commentaries on them were central to Ramalingar's conception of *cīvakāruṇyam*. Hence, his publication of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* also indicates his sustained interest in the writings of Tamil Vīraśaiva authors starting from the late medieval period into his own time.

In the Preface (mukavurai) jointly authored by Koraṭṭūr Ciṉṉakiruṣṇa Pirammam and Appāturai Mutaliyār, the title of the work is explained: it illuminates (*viḷakkuvatu*) that which is full of knowledge (*ciṉmaya*). Knowledge

is that which discriminates between permanent and impermanent things. Thus, first the impermanent has to be explained and then that which is permanent revealed. The work, they say, falls within the lineage of the works of other authors who also speak of the same things – and have composed poetry based on experience (*anupavac ceyyuḷkaḷ*) of a similar kind. Thus, these authors – Auvai Pirāṭṭiyār, Tiruvaḷḷuvatēvar, Paṭiṉattaṭikaḷ, Tāyumāṉavar, Tirumūlatēvar, Kumarakuruparacuvāmikaḷ, Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, Aruṇakirinātar, Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷalār, Camayācāriyar Cantāṉakuravar – have been cited in explaining this work. Here we should note that the authors are pointing to the fact that the commentator, Irāmānanta Yōkikaḷ is citing, among other works, the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal, regarding it as belonging to the same genre of works as the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*.

Structurally, the emplotment of the work begins with the heart mired in domesticity being approached by intelligence, which first points to the transitory nature of life (verses 3–17). The heart is impressed enough with the message to agree to listen further to intelligence and clear its doubts (verse 24). The intelligence shows that the heart is mistaken in thinking that it is sovereign in the world, charged with protecting its kith and kin while the real protector is God (verses 33–41). The path to realizing him is pointed out (verse 44), and there are two important verses here on the irrelevance of all caste divisions (verses 46–47). Verses 53–63 form a powerful section on the body, culminating on the approach of death in verse 65. This then makes the case for turning to a guru for salvation before it is too late (verse 73). The poem then segues into the final section on the nature of the guru, on the right religion and then concludes with the nature of the divine.

In the 114 verses of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* we can discern, broadly speaking, three themes: the nature of ultimate reality, the guru and of God; the impermanent, dream-like nature of domestic life and the folly of clinging to it; and, finally, the disgusting nature of the body of women and one's own body and the meditation on this corporeality.

The following are verses which speak to each of these themes, in translation.
On the nature of ultimate reality and the guru:
I praise that –
the life within "A"[28]
shining light,
vast space,
state of silence which is the crest jewel
in the midst of the *turiyā* state,
full of light.
The soft, lotus feet of the Supreme Guru
will be my protection,
to remove darkness in the blemishless heart,
so I can share the *Ciṉmayatīpam*, now shining forth. (prefatory verse 1).[29]

It is these –
a pinnacle of the precious scriptures,
the cosmos and its outer reaches,
the singular meaning within pure silence,
the real nature of that great light, hard to know in various ways,
and its reality, a great expanse.
That it see this, obtain happiness, seek to secure the guru's feet,
dispel darkness,
let us speak of what the mind said
beckoning to the filth cultivating heart (verse 1).[30]

In these two verses the ultimate reality is described as that which is within the pure silence which is a vast space, effulgent, and in the midst of the *turiyā* state – which in the Vīraśaiva doctrines of the Kumāratēvar lineage, to which Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ belonged to, refers to the final of the three *turiyā* states, (also called the *cit–bheda–jñāna* states), the *Śiva-turiyā*, which is also the state of living liberation or *jīvanmukti*, where one merges with Śiva as his part, *aṅga*.[31] This ultimate reality is also described as the real and final import of the scriptures, by which is meant both the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas, and as a shining light (*cuṭar oḷi*), a vast space (*akaṇṭa virivu*), and a state of silence (*mavuṉa nilai*) – all expressions we find in works like the *Tirumantiram*, as well as Kumāratēvar's major philosophical work, *Cuttacātakam*, which draws heavily upon the former.[32] Thus, in the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*, the heart is called by intelligence to come and listen to advice on how to reach this state.

The verses on God, two of which I quote here, highlight how the divine is immanent in all the quotidian realities and lives of the world, as the life within all life forms:

There is one good thing –
it feeds the snake and nourishes it with nectar,
lovingly helps lives in the world have food,
gives feed to all creatures of the sea in goodness,
holds up trees in thick wooded forests, giving water,
raises them, then, with care.
Yet you whirl around, Oh restless heart! (verse 39).[33]

There is the great light,
like a silent, vast space –
It feeds and quickens the chicken within the egg,
dabs colour deliberately on the clustered buds,
fills with water the growing coconut,
and sharpens the thorn inside the spawn of the deep water fish.
Yet you waste away in vain, Oh heart! (verse 40).[34]

This strand of what one might call nature poetry, which establishes a close relationship between the organic processes of the natural world, birth, growth, feeding, and a transcendent reality that is available to one if one were only to "know" it, is beautifully done in the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*. Even while poetry that teems with nature and nature imagery has had a long genealogy in Tamil literature beginning with the solitary gems of *Caṅkam* and shining bright in Tiruttakkatēvar and Kampaṉ, the sort of transcendentalism this poem evokes, a trope of several of these works, later found exemplary echoes in Ramalingar's better-known and much-loved verses.

The second theme is that of the transitory nature of the verities of family life, social life, fame, and fortune – all those things with which the heart is enamoured and clings to.

> Kings have reigned and died,
> as many as fine sand,
> regarding as theirs this sea girdled earth,
> You have heard the truth of these old sayings.
> Lords of the Earth, their hair festooned with flower garlands,
> and others like them – their bodies weakened, their fame ended,
> have died and become soil.
> You know this.
> Yet you have joined the earth-intoxicated (verse 8).[35]

> Birds densely flock to fruit laden trees,
> only to depart when the fruits cease.
> Like this, when a mound of wealth shrinks,
> do friends disperse or gather?
> when subjects praise even as the crowns of kings roll down,
> and those who once ruled the world beg, eat and suffer –
> is there the companionship that you vehemently upheld?
> You unsteady wandering heart! (verse 15).[36]

Here, in these and other verses of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*, we see a repeated reference to the fragility of temporal power, to the precariousness of kings, to the treachery of kith and kin and companions. While it would be far too simple to relate this to the upheavals of colonial modernity and the shake-up this brought to established powers and to ways of living in the Tamil region, nevertheless, like with the awareness of famines and constant hunger in Ramalingar, here too it would not be too much to speculate that theological doctrine alludes to and is tinged by the precariousness of the times and having seen power pass decisively, within the century, from local potentates to new, colonial masters.

The third and final theme which I reference from this poem is that of *memento mori* – the remembrance of death, related to the aforementioned

theme but even more strongly to the trope of the aversion to the flesh, particularly the female body and its morbidity and to the remembrance of the skeleton clothed by the flesh. This is perhaps the most distinctive theme of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*, a sensibility which closely relates it to the poetry of the *Cittar*s. The theme is first introduced in verse 24, where the body is stripped to its organic components in order to illustrate its perishable nature:

> Blood, flesh, sinews, the skeleton, skin,
> intestines, pus, fat, group, come together
> as the body, the site of worms.
> Desiring its clod of earth you wandered,
> not seeing that this body perishes,
> together with all manner of things,
> mingling with the soil.
> lacking surety, coveting dirt and dwelling,
> you think these are yours, oh heart! (verse 24).[37]

This body, the deteriorating, organic stuff, is then shown to be the same in everyone. We all have these bodies, says the poet, hence why pretend there is a fundamental difference. This view of the sameness of the human body becomes the grounds for caste critique, as well as for the avowal that the same sentience, the same divinity inhabits everybody:

> You say the upper-caste body is swan-like,
> then, the same maxim applies to those of the lower.
> Or, their body is sentience you say,
> then, it will be the same.
> Does difference exist?
> The shining sun mirrored in the waters of a golden vessel -
> is it other when reflected in the gutter? (verse 46).[38]

> When a crane mates with a rooster,
> tell me, does the egg look different?
> If Brahmins lovingly mate with fertile low caste women,
> will not an appropriate seed be borne?
> In the cremation grounds is the stench of the burnt different?
> Is there high and low in lofty words? (verse 47).[39]

The next set of verses returns to the theme of the true nature of the body. The female body is, on the one hand, the treacherous object of desire. Yet, in reality it is an object of disgust which is converted by the male subject into an object of erotic desire and the subject of erotic poetry – all of which is explicitly mocked. Discrimination and intelligence – the heart being led by

true knowledge – will reveal the stench beneath the perfume and the skull beneath the skin:

> Face like a shimmering moon,
> a fine drawn nose,
> large eyes, big lashes,
> lips that conceal a pearl-toothed smile –
> If you look searchingly at these,
> you, oh heart, will grasp
> the young woman's facial beauty,
> that stirs a bewildering desire in you.
> Peel away the skin that covers the breasts-
> and discover, you will, their loveliness (verse 54).[40]
>
> You masked her hair stench with flowers,
> dripping with intoxicating fragrance.
> You changed her body odour,
> smearing her liberally with perfumed clay.
> She stood before you smiling, showing her white bones.
> You, oh heart, swooned, forgot your body, became aroused,
> came together with thieving dross,
> giving no thought to that body of hers (verse 56).[41]

In these two verses misogyny and disgust with the female body are expanded and relativized to include the male body – if one awakens to the knowledge that one's own male body is itself a perishable thing and a source of disgust, then one would respect it more and from this respect would also emerge a decisive turning away from the combination of self-love, self-care, and erotic desire that characterizes domestic life:

> There is the cage –
> a vessel of dirt called a mire,
> a coming together of veins, sinews, bones, flesh, skin, blood, and fat,
> and stinking orifices in which worms wriggle.
> From increasing love for this,
> seeing it as an always rare to find,
> "amazingly beautiful body of mine",
> you lusted after the bodies of women with scrawny waists,
> disrespecting your own body (verse 60).[42]
>
> This you don't speak of –
> when the knife slips, cuts the hand,
> reveals flesh, skin, sinews,
> then gashed, the bones show up.

You don't introspect about this cage of skin.
donning beautiful, colourful gems that dazzle,
you smear on aphrodisiacal perfumes,
wearing fragrant flower garlands daily,
with pride, Oh heart,
you have been drunk on women (verse 62).[43]

Finally, there are verses which expand the disgust with the body to the meditation on the cremation grounds and the hour of death. Meditating on the putrefying body and its dissolution in the fire is meant to lead one to the awareness that "clothes maketh the man", and that caste and other social and religious hierarchies are a social construct, a veneer that peals away at the time of death. Verse 65 shows us that we all die in the same way, that death is not pleasant and that we are ill-equipped to deal with it without the support of the divine. Thus, in the final analysis, the misogyny, the disgust with the body, the awareness of death – all this is but a preparation for, at the very least, an inward asceticism and a turning away from worldly life and towards God.

Go to the grounds where bodies are burnt.
In solitude seat yourself near a carcass.
Then, becalmed, if you think with feeling about
the limbs of the corpse,
its fitted skin,
the heavy miasma,
that reeks of fat melting,
and you see it steam,
then you might well think and accept this –
however fragrant the body,
once burnt, so will it be (verse 63).[44]

The senses become confused,
the mind swoons,
the intelligence is destroyed,
the condition weakened,
the sense-organs suffer greatly,
the body becomes lean,
the eyes dim,
the mouth blabs,
the life-breaths falter,
This is the agony of death.
Many won't grasp this, who lack knowledge of the Supreme.
Before that pain of death comes, Oh heart,
Surrender (verse 65).[45]

It is in a work like the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* that the *Uraiyāṭal* works and the poetry of the Cittars meet. The themes we find in Civavākkiyar, Paṭṭinattār, Pattirakiriyār, and Pāmpāṭṭcittar (all considered to have been composed between the 14th and 16th centuries) include a disdain for caste, an emphasis on a Śaivism which focuses on the path of knowledge rather than ritualism and worship in temples and the female body as a site of temptation and disgust. These general themes are, of course, differently emphasized in the different poets. Thus, Civavākkiyar does the least of the theme called "blaming women" (*mātaraip paḻittal*) and is the most explicitly Śaivasiddhāntic – with poetry that explains the fourfold Siddhāntic path, the significance of the Śaiva *pañcākṣara* mantra, etc. In Paṭiṉattār (also known as Paṭiṉattu Piḷḷaiyār) we have, in his most famous poems, a strong rejection of the world as a lie and a reproach of the wiles of women of which we see a strong echo in the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*. Pattirakiriyār's single work, *Meyñāṉap pulampal* (*The Lament regarding True Knowledge*) has the poet, in the first person, seeking true knowledge and its themes are closely paralleled in the *Uraiyāṭal* works like the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, which we will look at later.[46] In Pāmpāṭṭicittar's songs references to both *kuṇḍalinī* yoga, to the true guru and the false guru, and the detaching oneself from domesticity are recurrent themes.

The deliberate striving after a simplicity of diction that makes it sound almost contemporary that characterizes the *Cittar* poetry, its late compilation and uneven canonization within Tamil literary histories as well as the perennial difficulties of dating beginning with that of the *Tirumantiram*,[47] which has been repeatedly declared to be the first *Cittar* work of Tamil origin, has made *Cittar* poetry notoriously hard to pigeonhole and had usually led to it being treated as a separate category in all Tamil literary histories. Yet, all the evidence evaluated for the period between the late 14th and 17th centuries, I suggest, shows that the *Uraiyāṭal* texts and some of the *Cittar* poetry forms one Śaivite continuum, which takes the Śaivasiddhānta *caṉmārkkam* along new paths, using it as a springboard to evolve new genres of works which use the first person voice, committed to a mode of sincerity which give the works the imprimatur of an authentic religious experience, both Śaivite and seemingly beyond sectarianism at the same time. It is this kind of work that Ramalingar clearly saw as worth printing and which informed his own religious ideology that was anti-caste, committed to *ñāṉa* and with a focus on compassion, as the next chapter shows. It was also within these works that we have the first intimations of *cīvakāruṇyam*, well before Ramalingar's century.

We are guided, first, to the genealogy of *cīvakāruṇyam* by his own reading and publishing, by the works he singled out for attention by printing them or the authors we can surmise with some certainty he was familiar with. The most significant of these works, starting from the 15th century, will be examined in the following. These were also the works he saw as valuable doctrinally and they themselves, or other works linked to them, influenced him more profoundly than any of his biographers have been willing to explore in depth.

Oḻiviloṭukkam (ca. Early 15th Century)

The very first work that Ramalingar published in 1851 was *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, a title that can be translated as *Absorption into the Final Stage*.[48] The author of the text was Cīkāḻi Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal, dated to the early 15th century. The text was commented upon around the turn of the 17th–18th century by the Vīraśaiva author and commentator, Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, who we are given to understand had been handed the work by his own teacher, Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. 17th century) and asked to write a commentary for it, just as he did for Cāntaliṅka's own works.[49] This is significant for two reasons. Since writing a commentary on a text was the classic hermeneutical strategy for claiming it, the Tamil Vīraśaiva tradition, by the 17th century, saw the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* as a text that was worthy of being incorporated into their own larger canon of works. Moreover, because we will see the emergence of *cīvakāruṇyam* in Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's commentaries both on the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* and on his commentaries on Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ's work, the *Vairākkiyatīpam* (*Vairāgyadīpa*), we can assume that he was an important figure in introducing this concept to Ramalingar. This becomes clear because Ramalingar published the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* together with commentary of Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ as a single text and this has been its publishing history ever since. Nevertheless, as we will also see when we look at a later work, the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram*, Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ was not the only one to deal with this concept either before or within Ramalingar's own time. Thus, it becomes important for us to understand the context of *cīvakāruṇyam* not just within the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* commentary and other texts related to it but within a wider discourse in which it was embedded.

The *Oḻiviloṭukkam* consists of 252 verses in the *veṇpā* metre.[50] Mu. Aruṇācalam has pointed out that the work gained widespread popularity after its publication because of its language – terse yet simple with pithy analogies and verses of real profundity and beauty to emphasis its intentions or to illustrate philosophical and theological ideas. To give just two examples of such verses – in verse 16 the poet compares the feeling one could have on reading his work to other pleasures:

> Like rising waves, a flood of erotic love
> for he who sings in the embrace of its five forms,
> like time's flower[51] pouting open its bell-shaped mouth,
> like those who repose in pleasure to the songs of the *kiṉṉarī* –
> like that will this be, for those who see it.[52]

Or verse 54 which compares those who know the Real Substance which is God (*tattuvattār)* with those who do not (*tattuvattār illār*):

> Those who are not of the Real,
> they are like a moon in the waters.

> Those who are of the Real,
> their austerities have a clearness –
> like washing the sky with rain,
> like lustrating the wind with fire.[53]

The work is constructed as a dialogue between the disciple in search of liberation and the true teacher, guru, who instructs and is divided into ten chapters:

1) General Teaching regarding the Vedas and the Āgamas (*vētākamap potuvil upatēcam*) – verses 1–63
2) Absorption of Superior Beings through the Descent of Power (*cattinipātattu uttamar oḻivu*) – verses 64–91
3) Disappearance of Yoga (*yōka kaḻaṟṟi*) – verses 92–121
4) Disappearance *of Kriyā* (*kiriyai kaḻaṟṟi*) – verses 122–137
5) Disappearance of *Caryā* (*cariyai kaḻaṟṟi*) – verses 138–151
6) Elucidation of Dispassion (*viratti viḷakkam*) – verses 152–164
7) Renunciation (*tuṟavu*) – verses 165–189
8) Nature of the State of Grace (*aruḷ avattai taṉmai*) – verses 190–231
9) Nature of those whose traces have died (*vātaṉai māṇṭār taṉmai*) – verses 232–240
10) Nature of the State (*nilai iyalpu*) – verses 241–253

This structuring of the work into sections, as well as the framework which provides a narrative and linear framework for the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, cannot always be discerned explicitly within the text itself, which tends to return to certain themes in all the sections, but through a linear and clear-cut structure created by the commentary. Nevertheless, the commentary is not entirely improvising on this structure which clearly aims to reflect that of the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ*. This becomes apparent when we compare the structure of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* and that of the *Civañāṉacittiyār*, which might be taken as the basic paradigm for such works. Nevertheless, our understanding of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* is dependent, in great measure, on the framework that Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ gave it, which is that of a Tamil Śaivasiddhānta soteriologal narrative culminating in liberation. As Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ understands it, the journey of the person who seeks liberation goes through increasing stages of involution. This process is described in his own words, in the commentary on verse 245:

> After the thirty-six *tattva*s have come to an end, after the state of *kevala*, which stands above them obscuring, has ceased, that intelligence (*aṟivu*), (which has rid itself of those *tattva*s and that state of *kevala*, knowing them as such,) knowing itself as itself, and knowing them, ceases. [When this happens], it knows that it came to know through the divine grace, which came to make it known to itself. Then there ceases

> [the thought], "I have known". Then, there is the sight of the grace which made known, the unfettering from that grace as well and becoming oneself the pure *parai*.[54] Then there is the cessation of the idea of one's independence on knowing that *paṟai*, which comes from knowing a "this" and a "that", with oneself as a knower and ["that"] as the sight. In the cessation of that *parācakti* there is the dissolution of I-ness (*taṟpōtam*) . . . . There is the mingling, with the singular (*oṉṟāyirunta*) *Civam*, which is not anything itself (*oṉṟum tāṉ ākāta*) such that duality is destroyed (*iraṇṭaṟa*). That place where even the traces of I-ness are dead (*pōtavācaṉaiyum iṟanta iṭattil*), is [the state] "beyond happiness", *sukātītam* (*sukhātita*). This *sukātītam* is the State of Reality (*uṇmai nilai*).[55]

From the perspective of the commentary it is this progressive involution – a withdrawal from the ontological realities through a path of knowledge (*ñāṉam*), itself vouchsafed only through Śiva's grace and not through one's own agency, which ultimately leads to the dissolution of the knower and the known and all traces of I-ness. This, in turn, leads to the singularity that is Śiva and the enjoyment of being in that state, which is *śivabhoga*, where there is not even a trace of the sense being other than Śiva. This is the narrative which the commentary offers us as the framework for understanding the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*.

The *Oḻiviloṭukkam* locates this path within renunciation or *tuṟavaṟam* – a concept that, along with its binary householdership or *illaṟam*, acquires a long textual genealogy within Tamil literature subsequent to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* which, particularly since Paṟimēlaḻakar's 13th-century commentary on the relevant Chapters 25–33, forms the bedrock of all subsequent Tamil Śaiva literature on renunciation.[56] Among these chapters Chapter 33, which deals with Non-Killing (*kollāmai*), is interpreted by Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ as dealing, in essence, with *cīvakāruṇyam*. Householdership in the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* can only lead to the same goal if the householder, in effect, behaves like a renouncer, cultivating dispassion towards his beloved ones and his kinsfolk, while being embedded in social life, be he a king or the common man.[57] This theme in the text is also central to the understanding of *cīvakāruṇyam*, as we will soon see.

The poet describes the aspirant on the path to liberation using various terms and in various ways towards the very end of the text, in the 41 verses of the eighth section. This is a person whose path to liberation does not follow the fourfold path described by the Śaivāgamas – of *caryā* (public, ritual activity), *kriyā* (daily worship), yoga, and *jñāna* (knowledge) but disregards the first three, as sections 3–5 show, to acquire liberating knowledge alone. In verse 214 the poet tells us that these are people who have moved beyond social relationships, habitations, and conventions. They have left desire and domesticity (*kāmāti viṭṭu*) and now live with their hands as their begging vessels (*karamē kalam*), and, in sleep, the earth itself as the blanket for their hands and legs (*pūmiyē kaikkālaippōrttuṟaṅki*). For such people, unaffected

by the predispositions (*vātaṉaiyil tākkaṟṟār*) where, asks the poet, is there need for a name (*nāma*), qualities (*kuṇam*), caste (*cāti*), karma or religion (*camayam*). Nevertheless, in verse 227, the poet makes it clear that they remain still marked by their Śaiva affiliation – their entire bodies covered in sacred ash (*tiruṉīr*). They are naked (*tikampari/digambarī*) and have many names says verse 229 – these include *attuviti/advaitī*, *ēkānti/ekantī*, *ananti*, *cuttaṉ/śuddha*, *turiyaṉ*, *avatūtaṉ/avadhūta*, *tuṟavi*, *civayōki/śivayogī*, *niruvāṇi/nirvāṇi*, and *virattaṉ/virakta*. In the commentary on verse 192, Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ further explains that this person has discarded all the lesser qualities that relate to *tamas* and *rajas* and has only the eight qualities that are *sāttvic*. These eight pure qualities he lists as: lack of desire (*nirācai/nirāśā*), austerity (*tavam/tapas*), patience (*poṟumai*), **compassion** (*kirupai/kṛpā*), happiness (*cantoṣam/saṃtoṣa*), truthfulness (*vāymai*), possessing intelligence (*aṟivuṭaimai*), and self-control (*aṭakkam uṭaimai*).[58] So, we see that among the essential pure qualities of the *Śivayogī* is compassion. Keeping this in mind we turn, now, to the single instance in the commentary on the entire text where Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ uses the compound *cīvakāruṇyam*. This is very early on, in the first section of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, while commenting on verse 35, which is as follows:

> Once fear recedes –
> of the rope as a snake,[59]
> will one imagine this,
> crying, agitating the body?
> Even if the *Śivayogī*,
> standing in the dissolution of activity,
> thinking, were to ever call out, "You come!"
> Why is there no agitation?[60]

In his commentary on this verse Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ says:

> The *Śivayogī* is filled with the bliss of silence (*mauṉāṉantam*) because of ***cīvakāruṇyam*** etc. He stands in the form of grace (*tiruvaruḷ vaṭivāy*) and not in the form of illusion (*māyāvaṭivam*). Hence, just as darkness does not appear in the light of the sun, the darkness of *māyā* (*māyāntakāram*) does not appear where there is the light of knowledge (*ñāṉapirakācattil*).[61]

The conclusion we come to from the commentary on the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* is that *cīvakāruṇyam*, the quality of compassion towards all living beings, is part of a complex of virtues vouchsafed only to those human beings who have made great progress on the path of liberation and, in fact, are either very near or have already attained liberation while living (in another part of the text Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ calls the *Śivayogī* the *jīvanmukta*). It is also placed clearly within a framework of renunciation or *tuṟavaṟam*, and of a gnostic path to salvation where there is the absorption into a state of unity with Śiva.

Vaḷḷalār cāttiram (ca. Late 15th Century)

This is a collection of 20 short compositions of a single author, Civañāṉa Vaḷḷal, who is from the disciplinary lineage of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal, being the disciple of his disciple Cuyampirakāca Vaḷḷal. On the basis of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's dates, it has been suggested that Civañāṉa Vaḷḷal might be dated to the third quarter of the 15th century.[62] Among these 20 short works two are of particular interest to us because, as far as I am able to ascertain, they are the sole works within the anthology that contain references to *cīvakāruṇyam*. The first is *Elucidation on God, the Soul and Bondage* (*Patipacupāca viḷakkam*), which is the second of the texts in the anthology. Here, in the section titled *Characteristics of the Teacher* (*Ācāriyayilakkaṇam*) we have the following single verse:

> *cīvakāruṇyam*, dispassion towards the bonds,
> unceasing devotion towards the Lord, rich in abundance,
> knowledge of Brahman that spreads light –
> these four alone are the body of the Guru,
> say the *āgama*s of Caṅkaraṉ [Śiva],
> who neither lives nor dies.[63]

Thus, we see that under the description of the qualities necessary for someone to be considered a guru we have a list of four qualities of which *cīvakāruṇyam* is the first. This is a list we will again encounter, in the very next work and we will consider it in greater detail then.

The second work of interest within the anthology is the *Elucidation of Knowledge* (*Ñāṉa viḷakkam*). Its structure and themes are remarkably similar, in miniature, to that of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*. Consisting of 101 verses in the *veṇpā* metre it begins with a general section on the nature of liberation, the reference to the teacher of knowledge (*ñāṉakuru*, verse 7), and is framed as a dialogue, as the text we have already seen, between the disciple and the teacher. Verses 26–29 is called *Bewailing the existence of prārabdha karma* (*pirārattuvattukkiraṅkal*) and is one in which the disciple laments being trapped in *saṃsāra* and requests the great knowledge (*peruññāṉam*, verse 29) that liberates.[64] Verses 30–35 is a section on *Grief regarding Birth* (*piravivaruttam*), where the disciple praises the greatness of renunciation (*tuṟavu)* and expresses the intention of tolerating any kind of harsh discipline from the teacher (verses 33, 34). The next three verses, 36–38, fall into the section titled *Devotion to the Lord* (*īcurapatti*), followed by two verses, 39–40, in the section *Knowledge of Brahman* (*piramakkiyāṉam*), where Brahman is described as the "life within life" (*uyirkkuyirāy*).[65] The next single verse is on *Dispassion towards the Bonds* (*pācavairākkiyam*), where the teacher tells the disciple that the latter needs to understand that all that which is the "not-I" is a mere covering.[66] Then we come to the two verses of the section called *Cīvakkāruṇṇiyam*:

> They will thread softly, with their delicate feet,
> Who think that small worms etc. will perish;

> Caṭaparataṉ himself is an example of this –
> who saw as false all the standing in the shade
> of the pleasure giving umbrella.[67]

The verse refers to the story of Jaḍabharata, narrated already in the *Viṣṇu-* and *Bhāgavata* Purāṇas, who is so impervious to his own body, seeing through its impermanence, that he is called the "inert (*jaḍa*) Bharata", who is contemptuous of kingly power (symbolized by the umbrella), and a perennial wanderer, with no place of his own. In this verse those who have the quality of *cīvakāruṇyam* are like him. They too recognize that their body is not truly real and that there is a permanent, ultimate reality beyond it. Their dispassion towards their body, paradoxically, engenders compassion towards all living beings, even insects, and makes them conscious of the need not to harm them. The second verse, verse 43, is as follows:

> A tiger does not refuse meat and attain liberation,
> [nor] a harmless crane refraining from eating fish.
> He who dwells in Kayilai of the flowers, king of the forests, [Śiva] –
> Alas, did he not knowingly create all this before?[68]

Here, the teacher points out that it is part of the natural world that there is the violence of creatures killing and eating each other and that this is a world created as such by God. The suggestion is that man must be an exception to this "dog eat dog" tendency of the natural world and both avoid harming even in the slightest way other creatures and killing them for food. In the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram*, therefore, we see that *cīvakāruṇyam* is associated with the teacher or guru – it is part of his qualities just as it was in the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*. It is significant, though, that now it is part of a quartet of qualities – the others being devotion, dispassion, and knowledge – which a true guru must possess.[69] At the same time, *cīvākāruṇyam* might also be described as part of a practice of daily living which involves non-killing and non-harming even the smallest of living creatures as well as refraining from eating meat – a way of being which is central to the Jaina world view that had such a widespread influence in the Tamil region, as reflected in its literature, from the second half of the first millennium of the common era, to which these features of *cīvakāruṇyam* are also undoubtedly indebted.

Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's Commentary on *Vairākkiyatīpam* (ca. 17th Century)

It is in his commentary on several verses of *The Lamp of Dispassion* (*Vairākkiyatīpam*) written by his own guru Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ that Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, the commentator of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, elaborates even further on what he means by *cīvakāruṇyam*. It is worthwhile for us to look into this not only because it illuminates the context of the discourse on this topic even further but also because it is extremely likely, considering

both the evolution of his own thoughts on the issue and his publishing history, that Ramalingar was profoundly influenced also by this and other works of Tamil Vīraśaivas, among whom Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ was an eminent figure of the 17th century.[70]

The *Vairākkiyatīpam*, as the title indicates, is about the cultivation of dispassion as a prerequisite for liberation. It is also a dialogue between the teacher and his disciple. In his commentary on verse 8 of the text Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ explains the significance of the title of the work:

> Knowing those bonds of enjoyment that are a wife, mother etc., and understanding that the attachment to the body, which is egoity, naturally dwells on those things that are indeed unclean, the cause of sorrow and impermanent, and from illuminating the house that is the mind with the light of asceticism that removes that incomparable darkness of confusion kept and reflected upon within the mind, this scripture's name is said to be *Vairākkiyatīpam*.[71]

The main difficulty addressed in the work is to reconcile dispassion and the ideal of the renunciation of social life associated with it, with domestic life and householdership. The *Vairākkiyatīpam* (or, more specifically, Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's commentary on it) advises, as did the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, that the paradox might be resolved by cultivating the virtues of renunciation, of which dispassion is one, already within domesticity. This point, made earlier, is elaborated further in the commentary on verse 18, where the following trajectory is described:

> When one flawlessly adheres to the code of conduct for householdership (*illaṟam*), family [life] will be seen to be an error (*kuṟṟam*); through this there will be external renunciation (*puṟattuṟavaṟam*); through this renunciation austerities (*tavam*) will be undertaken; through austerity there will the mental renunciation of desires and attachment (*uṭṭuṟavu*); through this the knowledge of reality will arise (*mey uṇarvu*); through the knowledge of reality birth, will cease.[72]

Then, starting with verse 55 we have a cluster of verses where *cīvakāruṇyam* comes to the fore. In the commentary on verse 55 the word *aruḷ* is first glossed with *cīvakāruṇyam*. Both the verse and the commentary are about the suitable place of habitation for one who has chosen the ascetic life. In this context Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ elaborates that the proper dwelling place for an ascetic is not the wilderness because there he would have to live among small insects like mosquitoes, scorpions, and ants and might harm them. If he were to harm them, without *cīvakāruṇyam*, then his mind would become sullied.[73] In the commentary on the next verse there is a reference to how Tiruvaḷḷuvar, the author of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, had pointed out that all the knowledge one has acquired with difficulty through scriptural learning

is not necessary if one regards the suffering of another being as one's own.[74] In the commentary on verse 60, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar* is again evoked:

> Tiruvaḷḷuvanāyaṉār said that austerity (*tavam*) is that which has the goodness of not killing living beings. Thus, *cīvakāruṇyam* will abide within that heart in which there is the renunciation that is devoid of attachment towards anything.[75]

Eventually, in the commentary on verse 66 we are given a list of qualities that the ascetic or renouncer possesses. These are deep absorption (*camāti/samādhi*), renunciation (*tuṟavu*), devotion to the guru (*kurupakti/gurubhakti*), and *cīvakāruṇyam*.[76] Finally, in the commentary on verse 67 the same list is reproduced, with some terminological modifications and in the reverse order as the qualities which the guru, the teacher of knowledge (*ñāṉācāriyaṉ*) embodies. These, which we have already seen in the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram* from a century or so before, are *cīvakāruṇyam*, devotion to God (*īcurapakti/īśavarabhakti*), dispassion towards the bonds (*pācavairākkiyam/pāśavairāgya*), and knowledge of Brahman (*piramañāṉam/ brahmajñāna*).[77]

Summing up, *cīvakāruṇyam* in the texts looked at thus far, between the 15th and 17th centuries, emerges within a genre of works in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and the Tamil Vīraśaiva traditions that pertain solely to a gnostic path to liberation. This emphasis on compassion was not unique to the Tamil religious traditions but had already been part of an ideological exchange between the Buddhists and the Pratyabhijñā school, as expressed in the writings of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta in the 10th and 11th centuries. In that exchange, as Ratié (2009) has lucidly shown, the Buddhists saw compassion or *kāruṇya* as arising from the acknowledgement of others' pain or *duḥkha*, while for the non-dualistic Pratyabhijñā school it is the awareness of one's own innate nature as bliss, extending to action aiming at others' welfare, that generates compassion. It appears to be the case that in the *cīvakāruṇyam* of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Vīraśaiva traditions we have, first, the gnosis of the liberated person, who is the *Śivayogī* and *cīvakāruṇyam*, in turn, is the effect of this higher state of consciousness rather than the result of mundane knowledge. Thus, *cīvakāruṇyam* in both these traditions remains closer to the Pratyabhijñā concept than the Buddhist one, a quality that arises from the highest of soteriological knowledge than from the observation of the suffering of others on the mundane level. At the heart of the gnostic path lies the assumption of an internally vouched for and direct experience of oneself as Śiva in liberation, called *anubhūti*, granted by the divine guru working without one who is also the guru of knowledge (*ñāṉācāriyaṉ*) and is Śiva himself. The human guru, even when he actually exists as the person who initiates one in this path, embodies Śiva. The soteriology of *śivayoga*, the ascetic practitioner of its highest states, the *Śivayogī* and the latter's characteristics, his rejection of caste, the liminal status he occupies in society – all this

predates the Śaivasiddhānta's formulation by several centuries. It emerges in the corpus of texts that were concerned with lay Śaiva religion known as the *Śivadharma* corpus.[78] Of particular significance for our purposes is the *Śivadharmottara*, a text which might well have been composed prior to the 7th–8th centuries CE and which came to be translated into Tamil around the 16th century by Maṟaiñāṉacampantar belonging to the Meykaṇṭār lineage and residing in Citamparam. A detailed study of the influence of the lay Śaivite ideology of the *Śivadharmottara* on the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and on Tamil Vīraśaivism is still to be done but there remains little doubt that such a study would be able to substantiate the link, speculative at the current moment, that the emergence of the *Uraiyāṭal* texts in their plenitude happens after Maṟaiñāṉacampantar's Tamil version of the Sanskrit work, the *Civatarumōttaram*, comes into existence.[79]

Bringing into confluence the conceptions of *śivayoga*, the *Śivayogī*, and *cīvakāruṇyam* gains traction in the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram* and in the writings of Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ a few centuries later. There, *cīvakāruṇyam* comes to be mapped onto the qualities required by the serious aspirant for liberation as well as for the guru, within a framework of renunciation or *tuṟavu* and, with Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, now linked to the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. At the level of daily ethical practice it involves the non-harming and non-killing of other living beings and not eating meat. It also manifests itself in the empathetic fellow feeling, where one feels others' pain as one's own. It also ultimately involves the recognition of the illusory nature of social hierarchies and conventions and to step beyond them, thus stepping beyond social identity, caste, and habitation – to become, as it were, a child or a mad person. Such a cultivation of *cīvakāruṇyam* is also the prerequisite for dispassion which, in turn, is the prerequisite for renunciation, without which one would not commence on the Śaivite path to liberation. At the same time it is one of the fourfold qualities of the guru inasmuch as he embodies Śiva, who himself is the ultimate embodiment of compassion or *aruḷ*. Thus, manifesting compassion or *cīvakāruṇyam* is also to manifest the Śiva-ness that is within each human being but most visible in the ones enlightened among us, like the guru who is the *Śivayogī*. In sum, this was the context of *cīvakāruṇyam* in Tamil Śaivism prior to Ramalingar and one he was deeply familiar with from works he had access to or even printed. How he further developed upon this textual edifice, just as some of his contemporaries did, becomes evident in the next chapter.

Notes

1 Vanmikanathan (1980:4). Here Vanmikanathan is, more or less, abstracting from Ramalingar's own views as he expresses them in the lengthy, highly autobiographical poem, the *Piḷḷai peruviṇappam*, which is the thirteenth poem of Book 6. One might particularly refer to verses 23–24 where he speaks of his aversion to loud noises and other strong sensory impressions.

2 Ūṟaṉ Aṭikaḷ (1989:759–760). The widespread circulation of these two verses as part of the popular culture was also sealed by their use in the 1940–1960s – in

the golden age of Tamil cinema – when the values of the emerging Indian nation were placed within a Tamil cinematic landscape. Thus, the runaway hit film of 1947 just prior to Indian independence, *Nām iruvar* (We Two), a morality tale about the rescue of a hapless youth from the clutches of debt and penury, has a famous scene where the lead character, Sukumāraṉ (played by T.R. Mahalingam) sings these two verses exquisitely while seated in a verdant landscape.

3 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1989:634–662):
vāṭiya payiraik kaṇṭapōtellām vāṭiṉēṉ paciyiṉāl iḷaintē
vīṭutōṟ irantum paciy aṟātayarnta veṟṟaraik kaṇṭuḷam pataittēṉ
nīṭiya piṇiyāl varuntukiṉṟōr eṉṉēruṟak kaṇṭuḷan tuṭittēṉ
īṭiṉ māṉikaḷāy ēḷaikaḷāy neñciḷaittavar tamai kaṇṭē iḷattēṉ.
The translation is mine.

4 By this I refer to those written by those who directly did not experience Ramalingar. These biographies began to emerge after the 1930s.

5 English hagiographies and biographies that stress this include Vanmikanathan (1976, 1980), Srinivasan (1968), Balakrishnan (1984), Dayanandan Francis (1990), Annamalai (1988), Shammugan (1982), to name a few. The modern Tamil publications are innumerable, running into hundreds if not more, and with new ones coming out even today. Some of the more significant ones are Pālacuntaram Piḷḷai (1930), Vasudeva Mutaliyar (1953), Vaṭivēl (1956), Civañāṉam (1962), Sripal (1977), Acalāmpikai Ammaiyār (1970), and the definitive hagiography of Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1971), among others.

6 Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1976:335).

7 On the many Auvaiyārs of Tamil literature ranging from the *Caṅkam* poetess to a possibly 14th– century *Cittar* figure, see Zvelebil (1995:85–87).

8 Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1976:335–342).

9 The commentaries are those of Nirampavaḻakiyar, Maṟaiñāṉacampantar, Civākrayōkikaḷ, Ñāṉappirakācar, Civañāṉayōkikaḷ, and Cuppiramaṇiyatēcikar. In his detailed analysis of the six commentaries Devesenapathi (1974:9) suggests that while Nirampavaḻakiyar might be somewhat earlier, Maṟaiñāṉacampantatēcikar, Civākrayōkikaḷ, Ñāṉappirakācar all stem from the 16th century. In this section I mainly consult Maṟaiñāṉacampantatēcikar's commentary and resort to others only where necessary.

10 For an account of these four in the Śaivāgamas, see Chapter 15 of the *Parākhyatantra* in Goodall (2004).

11 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:928, verse 269):
caṉmārkkam cakamārkkam caṟputtiramārkkam
tātamārkkam eṉṟum caṅkaraṉaiyaṭaiyum
naṉmārkkam nāl avaitām ñāṉayōkam
naṟkiriyā cariyaiyeṉa navṉṟuvatum ceyvar
caṉmārkka muttikaḷ cālōkkiya cāmīppiya
cārūppiya cāyucciyam eṉṟu caturvitamām
muṉmārkka ***ñāṉattāl eytu mutti***
muṭiveṉpar *mūṉṟiṉukkum muttipatam eṉpar*

12 The sort of *yoga* envisaged here is that outlined, for example, in *Tirumantiram* 3 and 8 and described further in later works such as the *Aṭṭāṅkayōkakkuṟaḷ* of Kaḷantai Ñāṉappirakācar (15th century). On the latter work, see Aruṇācalam (2005b:141–142). In *Tirumantiram* 3, the system described in 3.1 as *aṣṭāṅgayoga* is meant to culminate, as *Tirumantiram* 3.9 makes clear, in a vision of Śiva and union with him. *Tirumantram*, 3.1.3:
aṉṉeṟi eṉṉeṟi eṉṉātē ***aṭṭāṅkan***
taṉṉeṟi ceṉṟu camātiyilē niṉmiṉ
naṉṉeṟi celvārkku ñāṉattil ēkalām
puṉṉeṟiyākatiṟ pōkkilēy ākumē

13 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:946, verse 273):
caṉmārkkam cakalakalai purāṇa vēta
cāttiraṅkaḷ camayaṅkaḷ tām palavum uṇarntu
paṉmārkkap poruḷ palavum kāṉāka mēlām
pati pacu pācam terittup paracivaṉaik kāṭṭum
naṉmārkka ñāṉattai nāṭi ñāṉa
ñēyamoṭu ñātiruvum nāṭāvaṇṇam
piṉmārkkac civaṉuṭaṉum peṟṟi ñāṉap
perumaiyuṭaiyōr civaṉaip peṟuvar kāṇē

14 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:947): . . . *civaṉuṭaṉ oṉṟupaṭṭu aikyamāṉa* ***camaracīya-pāvamām*** *ānantattai porunti* . . . The term *samarasībhāva* to refer to union with Śiva/Brahman in a yogic path is already present in at least two of the Āgamas which the commentators cite: the *Kāmika* (6.353) and particularly *Kālottara* (21,24,27,67,69 etc.).

15 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:969): *ñāṉattāl vīṭeṉṟē nāṉmaṟaikaḷ purāṇam nalla ākamaṅkaḷ colla* . . .

16 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:983):
aṟiyāmai aṟivakaṟṟiy aṟiviṉuḷḷēy
aṟivutaṉaiy aruḷināl aṟiyātēyaṟintu
kuṟiyatē kuṟittantakaraṇaṅkaḷōṭum
kūṭātē vāṭātē kuḷaintirupaiyāyil
piṟiyāta civaṉ tāṉē pirintu tōṉṟip
pirapañcapētam ellām tāṉāy tōṉṟi
neṟiyālē ivaiyellām allavāki
niṉṟeṉṟum tōṉṟiṭuvaṉ nirātāraṉāyē

17 Arunanti Civācāriyār (1958:994):
ñāṉamatiṉ ñāṉaniṭṭaiy uṭaiyōrkku
naṉmaiyoṭu tīmai ilai nāṭuvat oṉṟillai
cīlam ilai tavam ilai viratamōṭē ācciramac
ceyal illai tiyāṉam ilai cittamalam illai
kōlam illai pulāṉ illaik karaṇam illai
kuṇam illai kuṟiyillai kulamum illai
pālaruṭaṉ uṉmattar pacācar kuṇam aruvip
pāṭaliṉōṭāṭal ivai payiṉṟiṭiṉum payilvar.

18 re. *Piracātatīpam*, p. 22 where an excellent summary of these aspects of the *caṉmārkkam* are given in the commentary of Kumāracuvāmi Kurukkaḷ.

19 This idea of being a demon or a ghost devotee of Śiva, a *pēy*, is a particularly important trope in Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār. See Craddock (2010) and Pechilis (2012) on this.

20 This view is expressed by Aṉavarata Viṉāyakam Piḷḷai in an influential essay on the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, cited in Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1976:73–74). We have further evidence for this in the introduction to the edition of the *Tiruvuntiyār*, *Tirukkaḷiṟṟuppaṭiyātār* edition which has a commentary composed by Ālālacuntaram Piḷḷai in which the commentator says:

> The *Tiruvuntiyār* and *Tirukkiṟṟuppaṭiyār* are like *sutra*s and their commentary. They take as their subject matter only *anupūti* which is spoken of in the section (*atikāram*) on the Ultimate Reality (*uṇmai*) of the *Civañāṉapōtam* and they have the excellence of being capable of explaining very simply how one might bring to an end the bonds which give grief and how to experience, in stages, the experience of Śiva (*civānupavam*) which gives joy.
>
> (Tiruvuntiyār, Tirukkaḷiṟṟuppaṭiyār, p. 7)

21 In his *Preface* to the study of the *Parākhyatantra* Goodall (xxxii, footnote 43) points out that the dates given for each of the works that form the corpus of the

Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ seem to be unsubstantiated by scholars, with each relying on the other. Thus, he suggests, looking at the evidence, that the only work that can be reliably dated in this literature is that of 1313 CE for the *Caṅkaṟpanirākaraṇam.* While this cannot be disputed one might be able to do a relative chronology of the texts in terms of their doctrinal evolution, a chronology which would definitely place the *Tiruvuntiyār* as prior to say the *Civañāṉacittiyār.* As Pechilis Prentiss (1999) has shown in her careful and excellent study of Umāpati Śivācārya, in his own works (and therefore by the 14th century at the latest) he accomplished the canonization within the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta of the *Tirumuṟai* and the works of his own teachers, Meykaṇṭār and Aruṇanti.

22 One might well ask why I would invent names for genres of works with Tamil Śaivism instead of sticking to emic categories. The idea that there is a class of works that one might call *anupūti* texts is certainly emic as we see its usage in this way at least in 19th-century authors. The reason for my typology becomes apparent when we see that, apart from some occasional indications, the best of the literary histories of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, including Mu. Aruṇācalam's multivolume study, which is the *locus classicus,* arrange their materials either along a temporal axis, a biographical axis, or a genre axis. Thus, Mu. Aruṇācalam (combines methods one and two, as does Auvai Turaicāmi Piḷḷai (1958) and Na. Cuppu Rettiyār (2001), who takes Aruṇācalam's work as his basis and reorganizes it to combine the biographical with the genre route. The most interesting of these ways of classification is in Capāpati Nāvalar (1976), who begins by showing the divinity of Tamil (*tamiḻiṉ teyvattaṉmai marapiyal*), moves on to discussing grammatical works (*ilakkaṇa marapiyal*), then works of literature (*illakiya marapiyal*), and concludes with a separate section on sacred scripture (*cāttira marapiyal*), with a temporal chronology within all these sections except the last mentioned which takes a doxographic approach, culminating in the Śaivasiddhānta – even as he is clearly attempting to create a division of "non-religious" and "religious" works. What we do not possess in any of these works is what we might call a chronological, intellectual history of the tradition, or even modestly, for certain periods of it though Mu. Aruṇācalam's prefatory remarks to the chapters on *Caiva ilakkiyam* in each century are a valiant attempt to begin to do this. This has necessitated my recourse to a category like the *Uraiyāṭal* text, which is the attempt to define a genre beyond the traditional ones and, at the same time, to gesture towards its manifold ideological development over the course of several centuries – and within the different branches of Tamil Śaivism.

23 On these works, see *Piracātatīpam, Mukavurai,* page 1. In contrast to them we have a poetic composition like Ativīrarāmapāṇṭiyar's (16th century) *Tirukkaruv aippatuṟṟupattantāti* which describes in a single beautiful verse this gnostic path:
kātal uṟṟiṭa maṉanilai peṟṟiṭak kaṉintiṭak kaḷikūrap
pōtam uṟṟiṭa yāṉ eṉateṉṟiṭum pulaicceṟukkaṟam āṟa
nātaṉ muttamiḻk karuvaiyam paraṉ eṉa nāttaḻump uṟavōtiy
ōti maṟṟu nāṉ peṟṟataiy iṟṟeṉavuraittiṭa muṭiyāte (verse 21)

24 Aruṇācalam (2005b:142–143). Aruṇācalam assigns Ciṟṟamapalanāṭikaḷ to the 14th century.

25 Thus, for instance, the Dalit Buddhist intellectual Ayōttitāsa Paṇṭitar (19th century) in his remarkable work the *Ātivētam,* which narrates the life of the Buddha, was clearly familiar with and repeatedly cites the *Nikaḻkālattiraṅkal* in the work. On the *Ātivētam,* see Chapter 4.

26 Muttaiya Cuvāmikaḷ (1907): *srī kumāratēvacuvāmikaḷ ātīṉam muttaiyā cuvāmikaḷ iyaṟṟiya ciṉmaya tīpikai.*

27 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (2009:157–158). This information is also confirmed in the Introduction to the 1997 edition of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai.*

28 One can translate this first foot also as "the vowel "A" – where *uyir* refers to both vowel and to spirit/life.

29 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:1):
akaravuyirāyc cuṭaroḷiyāy akaṇṭavirivāytturiyanaṭuc
cikaramaṇiyā mavuṉanilaittēcōmayam eṉpataip pōṟṟip
pukariṉuḷḷattiṉ iruḷ akaṟṟap polintu vaḷar ciṉmayatīpam
pakaravaruḷum paramakuru patumamalar meṉpataṅ kāppām.

30 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:10).
arumaṟaiyiṉ cirapporuḷāy aṇṭapakiraṇṭamumāy amalamōṉat-
toruporuḷāyp palavitamāy uṇarvariya pēroḷiyiṉ uṇmaiyākum
peruveḷikaṇ āṉantam peṟutaṟkuk kurupatattaip peṟutal vēṇṭiy
iruḷaṟavē malaviḷakku neñcaiy aḷaitt aṟivuraitta iyalpu colvām.

31 Murugesa Mudaliar (1972:6):

> Resplendent like the sun, moon, and agni and knowing the past, present and future, unmatched in the three worlds, swarga, bhūloka and pātāla, knowing the three paths kriya, upāsana and suddha, experiencing the three cit-bheda jnanas (jiva-turiya, para-turiya and Siva-turiya) and transcending all the three malas (ānava, karma and maya) and free from the three affections (ātmika, baudhika and deivika) the Jivanmukta shines.
> See also *Tirumantiram* 8.22 on these three *turiyā* states.

32 re. *Tirumantiram* 7.15.5 on *mavuṉam*; 3.6.5, 5.19.8, 6.4.2, 7.22.3 (*cōtiyiṉuḷḷē cuṭaroḷiyāy niṟkum*)

33 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:66):
aravu taṉakkamutaḷittu vaḷarttum ulakuyir taṉakkum aṉpāy aṉṉam
parukavaruḷ purintu kaṭaṟpalavuyirkkum uṇavaruḷippaṇpāy niṉṟu
taruneruṅkum paruvaṉattiṉ maran taṉakkun tārakamāyt taṇṇīr nalki
arumaiyoṭu vaḷarttiṭu naṟporuḷ irukkavuḷaṉṟaṉaiyēyalaiyuneñcē.

34 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:67):
muṭṭaiyiṉuṭ kuñciṉukkum amutīntu vaḷarttu moyttataḷirkkuc cāyan
tiṭṭamuṭaṉiṭṭu vaḷarteṅkiṉukku nīr aruḷic cēṉīrmīṉiṉ
kuṭṭitaṉakkuḷ irukkum muṭṭaṉakkuk kūrmaitaṉaik koṭuttu
mōṉaveṭṭaveḷiyāy parañcuṭar irukka vīṉāka melintāy neñcē.

35 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:22).
vāricūḻpuvitaṉayē tammateṉa mattitāṇṭu māṇṭamaṉṉar
pāriṉiṉuṇmaṇ nikarppāreṉavuraikkum paḻamoḻip paṭṭāṅku kēṭṭum
tār ilaṅkun tāmamuṭit taraṇiparkaṇ mutalāṉōr taḷarntu tēkañ
cīr aṟavē cettu maṇṇāñ ceyal aṟintum puvimayakkiṟ cērntāy neñcē.

36 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:33):
paḻuttamaram taṉiṟ paṟavai niṟaintiruntu paḻamōyap paṟantē pōṟ
koḻuttaniti ciṟuttavuṭaṉ cuṟṟam akaṉṟiṭum allāṟ kūṭumō maṇ
vaḻutta maṉṉarmuṭi tāḻap puviyāṇṭōr irantuṇṭu vāṭum pōtil
aḻuttamuṭaṉ ātaritta cuṟṟam uṇṭō nilaiyaṟṟēyalainta neñcē.

37 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:46–47):
kuruti tacai narampelumpu tōl kuṭal cīniṇaṅkaḷeṉuṅ kūṭṭaṅ kūṭi
maruvu puḻukkiṭamākum ivvuṭaṟkuc contamā maṇṇai vēṇṭit
tiriyal uṟṟāy uṭaṉ māṇṭēyyevvitamumaṇṇākac cērumeṉṉē
karuti nilai peṟṟilayē maṇmaṉaiyē contameṉak kavarum neñcē.

38 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:75):
cāti taṉil uyarntōrkaḷ uṭal aṉṉamayam eṉṉiṟṟāḷntōrkk anta
nītiyām alatu cayitaṉiyam eṉṟiṭil atuvāy niṟkum eṉṉiṟ
pētam uṟumō kaṉakapāttirattunīriṉilē pirati tōṉṟuñ
cōtikatiravaṉ vērōvaṅkaṇattiṟ piratiyuṟṟa cuṭartāṉ vērō.

39 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:76):
kokkutaṉiṟ kukkiṭantāṉ kūtiy iṭil aṇṭam atu kuṟikkumō coṟ
pakkuvattiṟ kaṭaicciyaraip pāṅkāka vētiyarkaḷ parintu kūṭiṟ
ṟakkavintu tariyātō cuṭalai taṉiṟ cuṭunāṟṟan tāṉ vēṟuṇṭō
mikkavuraiyātiyantam pētam uṇṭō

40 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:84–85):
nilavoḻukumatimukatti ṉeṭumūkku nūṇṭaviḻinimaiyum mutteṉṟ-
ilakum iḷanakaiyataṉai maṟaikkum itaḻaiyuṅ kuṟittēy īrntupārkkil
alamikuttavācai tarum arivaimukattaḻak ataṉai aṟiyalāku
mulaiyataṉai mūṭiya tōl akaṉṟiṭil am mulaiyaḻakum uṇarvāy neñcē

41 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:87–88):
kaḷḷoḻukumalar cūṭṭik kuḻanāṟṟan taṉai māṟṟik kaḷapaccēṟṟaiy-
aḷḷiy avaṇmītaṇintēy uṭanāṟṟamāṟṟivaittāy avaṇ muṉṉiṉṟu
veḷḷelumpaik kāṭṭi nakaittiṭa mayaṅkiyuṭaṉ maṟantu vēṭkai miñcik
kaḷḷamalattuṭaṉ kalanta neñcē nīyavaḷ uṭalaik karutilayē.

42 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:92–93):
nāṭi naramelumpu tacai tōṟ kuruti niṇam potintu nāṟṟaṟ pūṟṟaṟ
kūṭiyaṟtiṟ puḻukkutikkuṅ kumpiyeṉum malapāṇṭakkūṭṭai nāḷun
tēṭariya pēraḻakām eṉatuṭal eṉṟacai mikac ciṟantatālē
vāṭum iṭaiyuṭaiyār uṭaṉ mēl ācaiyuṟṟāy uṉṉuṭalai matittilāyē.

43 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:95):
katti karan tavaṟi karat ariya tacai tōṉ narampu kāṇak koytē
atti veḷikaṇṭat eṉavuraippataṉṟit tōṟkūteṉṟakatteṇṇātmaṟ
cittiramāy aḻakumaṇipūṇ ilaṅkat taṉaṅ kalavai timirntu vācak
kottumalarttār aṇintēy iṟumāppāyp peṇmayakkaṅ koṇṭāy neñcē.

44 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:97):
piṇaṅkaḷ cuṭuñ cuṭukāṭṭukēki taṉiyākavoru piṇattiṉpāṟ ceṉṟ-
iṇaṅkip parappataṅkiyavēy uṇarntaṟiyiṉ piṇavuṟuppum icainta tōluṅ
kaṇaṅkoṇavai niṇam oḻukumpaṭi nāṟa vēkum ataik kaṇṭēyenta
maṇaṅkoḷ uṭalṟaṉaic cuṭiṉum ivvitamām eṉa karuti matittiṭāyō.

45 Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ (1907:99):
pulaṉ kalaṅki maṉa mayaṅkiyaṟivaḻintu nilai taḷarntu poṟiyu metta
valam vantu mey taḷarntu kaṇṇiruṇṭu vāy kuḻaṟiyāvi niṉṟa
nilai kalaṅki maraṇam uṟum vētaṉaiyaip paramaṟivu nilaiyēyallāṟ
palar aṟiya voṇṇāta maraṇavattai varu muṉṉum paṭiyāy neñcē.

46 On the parallels between the *Meyñāṉap pulampal* and the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, see Steinschneider (2017).

47 For a firm rejection of an early dating of the work, see Goodall (2004).

48 In his commentary on verse 12, which deals with the title of the work Tiruppōrūr, Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. late 17th century) says that it means absorption into the state of *cukātītam* (*sukhātīta*), just prior to the ultimate state of salvation. This is also considered the stage when there is the complete annihilation of a sense of "I-ness" (or egoity, for which the Tamil Śaivasiddhāntic term is *taṟpōtam*) paving the way for the attainment and enjoyment of Śiva in the state of salvation – in *śivabhoga*.

49 Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005:162).

50 For an analysis of the text as a trans-sectarian, non-conformist Śaiva work, see Steinschneider (2017).

51 *kālap pū* – referring to the lotus that unfurls its petals with the sun.

52 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:45, verse 16):
āliṅkaṉattilē aintiṉaiyum pāṭuvōṉ
māliṉpavāri maṟitirai pōṟ kālappū
kiṇkiṇivāyc ceytatu pōṟ kiṉṉarip pāṭṭu ullācam
koṇṭavar pōṟ kaṇṇtavarkkām.

53 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:90, verse 54):
tattuvattār allār calacantiraṉ oppār
tattuvattār ceyyun tavātavaṅkaḷ cuttak
kakaṉa maḻaiyāṟ kaḻuvik kāṟṟaik kaṉalāl
takaṉañ ceyal pōl teḷi.

54 The best succinct definition of *parai* is within the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* itself, in verse 41:
Knowing oneself through grace (*aruḷālē tammai aṟintu*), being Grace (*aruḷāy*) – that very fulfillment is *parai* (*antap paripūraṇamē paraiyāy*).

55 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:320–321).

56 On this, see Chapter 7.

57 *Oḻiviloṭukkam,* verses 235–240 reiterate this in various ways.

58 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:254).

59 The standard Advaitic imagery to explain the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of objects on to the subject or *ātman.*

60 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:68, verse 35):
paḻutaiyaip pāmpeṉṟa payam pōṉāl pāvittu
aḻutuṭampai āṭṭukiṉum āmō toḻil oḻivil
niṉṟa civayōki niṉaittorukāl nī vārāi
eṉṟaḻaittālum pataiyātu eṉ.
The commentary takes the phrase "You come" (*nī vārāi*) to refer to the previous stages (*avasthās*) in the soteriological path the *Śivayogī* has already crossed over and will not return to. I would suggest that the phrase might well refer to a return of "I-ness" (*taṟpōtam*), which has also been forever crossed.

61 *Oḻiviloṭukkam* (2004:69).

62 Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005:175).

63 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:33, verse 1):
cīvakāruṇiyam *pācavairākyaṅ cīrpiraṅkiy-*
ōvilāvīcaṉpattiyoḻivaḷarpiramañāṉantākiya
nāṉkuntāṉē kuravaṟkuc caṭalam eṉṉuñ
cāvatum piṟappatum illāc caṅkaraṉ ākamaṅkaḷ

64 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:107).

65 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:109).

66 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:109): *uṉakkum aṉṉiyamē vēṭeṉṟaṟi.*

67 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:109, verse 42):
meṉpuḻukkaḷātiy uyir vīṭum eṉa nāṭit tam
meṉpatattai melleṉavē vaippār – iṉpak
kuṭainiḻal kīḻniṟpatellāṅ kuṟṟam eṉak kaṇṭa
caṭaparataṉ itaṟkkuccāṉṟu

68 Civañāṉavaḷḷal (1895:109, verse 43):
vēṅkai pulāṉ maṟuttu vīṭuṟṟataṉṟiyum ōr
tīṅkakaṉṟa nāraiyumīṉṟiṉṉāmaṟ – pūṅkayilaiy-
uṟṟiruntatantōvoru puṟavukkāy aracaṉ
muṟṟumarintīntilanō muṉ.

69 The listing of these fourfold qualities in the *Vaḷḷalār cāttiram* and then in subsequent *Uraiyāṭal* texts cannot but help lead us to the parallels this establishes with the *sādhana-catuṣhṭaya* of Advaita Vedānta within the common framework of the teacher–disciple dialogue. This seems to be a clear and further example of the influence of Advaita Vedānta on the Siddhānta and then the Vīraśaiva soteriological traditions.

70 I am very grateful to Eric Steinschneider for drawing my attention to these relevant passages in an email communication on 26th March 2020.

71 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:28): *pentir tāy mutaliya pōkapantattiṉai eṉṉateṉavum, acutta tukkānittiyaṅkaḷē cakacamāyuḷḷa tēkapantattiṉai yāṉ eṉavum, maṉattiṉ kaṉ vaittuk karutum oppaṟṟa mayakkamākiya iruḷait tuṟavākiya oḻiyiṉālē nīkki maṉamākiya vīṭṭiṉai viḷakkañ ceytaliṉāl intac cāttirattukkup peyar vairākkiyatīpam eṉṟu collappaṭum.*

72 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:28): *illaṟa muṟṟum vaḻuvātu naṭakkavē kuṭumpaṅ kuṟṟamāyt tōṉṟum; itaṉāṟ puṟattuṟavaram varum; ittuṟaviṉāl tavattaip paṇṇa varum; ittavattāl uṭṭuṟavu varum; ivvuṭṭuṟavāl meyyuṇarvu piṟakkum; immeyuṇarvāl piṟappu nīṅkum.*

73 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:65): *cellu, kotuku, mūṭu, eṟumpu, tēḷ mutaliya uyirkaḷukku* ***cīvakāruṇyattai*** *viṭuttut tuṉpañ ceytaliṉ maṉattiṉkaṇ aḻukkēṟum.*

74 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:65): *piṟatōr uyirkku vanta tuṉpattait taṉakku vanta tuṉpattaip pōṉṟu pōṟṟikkoḷḷāṉākil peritākiya cāttiraṅkaḷai aritiṉāṟ kaṟṟaṟinta aṟiviṉāl ōr payaṉāvatuṇṭōv- eṉṟu tiruvaḷḷuvaṉāyaṉār kūṟiṉamaiyāl . . .*

75 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:69): *uyirkaḷaik kollāta nalattiṉaiyuṭayatu tavam eṉṟu tiruvaḷḷuvanāyaṉār kūṟutaliṉ oṉṟiṉum paṟṟaṟṟa tuṟavu poruntiya uḷḷatiṉkaṭ* ***cīvakāruṇyam*** *nilai peṟṟirukkum.*

76 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:75).

77 Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (1991:76): ***cīvakāruṇyam****, īcurapakti, pācavairākkiyam, piramañāṉam eṉṉum nāṅkum oru vaṭivaṅkoṇṭatupōl . . .*

78 For a brief description of the *Śivadharma* textual corpus, see Bisschop (2014). For a possible early dating of the *Śivadharmottara*, see Goodall (2011: footnote 32). For the transmission of the corpus and the manuscript evidence, see De Simini and Mirnig (2017).

79 For an account of the enduring popularity of the *Civatarumōttaram* in the environs of Trichi and Tiruchirappally, in Vaidika Śaiva households, well into the first half of the 19th century, see Aruṇācalam (2005c:173).

4 Hunger and Compassion – the *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam*

Dalit Assertion and Tamil Vedānta

In the previous chapter we looked extensively at the genealogy of *cīvakāruṇyam* as it emerged in the *Uraiyāṭal* texts between the 15th and 19th centuries. While firmly located within a soteriology of a Śaivite and yogic path to liberation we saw also that, in the person of the *Śivayogī*, these works ventured into caste critique of a rational and mocking kind, couched in a simple diction that converged with the *Cittar* poetry. Other such works were less radical and more doctrinally oriented, giving a clear-cut account of the gnostic path. One such work was that of Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ (1815–1886), a somewhat older contemporary of Ramalingar, with *cīvakāruṇyam* in its title.

The *Cīvakāruṇya viḷakkam cuvānupūti viḷakkam* (henceforth, *CCV*) is a long poetic composition of 349 verses. The title page of the 1915 publication says: "This has been taught by Srī Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, who belongs to the *ātīṉam* of Intirapīṭam Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ, as it arose within his own experience (*svānūpūtiyil utittavāṟu*) and printed by his *Taruma Paripālaṉa Capai*". In simple yet highly philosophical language the text charts the path of the dissolution of egoity into Śiva-ness which we have encountered in the *Uraiyāṭal* texts and speaks of the relationship between the poet as the disciple and the guru, who guides him. The terminology for the ultimate state of liberation, which is slanted towards a monistic experiential understanding of dissolving into Śiva is also familiar to us. Thus, in charting its aim in the very first prefatory verse, the poet speaks of the ultimate reality as that great expanse (*peru veḷi*) which is God.[1] Other words repeatedly used for the ultimate state are light, *oḷi* (39, 41,) the self-illumined, *cuyaṉcōti* (55, 87), great light, *parañcōti* (verses 65, 105, 116, 244, etc.), the light in space, *veḷiyoḷi* (104) and the light that is sentience, *ciṟcōti* (220, 304). Those who see this light within also grasp that they themselves are Brahman or the ultimate reality (154). There is also the scepticism about true and false gurus (275) and other religions (274) and, most importantly, a conscious linking of his own lineage to that of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal in five significant verses, 321, 322, 325, 332, and 334, which anchor the text within the *Uraiyāṭal* tradition. The word *cīvakāruṇyam* appears nowhere within the work itself but is confined to the title.

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The life story of Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, the author of this work, is significant for understanding why Ramalingar and others like him focused on *cīvakāruṇyam* in the 19th century. For, in order to do so, we also need to grasp the caste dynamics of those who began to compose *Uraiyāṭal* texts, with the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* as their inspiration, in the 19th century. The hagiography of Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ tells us that he was born in 1815 in Īcūr in Tondaimandalam (now in the Kanchipuram district of northern Tamil Nadu) in the *Vēṭkōvar* caste of potters. The father's name was Cupparāyap Piḷḷai and mother Muṉiyammāḷ. When the child was three months old the parents moved to the potter's locality, the Kuyappēṭṭai also called Caṇmukañāṉapuram, near Puracai (i.e., Purasawakkam), now a part of the city of Chennai. The child's existence came to be known, through divine insight, by one local sage called Tōppā Paratēci, who then visited the child and prophesied great things of him. The link established with Tōpā Paratēci, who is undoubtedly Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ who lived in the first half of the 19th century is of great importance and I will return to this later. The child joined the local school at the age of five and immediately displayed evidence of the high intelligence that comes with "unlearnt learning" (*ōtātu uṇartal*).[2] As he grew he studied the *Caṅkam* literature and the grammatical literature with Vicākapperumāḷ Aiyar and his brother Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar, two important Vīraśaiva intellectuals and publishers of the 19th century, since they also lived in the Caṇmukañāṉapuram. Through studying with them he became *a pulavar*. He then applied for and got a job as Tamil teacher at the Madras Christian College.[3] He married Vēmpuli Ammai but had little interest in married life and meditated regularly on Civamurukaṉ. At this point he obtained Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ as his guru (*ñāṉakuru*). The hagiography says that Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ was the direct disciple of Tirutturutti Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ,[4] whose abode, Tirutturutti (near Kumbakonam in the Thanjavur district) was claimed to be, along with Kāñci Kāmakōṭipīṭam, one of the *pīṭha*s established by Ādi Śaṅkara. Intirapīṭam Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ was said to be a Brahman and a *paramahamsā*, an enlightened advaitic guru, the hagiography tells us, who had many disciples.[5] His direct disciple Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ composed commentaries on the following works: *Cattap pirakaraṇam, Tacakāriya makāvākkiyam, Cacivaṇṇapōtam, Ñāṉavāciṭṭam, Vētānta cūḷāmaṇi*, and the *Kaivalyanavanītam*.[6] In this fascinating list we see both the most important Tamil Advaita Vedāntic works and a Śaivasiddhāntic work like the *Tacakāriya makāvākkiyam*. The acquaintance between Caccitāṉanta and Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ was first facilitated by Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar when the former requested the latter to go over and rectify mistakes in his commentary on the *Ñāṉavāciṭṭam*. Caravaṇapperumāḷ Aiyar apparently offered Caccitāṉanta in his place. Thus, the latter became a disciple of Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ, after getting to know him, and was initiated in the advaitic lineage and texts. Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ passed away in 1866, and Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ took his place as the religious head of

the Tirutturutti Intirapīṭam.[7] The hagiography proceeds to speak of the independent works he composed, while remaining in the condition of an enlightened being in the world, in that it was an abiding in the knowledge of his own natural state (*sahajañāṉaniṣṭai*).[8] It is in this condition that he composes the work we are interested in: the *Cīvakāruṇya viḷakkam cuvānupūti viḷakkam* or *CCV* (*Elucidation of the Experience of the Self that is the Elucidation of Compassion towards Living Beings*).[9] He wrote commentaries to both Advaita Vedāntic works like the *Ñāṉavāciṭṭam* and the *Cacivaṇṇapōtam* as he did to Tamil Vīraśaiva works like *Pirapuliṅkalīlai*. When we consider the texts that he himself wrote and those he commented on and his teacher lineage (which included Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ of *Ciṉmayatīpikai* fame), we see that Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, like his guru, traversed without any ideological difficulty the doctrinal domains of Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, Vīraśaivism, and Advaita Vedānta, clearly seeing no contradiction between them.

More importantly, through the hagiography we come to have a glimpse of the caste dynamics at work in the interaction of these three vedanticized religious traditions within Tamil Śaivism by the 19th century. Thus, Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ's guru, Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ was purported to have been initiated by a Brahman advaitic guru, Tirutturutti Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ, on whom we have little and contradictory information.[10] Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ, in turn, initiated and was succeeded in his *maṭha* by Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ who comes from the Kucavaṉ caste group of potters, who at least till the 19th century were considered to belong to a Paṟaiyar/Dalit caste category.[11] Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, thus, overcame this birth indignity by becoming an erudite scholar within Tamil Śaivism, writing several independent works and commentaries. Equally important is that he came to be considered as the teacher of a figure like Muṉukappaṭu Nīlamēka Cuvāmikaḷ, the teacher of the Dalit guru Cuvāmi Cakajāṉantar (1890–1959), who started a school in Chidambaram in 1916 called Nantaṉār Kalvikkaḷakam for Dalit pupils and stood at the forefront of their education.[12] And Cuvāmi Cakajāṉantar was not unique but part of a wider landscape of Dalit vedāntic figures who inhabited the Madras Presidency in this period, including those such as Ēkāmpara Tēcika Cuvāmikaḷ, Advaitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, and Makāṉ Cāṅku Citta Civaliṅka Nāyaṉār. The last mentioned attached himself to the Vaḷḷal lineage and composed a work, the *Pūraṇāṉantōtayam* (*Pūṃānandodayam*), modelled on the *Oḷiviloṭukkam*, which continues the lineage of the *Uraiyāṭal* texts, now expanded to also accommodate Dalit learning and Dalit claims to soteriological knowledge in the late 19th century.[13] When we return to look carefully at Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ's hagiography, we see that the childhood identification of his greatness by Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ is an important pointer towards his further connection with the Vaḷḷal lineage. In his account of the latter's life, Pāṉukavi (1914) tells us that Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ lived in the early years of the 19th century and passed away in 1855. Two features of his life stand out. The first is that Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ was orphaned as a child and that he wandered about meditating on Tiruñāṉacampantar.

The latter appeared to him in a vision and taught him. Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ attained *svānubhūti* due to this teaching. Second, the hagiography of Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ shows that he seems to have had extensive contacts with the Kuyavar or potter community, granting the boon of children to childless couples within that community. This second motif would explain his presence in Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ's hagiography. Most importantly, the connection with Tiruñāṉacampantar and the self-initiation through a vision of him directly also links Tōpā Cuvāmikaḷ with the Vaḷḷal lineage and establishes a common link between him, Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal, Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, Ramalingar, and Cāṅku Citta Civaliṅka Nāyaṉār – the majority of whom are what we would call Dalit or subaltern religious figures of the 19th century.

This flowering of Dalit vedāntic gurus and vedāntic *maṭha*s must also be placed within the larger context of Dalit political claims and the evasive strategies adopted both by the state and local elites to contain these claims as Rupa Viswanath (2014) has shown in meticulous detail. It is within this colonial historical context and the emergence of figures such as these, then, that *cīvakāruṇyam* takes on a new lease of life in two radically different figures separated by half a century from each other. The first is Ramalingar whose seminal essay the *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam* is the focus of this chapter. The second person was probably the most brilliant and towering Dalit intellectual of the Tamil region in the late 19th and early 20th century – Iyothee Thass Pandithar (Ayōttitāsa Paṇṭitar) and his ambitious Buddhist narrative work the *Ātivētam*. I begin by briefly looking at the latter and then conclude the chapter with Ramalingar to demonstrate how *cīvakāruṇyam* comes to be reinterpreted, modernized, and radicalized by two of the most original thinkers in the Tamil religious landscape in the long 19th century.

Compassion in the Air

It has been recognized, not the least through the pioneering work of G. Aloysius (1998) and then V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai (1998), that the contributions of Ayothee Thass Pandithar were central to the emergence of a critical and radical Dalit intellectual and Buddhist discourse as part of the rise of Dravidian cultural nationalism starting from the second half of the 19th century. Ayothee Thass was a younger contemporary of Ramalingar, and many of his pioneering writings appeared between 1907 and 1914, in his weekly periodical *Tamiḻan*, long after the latter's disappearance. While much attention has been given to many of his writings there has been comparatively less work on the *Ātivētam*, his long narrative hagiography of the Buddha which was serialized in the *Tamiḻaṉ* under the title *Pūrvattamiḻ oḷi* (*The Light of the Ancient Tamils*) starting in 1907 and then printed and inaugurated as a book in 1912 with the additional title of *Puttaratu Ātivētam* (henceforth, *Ātivētam*). In his careful study of the serialization and printing of the *Ātivētam*, Stalin Rajangam (2016) shows us convincingly that as

the work started to emerge and consolidate so did its significance for the Buddhist organization Ayothee Thass had founded. This was the *Teṉṉintiya Cākkiya Pautta Caṅkam* and its branch organizations, established after his return from Ceylon in 1898 as a converted Buddhist. The establishment of this organization was to facilitate the institutionalization of Buddhism as the "religion" of Tamil Dalits. Thus, Ayothee Thass felt the need to support this endeavour by creating works and rituals for the organization which would inaugurate and instantiate a new Tamil Buddhism. The *Ātivētam* is this context was seen by both him and other members of his organization as the new Bible for the congregation. On 31st August 1912, a Saturday, the work was launched at *Irāyappēṭṭai Pautta Āciramam* in the presence of members of the branch organizations from Bangalore, the Kolar Gold Fields, etc., while its launch had been announced already in Burma, in the Rangoon branch of the organization, six days prior to the event. Once the publication came out, chapters were taken up for study in the branch organizations much as Bible study had been popularized by the Protestant churches in South India.[14] It is within this framework of the creation of a Bible for Tamil Buddhism that Ayothee Thass gave pride of place to *cīvakāruṇyam*.

It would be impossible to do justice to the richness and complexity of the *Ātivētam* in a few paragraphs of a chapter and it is not the intention of this section to do so.[15] Rather, I wish to briefly show how another subaltern figure of the 19th century, Ayothee Thass, who like Ramalingar did not have unmediated access to English or an English education but went through a traditional curriculum of learning, had either independently or through some mutual influence[16] come to also focus on *cīvakāruṇyam* in the most revelatory of his writings.

The first mention of *cīvakāruṇyam* in the *Ātivētam* is in the seventh chapter on the Four Noble Truths – *catur cattiya kātai*. The Enlightened One, the Buddha, has now reached Kāci, started the *Saṅgha*, and is beginning to give his discourses. In explaining the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha further outlines the Eight-Fold Path (*Pāli: ariya aṭṭaṅgika magga*, *Ātivētam*: *paricutta aṣṭāṅkamārkkam*) and, in doing so, comes to the fourth of these, *Right Conduct* or *camma kammantā* in Pāli – *naṟceykai* in the *Ātivētam*.

> To the extent that a person who has ceased to lie attains a state of knowledge of truthfulness that is more than any pleasure, he will prevent killing near him and stand as one full of *cīvakāruṇyam*. If one were to ask what is the throne composed of in that place of happiness called *mutti*, *mōṭcam*, and *nirvāṇam*, then [the answer is] through that *cīvakāruṇyam* that prevents killing. More than other humans calling a person a good person, if all living beings were to appreciate his love as a good person, his *cīvakāruṇyam* love will, verily, be called a stream of happiness. If a person, looking towards a renunciation within the heart that destroys birth by bringing to an end the sorrow of endless, repeated rebirth, were to prevent killing and look at *cīvakāruṇyam* the path of renunciation will become apparent.[17]

In the discourse as it continues the Buddha continues to speak of how killing any other living being for food is the path to hell. The rest of this section of the discourse is an impassioned plea for the rejection of meat (*pulāl maṟuttal*) with an explanation about how all life forms from worms to deities are part of an interconnected chain of being and, hence, even at a cost to oneself one should not kill others.

The next reference to *cīvakāruṇyam* is in the ninth chapter which is titled, "The Chapter on Protecting the Deer and Lifting up the Red Hot Iron" (*māṉak kāttu maḻuvēntiya kātai*). The Buddha enters a forest and sees a tiger about to kill a deer. He prevents it from doing so and offers his own body instead to the tiger, which is overcome by compassion and moves away. Soon after this, he encounters a brazier who makes fun of his care for the deer. There ensues a dialogue between the two of them in which the Buddha talks about the need for compassion and care towards all living beings and about the fires of hunger, anger, and desire that burn within each human being and how one has to bring them under one's control. Here, again, we have the reference to *cīvakāruṇyam*:

> If you control the heat of the three fires that rise within you, you will be called, with all due honours, a *cīvakāruṇyaṉ*, crossing over the state of being a human and obtaining and living in a state of happiness of the gods and Brahma.[18]

We then follow the discourse on *cīvakāruṇyam* in the subsequent chapter where events are narrated which take place on a mountain called Caturakiri. The Buddha gives a talk to the people living at its base. He begins by discussing the social division of humans into various categories culminating in those who are of his ilk – the *cammācamputtavarkkam*. He advises them to live as exemplars to the rest of society and adds:

> May you live as the truthful ones in the midst of liars. Illuminate the path of liars through your truth. May you live as those with *cīvakāruṇyam* in the midst of killers. May you shine your compassion in the midst of killers.[19]

The next doctrinally significant passage on *cīvakāruṇyam* is found in the twenty-second chapter called "The Chapter on Karma" (*kaṉma kātai*), where there is a discussion of the ten perfections (*pārami/pāramitā*) that lead to Buddhahood. In defining the ninth perfection which is Theravāda Buddhist doctrine, "the perfection of loving kindness" (*metta-pāramitā*) the *Ātivētam* has the following sentence:

> *maittrī*: in the same way in which a mother takes care of and guards her only son, to show *cīvakāruṇyam* towards all beings.[20]

The final reference explicitly to *cīvakāruṇyam* is a single sentence in the twenty-eighth chapter on the Buddha's *parinirvāna* where he talks to

Ānanda on his deathbed. Here, again, he speaks of how compassion is not to hurt other souls rather than to think about one's own self protection and adds that those who are without *cīvakāruṇyam* and kill others will be reborn as humans again and again.[21]

In his introduction to the book edition of the *Ātivētam*, Ayothee Thass speaks of some of the sources he used in reconstructing the life of the Buddha in this work. He points out that rather than relying more on works composed elsewhere, in another language, he wishes to rely on those works composed in Tamil by the Buddha's *Caṅkam* in the land of his birth. He then lists a series of such works in Tamil: *Aruṅkalaicceppu*, *Aṟaneṟitīpam*, *Aṟaneṟiccāram*, *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, *Tirumantiram*, *Tirivācakam*, *Tirikkaṭukam*, *Maṇimēkalai*, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, *Cilappatikāram*, *Vaḷaiyāpati*, *Kuṇṭalakēci*, *Cūḷāmaṇi*, *Nikaḻkālattiraṅkal*, *Nikaṇṭu*, *Tivākaram*, *Peruṅkuravañci*, *Ciruṅkuravañci*, *Peruntiraṭṭu*, and the *Kuṟuntiraṭṭu* as some of his sources. This acknowledgement of indebtedness to these works is substantiated by the footnotes in the *Ātivētam* which refer to them repeatedly throughout, not as direct citations but as influences on the narrative. This is a fascinating list for various reasons. The first is that it spans texts from the latter half of the first millennium CE to well into the 17th century, showing the wide range of his erudition in pre- and early-modern Tamil literature. Second, it includes works considered canonical within the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta tradition, from the *Tirumuṟai*, as well as those which would be considered as marginal to it and part of the Tamil Advaita Vedānta, such as Tattuvarāyar's *Peruntiraṭṭu* and *Kuṟuntiraṭṭu*. Works which are very specific to the Tamil Śaivite tradition, such as Cīkāḻi Cirrampalanāṭikaḷ's *Nikaḻkālattiraṅkal* which is a 50-verse praise-poem on Meykaṇṭatēvar lauding his incarnation on earth to teach one the true knowledge, are brilliantly reimagined within the context of the coming of the Buddha, where the latter substitutes for Meykaṇṭatēvar. In addition to these there are the works, thesauri (*nikaṇṭu*s) and the narrative literature composed by Jaina authors. Here Ayothee Thass tells us:

> The true dharma will be known clearly if one were to investigate the works of the Jaina authors, the scriptures of the ancient, wise Buddhists, transmitted orally [literally: from ear to ear] and their deeds known through experience.[22]

The *Ātivētam*, therefore is an attempt to reconstruct a Tamil Buddhism through an imaginative act of seeking it consciously within the existent and pre-modern Tamil literature which Ayothee Thass believed had been appropriated and camouflaged, eventually leading to the destruction of Buddhism in the land of its origins. Thus, seen within this context and framework, we are able to grasp that *cīvakāruṇyam* is taken by Ayothee Thass from its Tamil Śaivite context, where it was elaborated between the 15th and 19th centuries and re-appropriated for and aligned with the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism in the *Ātivētam*. Its immediate context and the

longest passage on it comes in the discourse on Right Conduct – *naṟceykai*. It is also here that we most transparently see the Śaivite genealogy of the concept of *cīvakāruṇyam*. Thus, it is framed as relating to a path of renunciation, *tuṟavu*, and one which ensures that one is not repeatedly reborn. It is the very material of which a seat in liberation is secured, says the Buddha. He then goes on to speak of it as a fellow feeling for all life forms that exist in the chain of being with humans, which would lead one to abjure any injury to them and any consumption of them. In reading this we recognize that Ayothee Thass does not simply adapt *cīvakāruṇyam* to Theravāda Buddhist doctrine. If this were the case he would have had to put very different words into the mouth of the Buddha relating to not eating meat, an issue linked to not killing animals. As Stewart (2010) in an article that analyses the issue of the killing of animals and vegetarianism has shown, the *Pāli* canon juggled a paradoxical position on this matter. On the one hand, it endorsed a strong claim for not harming any beings and therefore for not killing animals. This claim was based on empathy as well as the bad results it produces both for the person doing the killing and the animal killed. On the other hand, it permitted monks to eat meat, with the view that they must eat all that is offered to them by the laity, so long as the animal had not been specifically slaughtered for the purpose of feeding them. In contrast to this nuanced and complicated compromise in the *Theravāda* canon, the *Ātivētam* follows the unambiguous strictures on vegetarianism and the non-killing of animals that has been intrinsic to the genealogy of *cīvakāruṇyam* once it came to be linked with the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in the Tamil context. Thus, *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ayothee Thass is inherently Tamil and Buddhist in a way he consciously intended it to be.

Nevertheless, as we cumulatively look at the *cīvakāruṇyam* references in the text we see an additional doctrinal framework, a Buddhist Theravāda framework, which Ayothee Thass familiarized himself with before writing the *Ātivētam*. This is the framework pertaining to the Buddhist doctrine of the "boundless states/divine abidings" (*brahma-vihāras*) and the meditations (*bhāvanā*) on them. As Patel (2013) has pointed out, the comprehensive account of them first appears in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (ca. 5th century CE). The first of these states is *maitrī/mettā*, a word usually translated as loving-kindness and considered as encompassing in some way also all the other states. Patel's article shows that particularly *maitrī/mettā* became the central focus of modern and popularizing Buddhist movements in the 20th century. It is just such a focus on *maitrī/mettā* that we see in Ayothee Thass also, where he essentially defines it with *cīvakāruṇyam*. In terms of traditional Theravāda Buddhist doctrine the cultivation of *matrī*, like the cultivation of *cīvakāruṇyam* by the one who aspires to become a *Śivayogi*, was not a practice aimed at the person still entangled in domestic life. As Bond (2004) points out:

> Classical Theravada taught that the *brahmavihāras* represented enstatic states of mental tranquility that could be reached by withdrawing from

> the world and practicing *samādhi* (the meditation of calmness) . . . . *The brahmavihāras were traditionally cultivated by withdrawing from the world, not by acting in the world.* As subjects of meditation they produced calm mental states; creating an ethic for social involvement was not their purpose. The meditator who perfected the mental states of loving kindness or compassion infused these qualities into the world, not by doing social work, but by going through a process that Winston King described as "individualized radiation of virtue and health into society by holy persons".[23]

Despite this caveat, the potential for *maitrī* functioning as the basis for an ethical stance towards the world it has been argued had always been present.[24] In Ayothee Thass it is possible only when one takes an ethical stance to not lie. In the most extensive passage on *cīvakāruṇyam*, the Buddha says that the precondition for it is truthfulness and reiterates it in another shorter passage. Thus, Ayothee Thass gives *cīvakāruṇyam* an ethical foundation and then proceeds to anchor it firmly in the social, in an alternative religion for the Tamils which would stress the cultivation of an ethical personhood and a just, caste-free society. Through this hermeneutical move Ayothee Thass in the *Ātivētam* disentangled *cīvakāruṇyam* from the strictly yogic and soteriological path it had been embedded in within the Śaivite *Uraiyāṭal* texts and instead recalibrated it to function as both the basis and the *summum bonum* of being human and a social being. As Geetha and Rajadurai (1998) have pointed out Ayothee Thass's writings on Buddhism had two major themes. One was to detail the history of the decline of Buddhism and the rise of Brahmanism in the subcontinent. The second, to detail in its specifics how this decline had been orchestrated:

> Through a detailed re-reading of various Tamil sacral (and literary) texts, Iyothee Thass sought to demonstrate how the victory of Brahminism in the subcontinent signified a semiotic conquest, an achieved mastery over language and meaning.[25]

To claim *cīvakāruṇyam* for Tamil Buddhism, now reconfigured for an inherently egalitarian and exoteric religious tradition, was part of the project of a semiotic re-conquest, from Ayothee Thass's perspective. In some sense this is a kind of protestantization of *cīvakāruṇyam*, which once could be known and understood only through a teacher who conferred both knowledge of it and put one upon the right path in the pre-modern context. In doing this he had already been preceded almost a half century earlier, albeit in a strikingly different context and with an entirely different emphasis, by Ramalingar's impassioned appeal to the relationship between *cīvakāruṇyam*, social responsibility, and hunger.

The Conduct of Compassion

On 23rd May 1867 an inaugural ceremony took place in Vadalur. The occasion was the founding of the charitable feeding house by Ramalinga Swamigal. On the occasion of the founding of the almshouse a text was read out which subsequently, in the later canonization of Ramalingar's ouevre, came to be regarded as the central text of his religious ideology. This text was titled *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam* (*The Conduct of Compassion Towards Living Beings*, henceforth, *The Conduct*). The history of this document indicates that it was very important to Ramalinga Swamigal. It appears to have been conceived of, originally, as an oral discourse (which would also account for its highly repetitive nature), one that he then expounded upon and expanded subsequently into three sections. The third part is incomplete and remained so till the end of his life.[26] In examining how *cīvakāruṇyam* is the central tenet of Ramalingar's religion, the remainder of the chapter consists of three sections. The doctrines of *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ramalingar and how we might interpret them in the light of the long history of the concept in Tamil Śaivite literature will form the next section. This will be followed by a section where we look at an entirely different genealogy for the text – an equally long history of writings on hunger within the context of pre-modern Tamil literature. Finally, the two preceding sections will enable us to think further, in the final section, about Ramalingar's voice in the text and how the adoption of a certain kind of address and prophetic voice enabled him to consciously divest himself of the inherited genealogies, both religious and literary, thus paving the way for the formation of his sainthood within Dravidian nationalism.

The Doctrines of *Cīvakāruṇyam*

The Conduct consists of three sections in the 1997 edition of Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ. The first and longest section, *mutaṟpirivu*, is titled *Jīvakāruṇya oḻukkamē kaṭavuḷ vaḻipāṭu* (*The Conduct of Compassion towards Living Beings is the Worship of God*). The second section is called *Āṉma iṉpavāḻvu* (*The Life of Happiness for the Self).* The final section is titled *Jīvakāruṇya corūpam mutaliyaṉa* (*The Essential Nature of Cīvakāruṇyam etc.*) Each subsequent edition of *The Conduct* shows that this third section was incomplete to begin with, and that more and more bits of it were found and added with each later edition, even while it remained unfinished.[27] The first section of the text, and also its longest, also contains its core teachings. The second section speaks primarily of what the person who practices *cīvakāruṇyam* achieves. The third section of the text elaborates upon the first but essentially do not introduce any new elements. In the light of the nature of these sections an examination of Ramalingar's doctrines of *cīvakāruṇyam* concentrates primarily on the first two sections of *The Conduct.*

The Conduct unfolds as follows:

1) The aim of a human birth is to obtain one's self (*āṉmalāpam/ātmalābha*). This is nothing but getting the complete, natural bliss (*pūraṇa iyaṟkai iṉpam*) of God (*kaṭavuḷ*) and then living the great incomparable life (*oppaṟṟa periyavāḻvu*) that comes from the former.
2) How is this one to achieve this? Through God's grace (*aruḷ*) – which is also his natural illumination (*iyaṟkai viḷakkam*).
3) How does one obtain this grace? It can only be obtained through the conduct of compassion towards living beings. There is no other way. What does this mean? "Grace is God's mercy, his natural light. *Cīvakāruṇyam* is the souls' mercy, it is the natural light of their self".[28] One can obtain grace only through grace, he says. In another passage of this first section Ramalingar adds: "*Cīvakāruṇyam* is not only the main means to obtain God's grace but it is also the light of that single state of grace".[29]
4) Hence, there is the path of knowledge (*ñāṉavaḻi*), the true path (*caṉmārkkam*), and the conduct of *cīvakāruṇyam*, on the one side and their opposites on the other – the path of ignorance, the false path, and the lack of *cīvakāruṇyam*. Merit (*puṇṇiyam/puṇya*) is *cīvakāruṇyam* and demerit (*pāvam/papa*) is the lack of it.
5) Those who have obtained this path and the bliss that is attained through it are the living liberated (*cīvaṉmuttar/jīvanmukta*) and it is they who know God through their intelligence and become full of God (*kaṭavuḷmayam āvārkaḷ*).[30] Here, Ramalingar starts to elaborate on the specificities of this conduct of compassion.
6) He begins with a definition: "The conduct of compassion towards living beings is – living by worshipping the divine through that tenderness/melting of the heart (*urukkam*) that living beings feel towards other living beings".[31] This tenderness of the heart arises when one sees another suffering due to hunger, thirst, affliction, desire, poverty, fear, killing.
7) What is the obligation/privilege of intimacy (*urimai*) for *cīvakāruṇyam* to come about? It is the privilege of intimacy coming from brotherhood.

> When one sees one among his brothers is suffering due to danger or knows he will suffer, on seeing this is a brother, the tenderness that arises in a sibling is the privilege of the intimacy of brotherhood. [Similarly] one should know that when a living being is seen to suffer and one knows it will suffer it is an ancient privilege of the intimacy of the soul that [other] beings feel tenderness.[32]

Ramalingar adds that, correspondingly, those who don't seem to feel this way are those who whose eyes are dimmed due to a disease/cataract of ignorance (*añāṉakācam*) and won't be helped even by aids, like spectacles for the eyes. In contrast, those with *cīvakāruṇyam* have a clarity with regard to the vision of the self (*āṉmatiruṣṭi/ātmadṛṣṭi*).[33]

8) One might argue that the sufferings are experienced only by the sense-organs and not the self. Hence, why have *cīvakāruṇyam* for those who suffer? Ramalingar argues that the sense-organs are not sentient in themselves. They form the abode for sentience like the body forms a house for the soul. When there is suffering it is not the house which experiences it but the householder. Similarly, it is the self which experiences the suffering not its sense-organs.[34] These merely reflect the inner experiences of the self outside.
9) Why do so many people suffer from hunger etc.? Because in their previous lives they were beings with a cruel consciousness (*kaṭiṉacittar*) who had taken a path of inflicting pain. Ramalingar goes on to explain the basic two premises behind this argument: that there is something like previous births and that the soul experiences the effects of actions from previous births in this one. In making the case for both these views he resorts to the examples from a lived reality. A man who once lived in a house, we know, probably also lived in a house before and if he gives up this house he will move on to dwell in a new one. A man who lives in a certain way in one house will continue to live in the same way in another house.[35]
10) Surely if beings are suffering due to the sins from a previous life would one not be interfering with God's designs for them if one were to offer succour? In answer to this Ramalingar again picks up the analogy of the king and his subjects. Even when a king punishes his subjects for wrongdoing he, nevertheless, is happy when his other subjects are kind and help them out and appreciates and rewards the kind subjects. This is also what God would do.
11) This worldly conduct (*ikalōka vaḻakkam*) flourishes only due to *cīvakāruṇyam*. Ramalingar points out that it is only due to *cīvakāruṇyam* that both intelligence (*aṟivu*) and love (*aṉpu*) exist in the world. Without these there would not be fellow-feeling (*kaṇṇōṭṭam*), unity (*orumai*), or helpfulness (*upakāram*). Without all of these the weak will be preyed upon by the strong and the law of the jungle will prevail.[36] Otherworldly conduct also flourishes due to *cīvakāruṇyam*. Without it the light of grace will not fall upon one and there would be no liberation.
12) *Cīvakāruṇyam*'s goal must be to help those suffering from hunger and fear of killing etc., through the recognition that those enduring these will not be able to see the light of their inner self, and as a consequence of that not get God's grace. There would, instead, be a loop of cause and effect by which they would thus endure the same afflictions even more. There are two kinds of *cīvakāruṇyam* – the non-supreme *cīvakāruṇyam* (*aparacīvakāruṇyam*) that comes from removing all other afflictions and the supreme *cīvakāruṇyam* (*para cīvakāruṇyam*) that comes from removing hunger and killing. Ramalingar goes on to explain why supreme *cīvakāruṇyam* is called thus: hunger, thirst, and disease are connected. The lack of food leads to disease and the inability to care for oneself.

Someone who is fed can take care of his needs at least incrementally. But, "there is no greater poverty than that which comes through hunger".[37] Both hunger and fear of being killed generate a fear (*payam*) – one might be able to live with fear but one cannot live with hunger.[38]

13) Ramalingar asks us to consider the nature of the cosmos and our duty with regard to hunger. We are not obliged to take care of the gods or those in hell. Nor are we of moving and stationary beings, and animals because God will attend to them and create ways for them to hunt out and find food for themselves. Of course it is our duty to make sure that we provide food to domestic animals. In contrast to all this, if due to fate (*ūḻvakai*) humans suffer from hunger and rely on each other for food then they have to be helped because a human body is hard to get in the course of transmigration and it should be cherished.
14) He makes an interesting and obscure distinction between the kinds of food that animals need as opposed to humans. Animals and birds only need food that pertains to their fate (*niyati ākāram*) and to take care of their karma within this life. In contrast, humans need that and, in addition, food that takes care of the karma that is to come – the *ākāmiya muyaṟci ākāram*.[39]
15) Then he comes to vegetarianism. It is unacceptable, he says, to assuage the hunger of one being through the killing of another.[40] This is because the light of God (*kaṭavuḷ viḷakkam*) is in all beings. Meat is tāmasic food since its hides God's light. Here he resorts specifically to *Śaivasiddhāntic* terminology: the satisfaction that one gets from eating meat is the satisfaction of the *pacu* – the self whose intelligence has been ruined through its bondage to the eternal dirt of *āṇava, māyā*, and *karma*. The light that comes from eating this tāmasic food is brought about by impure *māyā*. He expands even further on considerations of harm to other living beings by eating them by asking and answering where we should stand on eating plants and fruits. After all these are living beings too and would be hurt by our eating them. To this he replies by saying that yes, indeed, eating plants and fruits is also the eating of tāmasic food. Nevertheless, they are beings with very limited sentience and living consciousness. Further, this consciousness is in their roots and stems and not in their fruits and leaves. Hence, by eating only the latter we are not acting against *cīvakāruṇyam*.[41]
16) The next topic is the goal that is achieved (*cāttiyam*) through *cīvakāruṇyam*. There are two kinds of goals: the non-supreme happiness (*aparā iṉpam*) and the supreme happiness (*parā iṉpam*). The person who supports others by giving them clothes, a place to stay, land to cultivate, a wife to marry and some possessions they might use as they wish, through *cīvakāruṇyam* attains non-supreme happiness. Thus, Ramalingar says, when one provides some or all of this to others,

> the light of happiness which appears from within in the face of those who receive [all this], and the joy of those who give on seeing that happiness, emerge to a limited extent as the activity of

> God and fully as the activity of the soul. Due to this it should be known as non-supreme happiness.[42]

In contrast to this, he continues: "The happiness which comes from stopping the pain that comes from hunger is supreme happiness".[43] This is because the circle of happiness which is thereby generated, both in the person who receives and in the person who gives it, is complete and not just partial divine activity. For, he goes on to say, even when people are deprived of things like land, a house, or a wife they can still endure this lack or make their own effort to acquire these. When they are starving endurance, through some kind of mental striving, will not succeed but only result in their death.

17) At this point Ramalingar paints a detailed portrait of a society ravaged by hunger and how, in such a society, all normative behaviour is upended.

> If when hunger comes, parents will dare to sell their children, children their parents, wives will be sold by their husbands and a husband by his wife, thus trying to change the suffering brought about by that hunger, then, it is unnecessary to say that they would sell that which is alien to them like house, cattle, land, possessions, to quell their hunger.[44]

Kings, he says, will lose their authority when confronted by hunger and plead for help; fearless warriors become weak and fearful of hunger; those men of wisdom who have renounced everything and know true intelligence, as well as yogis who are in a state of steady contemplation (*niṭṭai*), siddhas, seers – all of them when confronted by hunger will abandon the goals they seek or experience and when not receiving alms lose their equanimity. Those orthodox who adhere to the conduct of their caste and their religion strictly will, once hunger comes, forget these caste strictures and await food. After this comes an extraordinary passage which describes hunger by starvation, which I will go into greater detail in the next section. Speaking of both the social effects and the physical effects of hunger and starvation Ramalingar concludes that "the satisfactory joy (*tirupti iṉpam*) which arises from nourishment (*ākāram*) is nothing but the joy of salvation (*mōkṣa iṉpam*)".[45]

18) The next lengthy and impassioned passage returns to a more comprehensive definition of *cīvakāruṇyam* and ends with a stricture about its universality:

> *Cīvakāruṇyam* is having the hunger of each person satisfied, while regarding them as equal, in accordance with their customs, regardless of which place those who suffer from hunger come from, which religion, which caste, of whatever conduct, without instructing them or enquiring as to the customs of their country, religion, caste, conduct, etc., knowing that God's light shines equally in all living beings.[46]

19) Then Ramalingar shows where *cīvakāruṇyam* can be placed when one looks at it from the perspective of the traditional soteriology of the Śaivasiddhānta:

> Therefore, those householders who, when there is still time for it, earn the keys of *cīvakāruṇyam* to the house of salvation, not requiring the means which are aids [to this salvation] such as *cariyai, kiriyai, yōkam* and *ñāṉam*, will attain the house of bliss which one never attains at any time, will open the doors of that house and enter, and live as the eternally liberated ones.[47]

He enters into the details about what each of these traditional paths to liberation involves: *cariyai* and *kiriyai* include pilgrimages to sacred places, living there, worshipping the gods who dwell there, and doing ritual activities like taking vows (*viratam ceytal*), doing sacrifices (*yāgam ceytal*), and worshipping (*pūcai ceytal). Yōkam* is the control of the senses and dissolving the mind. *Ñāṉam* is the renunciation of all attachments and obtaining the experience of Brahman. Of those who follow these four paths but have not followed the conduct of compassion, he says,

> Those who have not earned the keys called *cīvakāruṇyam*, they will rise up here and there and wait in proximity to the mansion on high called liberation and go and return again to earn those keys. But one should know in truth, rather, that they won't have opened those doors, entered in and attained happiness.[48]

In the final part of the discourse he adds that it is these people, who follow *cīvakāruṇyam* who are in reality the *yogi*s and the *ñāṉī*s, those with wisdom.[49]

20) The discourse now segues into the pragmatics of *cīvakāruṇyam*. Ramalingar explains that one must undertake to feed others only according to one's capacity to do so. Those who are wealthier must do more. Those with less should at least ensure that their family is fed and healthy before they feed others. In all of this one can do more if one were to live economically, not host extravagant festivities and wedding, not serve sumptuous food on these occasions but live modestly so that one has accumulated the means to help others.[50]

21) The rewards of *cīvakāruṇyam* go beyond ultimate salvation:

> Those householders who regard it as their vow (*viratam*) to still the hunger of those hungering will not suffer from heat in the hot season, the earth will not warm them up, occurrences like heavy rains, strong winds, heavy frost, great thunder, and a vast fire will not harm them. Extraordinary afflictions such as the pox, poisonous air and fevers will not occur; those householders with *cīvakāruṇyam* will not be upset by riverine floods or robbers, they will not be disrespected by kings and gods, in their

arable lands crops will grow without effort, profit will accrue without hindrance in their business, in their professions there will be promotion without problems, they will not be surrounded by hangers-on and the servile, they will not be made fearful by wicked beasts, by wicked people, by wicked ghosts and wicked gods. For those householders with *cīvakāruṇyam* it can be promised that they will not experience dangers due to carelessness or due to the workings of fate.[51]

22) This section on the rewards that those who practice *cīvakāruṇyam* is continued in a different vein in the second section of the talk titled, *Āṉma iṉpavāḻvu* (*The Life of Happiness for the Self).* There is a threefold classification of happiness, in ascending order of felicity, with which this second section of the discourse commences: happiness in this world (*immai iṉpam*), happiness in the next (*maṟumai iṉpam*) and, beyond these two, the supreme happiness (*pēr iṉpam*). The first is a life lived with a family without hardship and calamities. The second – in contrast to the usual understanding of it as the life after death – is understood in Ramalingar's system as still a human life but one in a high birth and with the status and affluence and well-being that accompanies such a life. Each of these kinds of lives comes accompanied by their own virtues which are the benefits they bestow. Happiness in this world brings with it love (*aṉpu*), kindness (*tayai*), good conduct (*oḻukkam*), modesty (*aṭakkam*), patience (*vāymai*), and purity (*tūymai*) among others. Happiness in the next is characterized as similar to the first, only greater in degree. The supreme happiness confers extraordinary powers and benefits. In a lengthy section Ramalingar explains that those who get it have a transformation of their bodies from the pure body (*cuttatēkam*) to the Om body (*piraṇavatēkam*) to the body of knowledge (*ñāṉatēkam*). The discourse clarifies that all three kinds of happiness are attainable only through the grace of God – the first two through a portion of his grace and the supreme happiness through his entire grace.[52] The sole means to all three kinds of happiness is *cīvakāruṇyam.*[53]

23) Here we have a long section about those who eventually acquire the body made up of knowledge, *ñāṉatēkam* (*jñāna deha)* which should be taken in conjunction with the passage in Section 1 on how those with *cīvakāruṇyam* are protected from all ills. The passage first highlights that they are unaffected by the physical elements, by heat or cold, by fire or water, etc. Their bodies are not delimited by physical or mental constraints. They have capacities of omniscience and omnipotence. Their bodies are supernatural.

They will not be hindered by things such as food, sleep, sex, or fear. Their bodies will not suffer from the defects of a shadow, sweat, dirt, grey hair, wrinkles, age, and death. Their bodies will not be affected at any place or time by frost, rain, thunder, or

> heat, by demons and ghosts, by gods, seers, humans, hell beings, beasts and birds, by anything moving or stationary nor hurt by weapons such as the scimitar or the sword.[54]

Finally, speaking of those with these bodies of knowledge, Ramalingar says,

> In their presence the *karumacitti* (*karmasiddhi*), the *yōkacitti* (*yogasiddhi*) and the *ñāṉacitti* (*jñānasiddhi*) of being able to awaken those who are dead and to turn young those who are old will be present without interruption. The obligatory actions of creating, preserving, destroying, hiding and gracing will happen as they conceive. The five doers will do their respective work under their benign gaze. Their intelligence will be the intelligence of God. Their deeds will be the deeds of God.

24) The conclusive statement of this section of the discourse is that, "From all this, it will be known that the conduct of compassion towards all living beings alone is the true path (*caṉmārkkam*)".[55] Merit and demerit are solely the possession or the lack of the conduct of *cīvakāruṇyam*. The illumination which one gets through the conduct of *cīvakāruṇyam* is the light of God. The conduct of *cīvakāruṇyam* is the real divine worship.

When we carefully examine the scaffolding and structure of *The Conduct* the extraordinary achievement of Ramalingar's religious vision becomes transparent in ways which both anticipated and yet took an entirely different path from that of Ayothee Thass in the *Ātivētam*. The scaffolding of *The Conduct* is the Śaivasiddhānta – Ramalingar's doctrines presuppose the Siddhāntic three categories (*tripadārtha*) of God (*pati*), the soul (*pacu/paśu*), and the three primary sources of bondage (*pācam/pāśa*) which are *māyā, āṇavamala*, and *karma*. It further agrees with the Siddhāntic doctrines that the soul is both the agent and the enjoyer of the fruits of its actions. Thus, Ramalingar is emphatic on the issue that when there is suffering – particularly the suffering of hunger – it is the soul, and not the sense-organs, which experiences the suffering. Simultaneously, he avers that the suffering itself is undoubtedly the result of past karma. Here again he adheres to a traditional doctrinal position that suffering is not gratuitous but something that is earned through transmigration, through past deeds, and rebirth, and also directed at the sufferer by a just and impartial God. His soteriological path is called *caṉmārkkam*, thus aligning it with the Śaivasiddhānta terminologically, and he refers to and acknowledges the fourfold path of *cariyai, kiriyai, yōkam*, and *ñāṉam* which are part of the orthodox and agamic soteriology. Nevertheless, it is with the elevation of the *caṉmārkkam* to a highest path, *now delinked from ñāṉam with which it is equated in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta*, that we see his first hermeneutical move to distance himself from the latter. In Ramalingar, the *caṉmārkkam* is beyond the fourfold path

and it confers benefits on those who attain its highest state of supreme happiness (*pēriṉpam*) which depart radically from that which one can achieve in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. In the latter, one reaches not complete union with Śiva, though as the *Uraiyāṭal* texts have shown at the experiential level the liberated soul feels like Śiva. But, doctrinally, the souls remain separate and lesser than Śiva, in a state of equivalence, or *śivasamatā* and they do not come to possess those qualities which still distinguish Śiva's supremacy – these are the five obligatory activities (*pañcakṛtya*) of creation, preservation, destruction, liberation, and reabsorption at the time of cosmic dissolution. Ramalingar diverged from these orthodoxies in important ways. He, first, postulated a transformation of the human body through three stages – a concept which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, he may have been inspired to take from and adapt to his own purposes, from the Vīraśaiva author Kumāratēvar (late 17th century). He further not only reconceived these three bodies of Kumāratēvar's *Cuttacātakam* but, in addition to the transformation of the body into a powerful one endowed with the powers given to the liberated soul described in the aforementioned text, he attributed to the person on the pinnacle of the soteriological path the powers of awakening the dead to life and, even more problematically from the Siddhāntic standpoint, the capacity to do the five obligatory activities which only Śiva can do. This, in effect, makes the living liberated, *jīvanmukta*, in Ramalingar, a Śiva, a supreme God on earth. Further, he declared that the sole route to such all-encompassing divinity was *cīvakāruṇyam*.

Therefore, *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ramalingar is not linked to the path of knowledge but to a *caṉmārkkam* that is higher than the Siddhāntic one. In the *Uraiyāṭal* texts we saw that the *caṉmārkkam* is shown to the person desirous of finding liberation by the *ñāṉakuru*, the teacher of knowledge, who reveals to the soul the truth about the ephemeral nature of existence, encourages it to cultivate *cīvakāruṇyam*, dispassion (*vairākkiyam*), and other such qualities and directs it towards the eternal verities. Here, it is Ramalingar himself through his prophetic voice who functions as that guru through *The Conduct*. The *caṉmārkkam*, in turn, is no longer about cultivating an inward asceticism, the cultivation of which in the best of cases would lead one to become an ascetic eventually, and then attaining knowledge of and dissolving into Śiva. Rather, as *The Conduct* shows us emphatically, Ramalingar is addressing householders, *camucārikaḷ*, and placing them at the forefront of this path. Thus, for all purposes the *Śivayogī* is now entirely marginalized by the householder, who must now orient his efforts towards a salvation which can be acquired only through this-worldly behaviour. The contrast cannot be more stark than that between a *Śivayogī* whose focus on salvation allows for a distancing from society that, in turn, regards him or her as a child or a mad person and the householder in Ramalingar, someone rooted in society and responsible for his or her fellow human beings. It is at the point that the most radically transformative features in the concept of *cīvakāruṇyam* become evident even while it still retains some of the distinctive aspects

of its long genealogy. There is in Ramalingar, as in the *Uraiyāṭal* texts, an emphasis on non-killing, on vegetarianism, on an empathy towards all living beings, and especially a repudiation of caste. But he moves far beyond the framework provided to him in those texts to make a radical plea for a compassion that obliterates all differences in favour of a common humanity. The first step in this transformation is that he is speaking not just of *cīvakāruṇyam* as a quality that pertains to the person in search of liberation but as daily behaviour and lived practice, qualified by the addition of *oḻukkam*. Thus, it is not just a virtue but a virtue that has to be instantiated in one's conduct on a regular basis. Furthermore, he places *cīvakāruṇyam* not simply as a virtue that the soul possesses but as its very essential nature – it is "the natural light" (*iyaṟkai viḷakkam*) of the self whose synonym is grace (*aruḷ*). When partial it approximates to a portion of divinity, when whole it is divinity itself. This is how men and women become gods. The *Uraiyāṭal* texts are also all about the love (*aṉpu*) which is a melting and the dissolving (*kuḻaital*) into God. In *The Conduct* the melting (*urukkam*) of the heart is seen to spontaneously arise at the sight of suffering. This spontaneity, in turn, is anchored in the *urimai* we have over one another as human beings. The word *urimai* has a range of connotations – on the one hand, it simply means duty or obligation or rights. I have *urimai*, I am bound to you by certain obligations, usually culturally and socially determined. But *urimai* is also the privilege of intimacy – I incorporate your concerns into my own thus having *urimai* over you. Ramalingar consciously uses the word in both these connotations. When a human being becomes conscious of the *urimai* of brotherhood, only then do those feelings of tenderness arise which moves one into compassionate action. Compassion in action is premised on being a witness to suffering, on the one hand, and being the sufferer, on the other, undergirded by a social relationship between the two which then translates into practice. Inasmuch as the witness is explicitly not the sufferer there is also at work here what might be called an "ethics of privilege" and patronage where the one gives and the other takes. Indeed, the concept of giving and generosity or *īkai* in classical Tamil literature, linked to kings and generous patrons, is premised on this "ethics of privilege".[56] In Ramalingar's doctrine this triangulation between the witness, the sufferer, and the spectacle of hunger and suffering is deliberately dissolved. By evoking the doctrinal view that all souls are made of the same "natural light" which is divine, *The Conduct* both reduces and expands everyone, dissolving the spectator and the sufferer into the same stuff – by which they are interchangeable. In another section of the discourse this common ground is again emphasized through the concept of the reciprocity of the light of happiness (*iṉpaviḷakkam*) which arises simultaneously both in the giver and the receiver, binding them together. Further, in Ramalingar there is the profound recognition that the other side of compassion is cruelty and that the two opposing emotions can be generated by the same event – just as some rush to help, others develop the conscious ability to

ignore, look away, and harshly justify the looking away. Suffering, thus, can also bring out an implacable hard-heartedness and a conscious breaking of social bonds. *The Conduct*, thus, explicitly addresses the question of why some react with cruelty and sadism at the sight of suffering. They are those who are blind to their own true nature, like a person whose defective eyesight cannot be helped by any means. But the harm they do is by no means confined to just their actions but contributes to a society where there would be no fellow-feeling (*kaṇṇōṭṭam*), unity (*orumai*), or helpfulness (*upakāram*). Finally, and most radically, the conduct of compassion demands an agency and attitude that is not faith bound – meaning religion bound, applicable only within the boundaries of one's religious group. Even while the framework of Ramalingar's thoughts as we have seen is broadly Śaivite, it decisively moves beyond it to a post-sectarian, post-Brahmanical ethics. Halbfass's (1998) insightful examination of the transformation of the concept of *dharma* from traditional "Hindu" thought to modern "Hindu" discourse is of great relevance here. Dharma is Classical Hindu thought "is not universal lawfulness" nor a "general principle of behavior though there are always provisions for exceptional situations".[57] Rather we are talking almost always about specific norms which apply to specific groups, allowing for a relativization and hierarchization of what is proper and virtuous conduct, within a unified Brahmanical system. But, the need to do away with this relativization of ethics and the urgency of universalizing *dharma*, as Halbfass cogently shows, arose directly as a result of the colonial missionary encounter and the Christian critique of "Hindu" ethics.[58] The idea that emerges, as Halbfass sees it, in modern Hindu thought might be called a universal dharma, "the *dharma* of human beings" within a universal human order.[59] In Ramalingar, *cīvakāruṇyam* is not meant to function according to dharmaśāstric rules which can be bent in times of natural calamity – *āpad-dharma* – only to be strictly upheld at other times. Yes, widespread hunger is a larger social calamity but not everyday poverty and hunger, except for the hungry. *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam* demands that one treat all hunger at all times as a call to ignore dharmaśāstric rules. Since hunger is all pervasive and ever present what Ramalingar proposes might require the suspension of an "ethics of privilege", based on a Brahmanical world view and anchored in hierarchy, forever.

Hunger

Let us now turn to look more closely at the long passage on starvation and hunger which is found towards the latter half of the first section of *The Conduct*:

> When living beings experience increasing hunger the living intelligence ceases to shine forth and becomes clouded. As it dims the intelligence within the intelligence, the light of God is dimmed; as that dims

> the spirit (*puruṭatattuvam/puruṣatattva*) becomes exhausted; when that becomes exhausted matter (*pirakirutitattuvam/prakṛtitattva*) is dulled; as it dulls the qualities (*kuṇaṅkaḷ / guṇas*) are separated; then the organ of perception (*maṉacu/manas*) is shaken and shatters; the organ of intellect (*putti/buddhi*) is ruined; thought (*cittam/citta*) is polluted; egoity (*ahamkāram/ahaṃkāra*) is destroyed; the life-breaths (*pirāṇaṅkaḷ/prāṇāḥ*) swirl, the elements (*pūtaṅkaḷ/bhūtāni*) all swelter, the humours of wind (*vātam/vāta*), choler (*pittam/pitta*) and phlegm (*cilecumaṉ/śleṣman*) change their states; the eye is like a hollow filled with cotton wool; the ear deafens, filled up with an echo; the tongue dries up and becomes parched; the nose becomes swollen and hot; the skin thins and loses all feeling; the hands and limbs, exhausted, become limp; the voice changes timbre and slurs; the teeth become loose; the excretory organs wither; the body darkens; the hair becomes wild; the muscles soften and waste away; the channels of the body lose their firmness and become soft; the bones darken and the joints break up; the heart burns; the brain shrinks; the sperm cooks and dries up; the liver is depleted; blood and water dry up; the flesh becomes soft and loses its nature; the stomach hurts and swells, painful sensations increase; the signs and experiences which foreshadow death increase. All living beings experience these afflictions due to hunger.[60]

There are, of course, many ways of attempting to contextualize such passages within both Ramalinga Swamigal's literary output (which was prodigious) and his life. Here, in the context of understanding Ramalingar's intellectual genealogy, one might venture into those contextualizations which first, foreground the passage as a literary representation within a history of literary representations of hunger, the response to hunger, and death and dying in Tamil literature. The reason for this is because it is only through seeing Ramalingar's narrative of hunger as part of a larger literary landscape of such representations that predate his own writing that we can begin to make sense at all of this extraordinary passage. At the same time, it is also in this presence of the past, as we will see, that his uniqueness is asserted most vigorously. Thus, it is this very contextualization and historicization that will enable us to see what Ramalinga Swamigal does differently and also to consider how such a contextualization might enable us to make some general albeit somewhat speculative observations about the transformation of such representations in early Tamil modernity. With this in mind, this part of the chapter begins with an account of how hunger and starvation, on the one hand, and the alleviation of such hunger, on the other, are portrayed in classical Tamil literature. This is followed by an examination of the theme of dying, with the focus being on understanding the passage quoted earlier.

Any attempts to historically contextualize these themes of hunger, deprivation, suffering, and death, not just within Ramalingar's own body of writings but within the context of his social and cultural history, might well wish

to begin with paying attention to the material circumstances under which they might have been written. The semi-permanent state of subsistence crises, if not outright famine, brought about by inclement weather (such as uncertain or failed monsoons and droughts) among both the urban and the rural population of the Tamil region in the early (18th century) and the later (19th century) colonial period has been the subject of excellent studies in the last decades. An examination of how, first, the pre-colonial regional powers and later the East India Company and the British Crown dealt with these regular occurrences shows that much of "famine policy", until the codification of it in the 1830s, was improvised. It manifested itself, as the crises persisted or deepened, in limited measures such as the establishment of charitable outlets for the feeding of the needy and indigent and through some manipulation of the grain trade.[61] This is particularly true of the crises of the 18th century. The 19th century, as Arnold (1984, 1988) has shown, was also no stranger to such repeated catastrophes in the Tamil region. Particular mention must be made of the major famines of 1833–1834, 1854, and 1866. W. Francis, writing on the impact of the 1833–1834 and 1866 famines on the South Arcot district (the area where Ramalingar spent most of his life), points out that this region, even while it suffered less than other parts of the Madras Presidency, was not spared the ill effects of crop failure and food scarcity. The most affected were, as is to be expected, those who lived at subsistence levels, reliant upon daily labour.[62] But we need not even go so far as to assume that Ramalinga Swamigal's deep-rooted concern regarding hunger was necessarily rooted in the direct experience of being an eyewitness to such events. One can merely observe that, during the last decades of his life, his sojourn in the semi-rural areas of the South Arcot district would have resulted in a direct exposure to families that constituted the rural peasantry. And for such families and such people a scarcity of resources was an ever-present threat. As Arnold points out,

> In India the perennial problem of subsistence for the poor was intensified by the extreme dependence of agriculture on the arrival of adequate monsoon rains. The consequences of even a few weeks' delay or a partial failure of monsoon were well-known from experience. It was not therefore from blind or irrational panic that the prospect of drought and dearth caused alarm and generated such widespread suspicion, anxiety and fear.[63]

Ramalingar's words, his actions might be seen as a direct response to this ever-present anxiety and fear, a potential food scarcity or famine forming the foreboding backdrop to the three great themes of *The Conduct*: hunger, the immanence of death, and a compassionate response.

As I hope to show in the following sections, there are a spectrum of narratives, beginning with some of the earliest accounts in classical poetry that underlie older accounts of deprivation, hunger, and death and that inform

Ramalinga Swamigal's own depiction of these themes. These include, particularly, the classical Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry and a Buddhist text attributed to the end of the *Caṅkam* period, the *Maṇimēkalai*.

It is not the intention here to propose a direct citational relationship between the *Puṟam* poetry and the *Maṇimēkalai*, though Richman suggests that the latter text does take up and parody several *Caṅkam* elements.[64] Even less so, therefore, is it proposed that such a relationship is to be found between *The Conduct*, on the one hand, and the literary texts that will be cited, on the other. In fact, it must be acknowledged that there is only meagre evidence for directly identifiable intertextuality at work here between the very different genres (classical poetry, the *kāppiyam*, the *kummi* genre, and the theological sermon) that will be referred to. To propose even an implicit one, therefore, is speculative. Rather it is being suggested that we have here the literary echoes of a common theme in Tamil literature, which seen from a diachronic perspective, is available to both those who compose texts and those who hear or read them at subsequent historical moments. Thus, it is to also stress the historical contingency of Ramalinga Swamigal's own writings.

The Starving Bard of *Caṅkam*

Classical Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry contains graphic descriptions of hunger most frequently within the context of a specific theme that one might call, "the starving Bard". This theme is highlighted in the collection of poems within the corpus known as the "Eight Anthologies" (*Eṭṭuttokai*) known as the *Puṟanāṉūru* (henceforth, *Puṟam*). The *Puṟam* poems, numbering 400 in all, are generally considered to be a compilation of heroic poetry, focusing on the heroic deeds in battle of warriors.[65] Yet, a persistent sub-genre of this main theme is the search of a desperate and poverty-stricken bard for a generous patron who would relieve him and his family of their destitution.[66] Tieken (2001) refers to this theme at some length and quotes as examples of it two of the most striking poems that exemplify it: *Puṟam 159* and *160* attributed to Peruñcittiraṉār.

Puṟam 159 contains the following passage:

> And my wife, her body gone sallow, is troubled
> by pain and sickness;
> breasts fallen,
> squeezed and devoured by the many children
> all about her;
> needy, she picks the greens
> in the garbage dump
> hardly sprouting
> in the very spot she had plucked before,
> boils them in water
> without any salt,

eats them without any buttermilk.
She has forgotten the look of well-cooked food.
Wearing unwashed tatters,
my wife who loves me
goes hungry,
blames the order of things.[67]

Puṟam 160, attributed to the same bard, repeats this theme in its poignant essentials:

Since my house is empty of food, and
my son who has a sparse
topknot on his head, his stomach turning, seems to have forgotten that his house was
ever there to feed him and he tries many times to suck at an empty breast where
there is no milk and from it he draws nothing! Craving rice and porridge,
he opens the empty jars in the house, one after another, and when he is done with that,
he bursts out crying. When she sees him like this, my wife will tell him
a story, to frighten him, about a ferocious tiger, and in her pain she will try
to distract him by pointing at the moon. She tells him to think about his father
and pretend to be angry with him while she herself goes on grieving
under the full light of day![68]

These identical motifs – the hapless wife/mother (in the case of the *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, the mother is a female dog), her withered breasts that cannot feed her children, her futile attempts to cook and serve inedible greens, – all of this is repeated also in a later *Caṅkam* work that refers again to the life of the bard, the *Ciṟupāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* of the *Pattupāṭṭu* collection.[69] In all this poetry, and particularly in the *Puṟam* ones, the word used for hunger is *paci* and the word-index to *Caṅkam* poetry shows us that there are 35 instances of the use of this word, or its derivations, in *Puṟam* alone.[70] Other *Puṟam* poems that repeat these themes incessantly include *Puṟam 68*, *69*, *139*, *143*, *150*, *155*, *164*, *266*, *370*, *375–377*, and *393*. Even as all these poems hint at the immanent danger of death, death remains at arm's length, a pale shadow hovering in the background. Sometimes, as in *Puṟam 227*, *230*, *237*, and 238, death becomes the ultimate devourer, its maw gaping wide, consuming relentlessly the lives of humans.

But even this death can always be staved off, averted with the hope of a generous patron. If there is one word in the *Puṟam* that perhaps stands in greatest contrast to *paci* it is *īkai*, best translated as, "giving". The *Puṟam* is replete with the motif of the generous patron, usually the heroic warrior or king, who gives beyond expectation, beyond measure to the extent that the expression, "foolish munificence" (*koṭai maṭam*) is used of this behaviour.[71] Kailasapathy reminds us that there are 180 poems altogether, in the *Puṟam* and *Akam* anthologies that might be classified as poems of praise. The king's generosity is most often likened to the bounteousness of nature, to a "rain-like munificence". The terms used are compounds of *īkai*: "distributing gifts without caring for oneself" (*ōmpā īkai*) and "unfailing generosity" (*poyyā īkai*).[72] Subbaiah, referring to the earliest Tamil grammar, the *Tolkāppiyam* and its gloss on the verb shows us that it refers to a very specific kind of giving, one, "when the suppliant is inferior to the giver."[73] One could read this, on the one hand, as Rāj Kautamaṉ does in his study of this literature, as the relationship between a hegemonic elite, on the one hand, and a dependent and subaltern group, on the other.[74] Or, alternatively, as Kailasapathy suggests throughout his study, rather than seeing this as the straightforward relationship between a beggar and his patron, the *Puṟam* invites us to valorize a world view where both are united through a code of honour by which the king earns his greatness by giving and the bard by getting and praising. I would add, against the backdrop of hunger. In a later classical text which we will consider next, the *Maṇimēkalai*, the duty to feed the hungry shifts from the hands of kings into the hands of others. This shift anticipates, in crucial ways, the narrative of Ramalinga Swamigal.

The Buddhist Nun, the Divine Vessel of Plenitude, and the Dangers of Giving

Maṇimēkalai has been the subject of two fine monographs, one by Paula Richman, 1998, and more recently by Anne Monius, 2001, and there is little I can add to what they have said about how it inculcates female asceticism and Buddhist values and how it anticipates the utopian future Buddhist society based on the principles of care and compassion.[75] The importance of *Maṇimēkalai*, for the purposes understanding *The Conduct*, is the centrality of the motifs of hunger and the Buddhist mission of assuaging hunger through the eponymous central character by her use of the divine vessel that is never empty. In short, the text (possibly stemming from the 6th century)[76] tells the story of a beautiful, young girl, Maṇimēkalai, coming from a family of courtesans, who renounces the hereditary lifestyle of the women of her family for the life of a Buddhist nun. She does so after achieving an enlightening experience in an island, in Chapter 11, that takes place in the context of what might be called the perpetually fantastical appearance of divine and semi-divine beings and phenomena that pervade the entire story. In this case, Maṇimēkalai's experience involves her recollection of

her past lives, an experience granted to only those who have reached a very high stage on the Buddhist path of enlightenment. In the aftermath of this, she has an encounter with the guardian of the island, Tīvatilakai, who helps her acquire the great vessel that appears only once a year, on the birth anniversary of the Buddha. A central and crucial passage in the book, canonical within the aphoristic tradition of Tamil literature, is one in Chapter 11, where Maṇimēkalai is entrusted with the famous vessel called, "that which yields nectar, *amuta curapi/ amuda surabhī*", that once belonged to another virtuous Buddhist. Helping her acquire the vessel Tīvatilakai then instructs Maṇimēkalai on the enormity of her task by giving a description of the effects of hunger on the individual and on society. This passage is worth quoting in full:

> The affliction of hunger (*paci-piṇi*)[77] destroys [the dignity] of high birth and kills excellence. It renders useless the surety of acquired knowledge. It removes the ornament of shame and shatters beauty. It drives one to the doorstep [of others] together with one's bejewelled women. My tongue cannot measure the words of praise for those who end it.[78]

In many respects, the epic *Maṇimēkalai*'s description of the social and cultural consequences of hunger in the passage from Chapter 11 quoted previously – the ensuing dissolution of the normal order of things and familial as well as societal bonds – has also reverberated in subsequent Tamil literature. In *The Conduct* Ramalingar speaks eloquently about how hunger upends familial bonds and renders people of status – kings, ascetics, the orthodox – to beggars. Well into Ramalinga Swamigal's own time we see repeated echoes of this passage as late as in the 19th century in folk-ballads meant to be sung and danced to, the *kummi* genre. Particularly interesting, for instance, are the *kummi* songs from the Kongu region of the Tamil country – the parts which are to the north-west of modern-day Tamil Nadu bordering on Kerala. This region, historically prone to aridity, witnessed repeated famines, but a particularly ferocious one lasted for 14 years between 1853 and 1867. Several *kummis* were composed during this period by local poets, *pulavar*s, residing in the very heart of the famine regions and some of these compositions such as the *Karavaruśa pañcakkummi* attributed to Veṇṇaṉtūr Varakavi Aruṇācalam reflect in folk idiom exactly the kind of social and political disorder which we find in the *Maṇimēkalai* passage.[79] After describing the social consequences of hunger, Tīvatilakai further instructs Maṇimēkalai:

> Those who give to others who can endure, [suffering], are like those who trade in right conduct.[80] It is those who alleviate the fierce hunger of the destitute who [are virtuous]. Their life endows a life of righteousness (*mey neṟi*). Those who give food, in this atomic world, to all on it, they, indeed give life.[81]

In this discourse, we see very clearly the resonance of certain *Puṟam* themes: it is not just unnecessary, but it is not even considered true giving if one gives to those who are not in want. Rather, the giving to the needy, to those who are in a non-reciprocal relationship to oneself – it is this which is legitimate and a sign of true virtue.

Let us recapitulate, at this point, the common themes that emerge through our survey of this literature. The theme of hunger and starvation is one that is depicted through both the intimate and the distant. Thus, the focus can be, as it is in the *Puṟam* works, on the effect of starvation within the family, or as in *Maṇimēkalai*, of families forced to turn on each other to survive. The rippling effects of this hunger and starvation spread out to distant spaces, to the whole of society, turning it upside down, destroying the social and cultural order of things. The solution to this, in the *Puṟam*, is the generosity of the royal patron that is a reflection of his royal virtues while in the *Maṇimēkalai* it is the compassionate response of the ascetic-renouncer that is guided also by her own soteriological goals. In the light of these themes, let us examine another remarkable passage from *The Conduct*:

> When the fire of hunger burns brightly in the bodies of the poor, the quenching of it with food is *cīvakāruṇyam*; when the poisonous wind of hunger is about to put out the lamp of intelligence of the poor, preventing its demise and sustaining it is *cīvakāruṇyam*; at the time when the bodies of living beings, that are temples for the natural light of God, are about to decay due to hunger, giving food and illuminating them is *cīvakāruṇyam*; . . . when the tiger of hunger attacks the lives of the poor and attempts to kill them, killing that tiger and saving those lives is *cīvakāruṇyam*; when the poison of hunger goes to the head and living beings are becoming dizzy, reducing that poison with food and clearing the dizziness is *cīvakāruṇyam* . . . Stilling that painful longing of the poor [who think], "That sinner, hunger, that killed us slowly, yesterday, day and night, will come also today. What shall I do?" Stopping the agony of the poor who, like flies trapped in honey, agonize, thinking, "Daylight is breaking, now the affliction of hunger will arrive. What shall I do regarding this entrapment of fate?" – this is *cīvakāruṇyam* . . . . There are human beings who, heart and face exhausted, without tongue to speak, like those mutes who dream internally, hearts languishing, [think], "Daylight has come to an end, hunger gnaws [at me], shame prevents me from going to other places, it hurts my self-respect to ask [for food]. The stomach burns, I know of no way to end my life. Alas, why have I acquired this body!" Giving food to them and safeguarding their respect is *cīvakāruṇyam*. "Even if we were to resolve to starve today due to our youth what shall we do regarding the stomach of our poor wives? Mentioning their hunger is not that important, but our mothers and fathers, who are debilitated due to their advanced age will die if they starve today as well. What can we do about this? How can we look at the

> faces of our children, exhausted from constant crying?" Thus, thinking incessantly, with the fires of hunger, of fear and of enquiry lit within, that have combined like a single fire that has arisen to destroy, the sorrowing poor sit with their hands on their cheeks and with tear-filled eyes. Giving food to them and transforming that sorrow is *cīvakāruṇyam*.[82]

In this passage we see how *The Conduct* deploys the modes of intimacy and distance in ways that are both familiar and unfamiliar from the literature we had surveyed. Intimacy here is achieved in the closest possible way: by leading us into the mind and thoughts of the hungering person and through an interior monologue. Indeed, the affective power of the passage lies in this interior monologue. At the same time the distancing is achieved precisely in the anonymity of the sufferer. It is not someone we know as an individual or even one of a category, like the starving bard but the poor person as everywo/man who is speaking here. In this sense, we might see here the construction of an impersonal category, "the poor" (*ēḻai*) who demands a compassionate response not on the basis of ties of kinship, family, or patronage but on the basis of being a certain social category in themselves. Further, let us consider who is meant to respond to this everywo/man. The figure of Maṇimēkalai already marked the shift in compassionate activism from that of the elite hero, the royal patron to that of the ascetic-renouncer.[83] It has been frequently pointed out and theorized that the emergence of the activist-renouncer, the *sannyāsī* in the world, is a marked development and feature of early modernity and of "Hinduism" in South Asia.[84] While the mass of evidence for this is indubitable it must also be seen that narratives like the *Maṇimēkalai* and others of this kind anticipate such shifts already, if only in the landscape of the imagination, in classical Tamil narratives and echo in the self-representation and the reception of Ramalingar in colonial modernity. *The Conduct* now goes several steps further and makes it the central religious duty of each person, each of us who are the addressees of this work, to each become a patron, a Maṇimēkalai, not just in order to assuage the pain of others but to achieve the soteriological goal of one's own salvation. For, the text explicitly states that in the absence of hunger, the conduct of compassion could not function and without it one would not be able to access the grace of God and become God-like oneself. Hence, hunger is actually "an instrument of [soteriological] help", (*upakārak karuvi*) given to us by God.[85]

That which *The Conduct* envisages, the soteriological consequences of the elimination of hunger in the world, in its entirety, is explored and the consequences of it drawn along similar lines in Chapters 13 and 14 of the *Maṇimēkalai*, in the story of Āputtiraṉ, the former owner of the divine vessel, the illegitimate son of a Brahman woman, abandoned by her at childbirth. Scorned by orthodox Brahmans because of his opposition to animal sacrifice, Āputtiraṉ, destitute, takes shelter in the city of Madurai (Maturai). Each day he begs in affluent households with his begging bowl and then

invites the blind, deaf, and destitute to eat of his gleanings. It is once they are done, that he avails himself of the remainder.[86] Impressed by Āputtiraṉ's good deeds, the Goddess Cintā appears before him and gifts him the divine vessel with the assurance that he would always be able to still hunger with it. But the story of Āputtiraṉ has a tragic twist. Such is his virtue and prowess in terminating hunger in the world that even the throne of the God of gods, Indra (Intiraṉ), begins to shake. Indra descends to the earth and tries to reward Āputtiraṉ for his giving, *tānam* (*dāna*), but his overtures are rejected. For Āputtiraṉ the giving is its own reward. Angered at this rejection Intiraṉ now showers the world with rain. Crops flourish, famine ceases, and there is no longer any opportunity for Āputtiraṉ to put his vessel to use. Thus does Indra deprive Āputtiraṉ of his sole rationale for living. Understanding that he is of no further use in the world, Āputtiraṉ eventually throws the vessel into a pond, to be available once a year for retrieval by any person who wishes to do compassionate good to all living beings. Then he himself takes the vow of fasting unto death (*uṇṇā nōṉpu*) and dies. I have narrated the story of Āputtiraṉ at some length because it illustrates, with great clarity, the inexorable logic of giving, a motif that echoes and re-echoes in Tamil literature.[87] If this is the activity that earns one the greatest merit, if it is a sign of a very high stage of merit that one has been gifted with an endless resource to give, one which far surpasses the "foolish munificence" of the kings and patrons as illustrated in the ideology of the *Puṟam*, then one has to give in order to live and one has to die, depriving oneself of sustenance, once giving becomes impossible. Āputtiraṉ, let us recollect, had already established himself within the cycle of giving in which he ate at the very last, the leftovers of what he had given away. Once the giving ceases he has nothing leftover to eat, therefore he must cease eating. This is what I mean by the logic of hunger and giving, on the one hand, and plenitude, not giving, and death, on the other, or the death that is the deprivation of God's grace, in Ramalinga Swamigal.

Decaying into Death

Texts which combine ideas of the destruction of the common weal when hunger stalks the landscape together with the need for compassionate intervention have, as we have seen, a long literary lineage in the Tamil literary tradition. What is also present is part of the third motif in *The Conduct*: the almost analytical scrutiny of bodily disintegration. The scrutiny of decay and death or "decaying into death" is not new to Tamil literature. It particularly crops up in the literature concerned with an ascetic reflection on the impermanence of life and the meditation on such impermanence. Here, again, a *Maṇimēkalai* passage from Chapter 20, where Maṇimēkalai instructs Utayakumāraṉ on the fleeting nature of female beauty is illustrative. Pointing to an old and white-haired woman Maṇimēkalai catalogues, pitilessly, the deterioration of her youthful beauty. Her black tresses, once

like the cool black sand on the seashore, have now turned white. Her brow that once shone like the crescent moon has lost its lustre, the skin wrinkled. Her eyebrows, once like bows of victory are now like dried-up shrimps. Her eyes, once like blue lotuses, now ooze "sleep". Her nose, once bud-like, is now dripping with pus. Her teeth, once like a row of pearls, are now like the seeds of the bottle-gourd.[88] This detailed catalogue continues and ends with Maṇimēkalai telling Utayakumāraṉ that such ageing should remind one that one should know the true nature of the body whose appearance is but a treacherous illusion we get from our ancestors, one that hides and controls the stench of flesh through the use of flowers and unguents, clothing, and jewellery.[89]

We saw that such descriptions of the decaying body, as discussed in the previous chapter, forms a continuum with the post-14th-century poetry of the Tamil *Cittar*s, in the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*, which was analysed in the previous chapter and now down to Ramalinga Swami himself.

The contemplation on ageing and decaying in the *Maṇimēkalai*, as Richman, 148–149, has again shown, must also be seen in the context of the specific Buddhist framework of the work and part of a larger range of Buddhist-specific visualization and meditational practices relating to developing detachment towards embodiment, appearance, and death through the contemplation of the "foulness of the body" that has been widely discussed in studies of both Buddhist narrative literature and contemporary ethnography.[90] In Tamil religious poetry prior to Ramalingar we see this also to be the case in, for instance, the poetry of Tamil *Cittar*s, particularly that of Paṭṭiṉattār (ca. 14th–15th century), who speaks of the orifices of a woman's body secreting pus, bloody discharge, and slimy mucus and it is persistent throughout many of the verses of the *Ciṉmayatīpikai*.[91] This strain of misogynistic revulsion towards specifically the private parts of the female body continues also in Ramalingar's poetic corpus, in the first five books of the *Tiruvaṟuṭpā*. A sample of just the first book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* would show us the repeated motif of the dangers of the woman's body: the fiery hole that is the woman's mound of love into which one is in danger of falling, the hole that secretes smells and contains worms.[92] The framework of this imagery also tends to be standard as in the Paṭṭinattār poem cited earlier. It is one where the poet laments his own inadequacies and sinful nature, acknowledges his complete unworthiness to be a recipient of God's grace and yet begs for the latter's benevolence towards him. This kind of poem of appeal, with a long history in the Sanskrit *stotra* genre is also ubiquitous in Tamil *bhakti* literature, there being innumerable variations of it in both the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite corpuses of medieval, Tamil devotional poetry. But only a small sample of it has this disturbing imagery we are confronted with, this overt misogyny directed at the female body. The point I wish to make here is that, precisely because Ramalingar uses this kind of imagery in certain contexts, it becomes very clear that his representation of the hungering and dying body in the context of *The Conduct* is meant to evoke very different emotions from

that of repulsion and detachment. Let us recollect that, in *The Conduct*, the description of the body is highly enumerative, almost like a forensic examination of disintegration. The description of the deterioration is based upon a classical Indian terminology and understanding of embodiment: thus, the disintegrating body is the one that is disintegrating back into the elements as defined, in its earliest form, in *Sāṃkhya* and subsequently modified and adapted in all the other classical systems: the body being seen as an evolute, emerging from the coming together of the basic principles of the individual monad (*puruṣa*) and materiality (*prakṛti*). Based as this description is on these classical conceptions, taking them for granted and then building up an analysis of the disintegration on the basis of this – these diagnostic and forensic qualities to the description are important indications of its rootedness in a pre-modern world of human physiology. In other words, Ramalinga Swamigal's description of what happens to the three different "humours" of the body as they lose their equilibrium draws our attention directly to the context of classical Indian medicine. It is when we turn to Indian medicinal texts or sections of texts that contain chapters on medicine,[93] that we find the kind of descriptions of the dying human, in particular the dying male,[94] that have a strong elective affinity with Ramalinga Swamigal's own writings. Consider the following passage already from the compendium considered as the harbinger of classical Indian medicine – the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, dated to the 3rd or 2nd century BCE, interestingly associated, due to the assumption that the author was a physician in the court of the Kaṇiska, with a Buddhist milieu.[95] In the fifth part of the work titled *Indriyasthānam* and devoted to diagnosis and prognosis, we have the following account of the symptoms that presage death:

> Now (I) will describe, as enumerated in the scriptures, the various forms and changes in condition of the embodied one (*śarīrī)* who has lived in the body for the allotted time-span, who has accepted departure from the body, abandoning the beloved and enduring life-breaths and the agreeable abode and who enters into the ultimate darkness (*tamo 'tyantam*) when all the systems and organs fall apart. [In such a state] the life-breaths (*prāṇāḥ*) are afflicted, understanding (*vijñānam*) is obstructed, organs (*aṅgāni*) emit their strength, activities (*ceṣṭā*) cease, senses (*indriyāṇi*) are ruined, consciousness (*cetanā*) is isolated, restlessness (*autsukyam*) and fear (*bhīru*) enter the mind (*cetas*), memory (*smṛti*) and intelligence (*medhā*) are lost, modesty and grace (*hrī-śrī*) leave, disorders (*pāpmānaḥ*) increase, energy (*ojas*) and lustre (*tejas*) are lost, good conduct (*śīla*) and predispositions (*bhakti*) are inverted, shadows (*praticchāyā)* undergo transformation and shades (*chāyā*) turn into apparitions, semen (*śukram*) flows down from its location, the wind (*vāyu*) takes the wrong course, flesh (*māṃsa*) and blood (*asṛk*) deteriorate, the fires (*uṣmāṇah*) disappear, the joints (*saṃdhayaḥ*) come apart, smells (*gandhāḥ*) are transformed, the complexion and voice

> (*vaṃa-svara*) fall apart, the body (*kāya*) becomes discoloured and its aperture (*chidram*) dries up, vapours (*dhūmaḥ*) together with a chalk-like (*cūṃakah*) paleness appear, all the pulsating parts (*spandanā deśāḥ*) of the body stiffen and become immobile, the qualities (*guṇāḥ*) of different parts of the body such as cold, warmth, softness and hardness are inverted and are now found in other parts, nails (*nakhāni*) acquire spots, teeth (*dantāni*) become discoloured, the eyelashes (*pakṣman?*) become matted and lines appear on the forehead (*murdhan*), medicines are not available as desired and when obtained are without strength, different kinds of cruel diseases, of differing origins and requiring different medicines arise quickly destroying both strength and energy. During the course of treatment tastes and smells, activities and thoughts arise, fearful dreams are seen, a state of meanness comes about, servants make haste, the appearance of death emerges, the normal recedes and the abnormal ascends and all the portentous signs of death are seen. All these are stated to be the characteristics of those on the verge of death as enumerated in the scriptures.[96]

Thus, it is in the medical texts that we encounter the kind of excruciatingly precise enumeration of a process happening to the human body of the kind we see in Ramalingar. At this point it becomes useful to recollect his self-proclaimed and repeated assertions that he was well versed in the system of medicine indigenous to the Tamil country, *Siddha* medicine, that he himself had obtained all the powers (*siddhi*s) that characterize a *Cittar*[97] and his intimate knowledge of the medical properties of plants and herbs which he displayed in the short, prose treatises such as *List of the Properties of Medicinal Plants* (*Mūlikai kuṇa aṭṭavaṇai*), *Herbs for Longevity* (*Cañcīvi mūlikaikaḷ*), and *Medicinal Observations* (*Maruttuva kuṟippukaḷ*). This section does not seek to go into the historiographical issues plaguing the genealogy of Siddha medical knowledge and the Tamil nationalist imperative to vouch for its antiquity vis-a-vis *Āyurveda*.[98] Rather, I take for granted the antiquity of the existent Āyurvedic literature available to us in contrast to the earliest extant Siddha medicine manuscripts,[99] as also the conceptual closeness of Āyurveda and Siddha with regard to human physiology, and to reflect on how remarkably similar in its tenor if not in its details the *Caraka Saṃhitā* passage is to the passage in *The Conduct*. On analysis, the literary echoes and resemblances to Ramalinga Swamigal's own writing on dying are unmistakable. It is the framing which is radically different: for, ironically, the *Caraka Saṃhita* passage is located within the framework of describing a situation which the physician is advised to avoid – that is, he should avoid taking on as a client a person afflicted with these signs of dying. In contrast, *The Conduct* demands the opposite response, encouraging one to rush to the succour of the person who is starving.

So, let us review what *The Conduct* has shown us thus far on hunger: it draws upon a rich tradition of previous Tamil religion literature to show

that the right response towards those suffering from hunger is the practice of *cīvakāruṇyam*. It deviates from such texts in focusing, in its most powerful passage, not on the social, not on the familial but on the process of starvation as it unfolds in the human body and does so through its affinity with an entirely different genre of texts – medical literature which may be directly or indirectly transmitted from the Āyurvedic canon and through *Siddha* medical treatises. At the same time, we must be very clear that one cannot adopt a reductionist approach to understanding Ramalinga Swamigal. It is not the intention of this section to parse *The Conduct* into a compendium of its literary antecedents. For, this would be an exercise that is not only misconceived in its intentions but even more so it could well lead to a misunderstanding of his religious vision. Rather, this section wishes to also ask questions that concern issues of representation and self-representation that feed into the narratives about Ramalingar – how does Ramalingar present his ideology, what is his relationship to what he claims, how does he validate it, who are its addressees? These questions might enable us to not only arrive at a more nuanced understanding of what his ideology is but also enable us to consider the debate about the nature and the moment of South Asian modernity from other perspectives, particularly ones that are restricted not only to social and cultural history but also to transformations in thinking that affect self-representation, genres, and theology.

The Prophetic Voice

The final section of this chapter turns its attention to the organization of *The Conduct*, its genre, the authorial voice, and issues of the self-representation of Ramalinga Swamigal. In doing so, I would like to focus on two issues: that of authority and practice. In reading *The Conduct*, the first remarkable feature of it that leaps to the eye is the complete absence of citations. Indeed, the strongest reason why we cannot make the definitive claim that the text is specifically indebted to classical Tamil literature or Indian medicinal literature is because it makes no such claims itself. On the contrary, it is conspicuously silent about this lack of bolstering authority. Yet, as we will see, the text asserts its own truth-value, urges that we take it seriously as a document of religious revelation and makes unequivocal claims as to what would result if one does what it advocates. In the absence of "śāstric" citations where is its authoritativeness located?

The Conduct begins by making four foundational statements. First, the singular opportunity provided by a human birth is that it enables one "to obtain one's self". Second, this is nothing but the attainment of that "complete, natural bliss" (*pūraṇa iyaṟkai iṉpam*) of God. Third, this bliss is given only through the grace of God. Finally, the only path to obtaining that grace is through "the conduct of compassion towards all". "One must know this with conviction" (*uṟutiyāka aṟital vēṇṭum*), says Ramalingar and he further adds, "There is no other authority for this".[100] One asks – no other authority

than who or what? And one is forced to conclude, as the text unfolds, that the authority lies within these words themselves, that he has pronounced. Later he will speak reassuringly of other beings (*cāttiyarkaḷ/sādhyas*) who have attained the desired soteriological goal and point the way. Scanning the entire text, of the length of approximately 45 printed pages, one is struck by the repeated use of phrases that qualify the doctrines, phrases such as, "one should know this truthfully", or simply, "one should know this". There are two significant modifications of this sentiment: in a passage that deals with definitions of compassion, Ramalingar says, "this has been ordained in the Veda of God".[101] Here, he seems to be referring to an elaboration of these doctrines in a more extensive work of his own, yet to be written, one he refers to as "the Veda of Equality" (*Camaraca Vētam*).[102] Finally, he concludes the main portion of *The Conduct* with the words that it should be known that all this has been stated truthfully, with the omnipotent God as witness.[103] If the text leads us to the inexorable conclusion that the veracity of it rests solely on the veracity of the speaker/writer who is both the sole witness and transmitter of this revelation of God it also makes it clear that those who are authorized to receive it are all those who choose to listen to Ramalingar. There can be, it explicitly says, no ritual or caste qualification to know and implement this teaching.[104] This discursive prose style, the emphasis on personal revelation, and the invitation to all to partake of it as part of an open public discourse – all this was not new to the Tamil country and the South Arcot district of the 1860s. It had its antecedents in the Śaivite literature and the *Uraiyāṭal* texts discussed earlier and could be found in the first person, intimate voice of the *ñaṉakuru*. Also, it received a further subjective tone in Tāyumāṉavar. But in all these cases we are dealing with poetry. With *The Conduct* we have a prose tract that combines direct address with revelatory authority – foregrounding orality and a "denotational rationality"[105] which we see only in this period and thereafter.

Religious tracts that inculcated virtues and public preaching that dispensed with textual citation and involved an exhortation to believe had been part of the Protestant Christian repertoire in the Tamil country for at least a century before this, having its beginnings in the early 18th century with the establishment of Protestant Christianity in South India – from 1706 when two Protestant and pietist German missionaries belonging to the Dänisch-Hallesche Mission (itself brand new and just founded by August Hermann Francke and hence full of new missionary zeal), Bartholamäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau, landed in the east coast of the Tamil country. Their base was Taraṅkampāṭi (Tranquebar),[106] not more than a stone's throw from Chidambaram and the environs that were Ramalinga Swamigal's own home territories. Indeed, the Danish Mission Society send Carl E. Ochs, originally from the German Leipzig Mission, to set up a missionary station in South Arcot in the 1860s at the same time as Ramalinga was most active there.[107] Protestant Christian missionaries acted as a catalyst for social and cultural transformation in at least two ways. They built upon

the considerable achievements of 17th-century Catholic Jesuitical contributions to the emergence of a new discursive prose style in Tamil that came to be the predominant language of public discourse henceforth in the Tamil country. Contributing towards this were some of the earliest Tamil Christian literature: catechisms, polemical tracts, hagiographical poetic literature and, most importantly, the Tamil translation of the Bible – first undertaken by Ziegenbalg and completed by Benjamin Schultze in 1728. The decisive version, though, was the translation of Johann Phillip Fabricius (1711–1791), whose New Testament came out in 1772 and the Old Testament in 1776. Generally regarded as a richly poetical and accomplished prose translation, the Fabricius Bible remained canonical for the Tamil Lutherans for a good hundred years till it was replaced by the so-called Union Version in the last decades of the 19th century.[108] It is this version of the Tamil Bible which must also have been in limited circulation in Ramalinga's own time. Moreover, the Protestant missionary efforts though strapped by lack of funds more than made up for this through evangelical enthusiasm characterized by the public sermon. As Blackburn[109] points out, "armed with their Tamil print bibles" the Tranquebar missionaries proceeded to have clear success in winning converts. Central to this spiritual enterprise was the strongly pietistic form of Lutheran Christianity that had emerged in the German context in the wake of the devastating 30-years wars. If one were to speak in broad strokes of the pietistic message that the missionaries conveyed in their writings and sermons, then it would be accurate to point to the stress on the subjective and "inner experience" of belief, the conviction that God actively seeks out the individual soul, the Passion of Christ as central to human redemption, and a daily practice of virtue actuated in good works. The soul would be called to account before Christ on Judgement Day when the life lived would be judged and assessed.[110] Even while being cautious about drawing explicit parallels and reductive conclusions Ramalinga Swamigal's stress in *The Conduct* on the significance of personal conviction and belief that supersedes or elides textual authority, his emphasis on both suffering and the need to address it through individual and constant ethical practice, combined with the statements in letters he wrote that the dead should be buried not cremated because they would be raised by "his Father" the Omnipotent God (*kaṭavuḷ*) who would appear in the *Hall of True Wisdom* that Ramalingar had constructed, to raise the faithful dead, all point to an unmistakable Christian influence in the last phase of his life on his theology, one which has discomfited his hagiographers.[111]

When we consider what is the immediate imperative for *cīvakāruṇyam*, it is the physical disintegration and suffering of the dying person so graphically described that I have dealt with in detail in the previous section. It is this person, the text says, who should generate compassion. Peculiar passages, very similar to this, appear in other pieces of Ramalinga Swamigal's prose writings.[112] I call them peculiar, even incongruous, because they create some kind of disjuncture within the doctrinal texts they inhabit. The reader/listener is jolted from a state perhaps of calm attentiveness or

intellectual involvement or, for that matter, even detachment, which may ensue from listening to a theological sermon, to a visceral sense of the corporeality of the human being and the horrific physical suffering involved in dying painfully, dying from hunger in this case. In this context, food is godly, those who give it akin to gods who mitigate the horrors of life. At the same time, the very lyricism of the passage lends it a forensic beauty – a kind of relentless fascination with the beauty of decay that is akin to the beauty of the aster flower in Gottfried Benn's famous poem, *Kleine Aster*, planted in the chest cavity of a corpse and blossoming in the fluids of blood and decomposition. In the ultimate analysis, this juxtaposition of pain and beauty leads us also to see that the suffering and dying person becomes a source of grace, the sole means through which one might attain salvation – leaving one to speculate and consider how deeply and intimately the Passion of Christ might have worked its way implicitly into the very core of Ramalinga Swamigal's theology.[113]

Ramalingar's theological trajectory confirms him as seeing that all around him was a religious continuum that could be appropriated in different ways. He adapted older understandings of *cīvakāruṇyam* to new contexts. He experimented with including eschatological thinking into his late doctrines which occupied a border space between "Christianity" and "Śaivism". His *Caṉmārkkam* did not emerge through a conscious borrowing between discrete "religions". Nor did it attempt to construct "neo-Hindu" universals. Rather, emerging as it did from an acute consciousness of pre-modern regimes of power that had been denied, if not completely at least partially, to those such as him, and encountering the new regimes of colonial power, it attempted to position itself in between and beyond the two, seeking to remain embedded in local histories and exist as a form of "border thinking", in the life and afterlife of colonial modernity.

Nevertheless, this unique vision of Ramalingar was not uniformly appreciated in his own time. Indeed, it can be established that his poetry, religious practices, his fledging organizations, his followers, and even his marital status were savagely attacked by the éminence grise of Tamil Śaivism, Arumuga Navalar, in an inversion of a hagiographical perspective. A detailed look at Navalar's critique is illuminating for giving us a glimpse into the contested status of Ramalingar in his own time. Simultaneously, it also illuminates for us what was seen to be at stake for Tamil Śaivism in the colonial period, as the next chapter will show.

Notes

1 CVV (1915:1):
curuti yuttiyoṭu cuvāṉupavam otta
peruveḷiyait *teyvam eṉap* pēṇi *urai ceytēṉ*
innūlai ēlātār ivveḷiyēlāṟ pōlum.

2 Anon3 (1986:4).

3 Since the Madras Christian College acquired its present campus and became a place of study for older students only after the late 19th century, we must assume

that īcūr Caccitānanta Cuvāmikaḷ worked there when it was in its early phase a small boy's school, not long after it was founded in 1835.

4 Not to be confused with the Vīraśaiva Karappāttira Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ from the late 19th century who composed, among others, the work *Atvaitapōtatīpikai* (*Advaita Bodha Dīpikā*) and died around 1918.

5 Steinschneider in his 2015 thesis, page 48, footnote 68:

> The title page of an 1868 edition of the *Ñāṉavācittam* with Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ's commentary identifies Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ with "Catācivappirammentira Yōkīsuvarar", an apparent reference to the famous Advaita theologian and Carnatic composer Sadāśiva Brahmendra (early 18th c.). In the introduction to Caccitānanta's anonymous hagiography (n.pag.), Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ's *guru paramparā* is given as follows: Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ, Tattātreya Cuvāmikaḷ, Ceṅkamala Cuvāmikaḷ, Muttaiya Cuvāmikaḷ (of *Ciṉmayatīpikai* fame), Cuppiramaṇiya Cuvāmikaḷ, Nākai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ, Piṟacai Aruṇācala Cuvāmikaḷ.

In my view the identification of Karapāttira Cuvāmikaḷ with Sadāśiva Brahmendra seems both misleading and dubious in terms of the known evidence we have for the Sadāśiva Brahmendra's life history. On a more plausible view that he might have been a Vīraśaiva guru, see footnote 10 below.

6 Anon3 (1986:6–7).

7 One must assume, inasmuch as the hagiography states that he continued to reside in the environs of Madras, that his guruship of the *maṭam* would have been undertaken even while perhaps the institution in Tirutturutti, if it existed as an actual building at all, did not have him residing there Anon3 (1986:8–9).

8 Anon3 (1986:8–11).

9 Anon3 (1986:12).

10 There is some reason to suspect that he was actually a Vīraśaiva guru. Thus, we seem to have some evidence (from the biographical details of a Vētaśrēṇi Citampara Periya Cuvāmikaḷ) that the Tirutturutti Intirapīṭam was part of the Vriddhacalam Kumāratēvar *ātīṉam* as well.

11 The Thurston and Rangachari (1909:188–192) entry on this caste group is revealing. It says that the "Kusavans" "wear the sacred thread and profess both Saivism and Vaishnavism", even though their main deity is Ayyaṉār. There is the contemptuous remark, cited from another source that "their stupidity and ignorance are proverbial" (188). Nevertheless, it concedes, "They are generally illiterate, though some of their class have earned distinction as sound scholars, especially of later years" (192).

12 Books regarding Cuvāmi Cakajāṉantā include U. Cuppiramaṇiyaṉ's *Camutāyac cirpi Cakajāṉantā* (2009), Ravikumar's *Cuvāmi Cakajāṉantā (2010)*, and an article by Reṅkaiyyā Murukan (2015).

13 On Cāṅku Citta Civaliṅka Nāyaṉār and the *Pūraṇāṉantōtayam*, see my unpublished paper presented at Madison, South Asia Studies Conference, 2017b.

14 Rajangam (2016:66–81).

15 Christoph Emmrich and I are currently working on an annotated translation of the text.

16 Here, if at all, we must speak of the influence of Ramalingar on Ayothee Thass though the evidence for this is non-existent. The latter never directly cites Ramalingar, whereas he does not hesitate to do so with regard to many other authors and works.

17 Ayothee Thass (1912:76–77): *poypēcutalaiyoḷittavaṉ ettakaiya cukattiṉiṉru uṇmaiyariyum nilaiyayaiyaṭaikiṉrāṉō avaṉ arukil kolaiyait tavirttu cīvakāruṇya mikuttavaṉāka niṟpāṉ. muttiyeṉrum, mōṭcam eṉrum, niruvāṇam eṉruñ colluñ cukanilaiyiṉ pīṭam etiṉāl amaikkappaṭṭiruppateṉṉil, kolaiyait tavirtta cīvakāruṇyattiṉālēyām. oru maṉitaṉai nallavaṉ eṉru maṟṟa maṉitarkaḷ colluvatuṭaṉ caruva cīvarācikaḷum nallavaṉ eṉru arukiṭ ceṉru aṉpu*

pārāṭṭumāyiṉ avaṉatu cīvakāruṇya aṉpaiyē cukavāriyeṉṉappaṭum. māṟimāṟi piṟakkum māḷāppiraviyiṉ tukkattai nīkkip piṟappaṟukkum uḷḷattuṟavai nōkkupavaṉ kolaiyakaṟṟi cīvakāruṇyattai nōkkuvāṉēl tuṟavviṉ vaḻi veḷḷa viḷaṅkum.

18 Ayothee Thass (1912:115): *ummiṭatteḻūvum mūvakkiṉiyiṉ kotippaiyaṭakkuvatiṉāl cakala matippum uṇṭāy cīvakāruṇyaṉ eṉṉum peyar peṟṟu makkaḷ nilai kaṭantu tēvar piramar eṉṉuñ cukanilaip peṟṟu vāḻvīr.*

19 Ayothee Thass (1912:134): *poyyarkaḷ mattiyil meyyarkaḷāka vāḻvīrkaḷāka. poyyarkaḷ pātaiyaiyuṅkaḷ meyyil viḷakkuvīrkaḷāka. kolaiñarkaḷ mattiyil cīvakāruṇyarkaḷāka vāḻvīrkaḷāka. kolañarkaḷ mattiyil uṅkaḷ kāruṇyattai viḷakkuvīrakaḷāka.*

20 Ayothee Thass (1912:243): *maittrī: tāyāṉavaḷ taṉ ēkaputtiraṉaik kāppaṟṟutal pōl cakala uyirkaḷ pērilum cīvakāruṇyattaik kāṭṭal.*

21 Ayothee Thass (1912:270).

22 Ayothee Thass (1912:6): . . . *maṟṟum uḷḷa camaṇamuṉivarkaḷiṉ nūṟkaḷaikkoṇṭum, purātaṉapauttavivēkikaḷ karṇaparamparaiyāka vaḻaṅkivarum curutikaḷaik koṇṭum anupavacceyalkaḷaik koṇṭum ārāyvatāyiṉ cattiyataṉmam naṉku viḷaṅkum.*

23 Bond (2004:14) quoted in Patel (2013:325).

24 Bond (2004:14) quoted in Patel (2013:325): "even in classical Theravāda, these ideas have ethical implications on the mundane, or this worldly, plane and seem logically to imply a social philosophy".

25 Geetha and Rajadurai (1998:96).

26 The history of the text is dealt with briefly in Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (1959b:64), where he points out that we do not have any original, handwritten manuscript for this work, only those transcribed in the handwriting of those close to Ramalinga Swamigal. Piḷḷai, therefore, prepared his edition with the help of four of these transcribed manuscripts. Further details are provided by Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:22–25). The text's origins lie in the period when Ramalinga Swamigal was still living in Karuṅkuḻi, before 1867. On 23rd May 1867 at the inaugural ceremony of the almshouse, called the *Cattiya Taruma Cālai*, in Vaṭalūr, the then-extant version of the text was read out by him. The version of the text which we now have was first published five years after his vanishing, in 1879, by Pu. Pē. Kiruṣṇacāmi Nāyakar. The title page indicates that the first edition was published at the private press of Capā. Māṇikka Piḷḷai at the request of several well-wishers, the foremost among them, Caṅku Ceṭṭiyār. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai also states that Ramalinga Swamigal had taught and written a text in seven sections that no longer exists. The text is also referred to as the first soteriological means (*mutal cātaṉam/sādhana*) of the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* in the earliest editions of it.

27 The final incomplete version appears to have been Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai's which the Ūran Aṭikaḷ's 1997 edition faithfully reproduces.

28 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:145): *aruḷ eṉpatu kaṭavuḷ tayavu, kaṭavuḷ iyaṟkai viḷakkam. cīvakāruṇyam enpatu cīvarkaḷ tayavu, cīvarkaḷ āṉma iyaṟkai viḷakkam.*

29 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:151): *cīvakāruṇyam kaṭavuḷaip peṟuvataṟku mukkiya cātaṉam eṉpatum allāmal anta aruḷiṉ ēkatēca viḷakkam eṉṟum aṟiya vēṇṭum.*

30 Ibid.

31 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:146): *cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam eṉpatu eṉṉeṉṉil – cīvarkaḷukkuc cīvarkaḷ viṣayamāka uṇṭākiṉṟa āṉma urukkattaik koṇṭu teyvavaḻipāṭu ceytu vāḻtal eṉṟu aṟiya vēṇṭum.*

32 *Ibid:* . . . *cakōtararkaḷuḷ oruvar oru āpattāl tukkappaṭukiṉṟapōtum, tukkappaṭuvār eṉṟu aṟinta pōtum avarttamatu cakōtarar eṉṟu kaṇṭapāṟ oṟu cakōtararku urukkam uṇṭāvatu cakōtara urimaiyātaliṉ, oru cīvaṉ tukkapaṭum eṉṟaṟinta pōtum maṟṟoṟu cīvaṉukku urukkam uṇṭāvatu paḻaiya āṉma urimaiyeṉṟu aṟiya vēṇṭum.*

33 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:145–147).

34 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:147): *ākalāl āṉmatiruṣṭikku upanayaṉaṅkaḷāka irukkiṉṟa maṉam mutalāṉa karuvikaḷ cukatukkaṅkaḷai aṉupavikka māṭṭā; āṉmāvē aṉupavikkum eṉṟu aṟiya vēṇṭum.*

35 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:148).

36 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:150–151).
37 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:154): *paciyiṉāl varukiṉṟa eḷimaikku mēṟpaṭṭa eḷimaiyē illai.*
38 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:150–153).
39 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:158).
40 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:159): *oru cīvaṉaik koṉṟu oru cīvaṉukku māmicattāl paciyāṟṟutal cīvakāruṇya oḻukkamēy alla. . .*
41 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:161).
42 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:163): *. . . peṟṟuk koṇṭavarkaḷukku uḷḷiruntu mukattiṉ iṭamākat tōṉṟukiṉṟa iṉpaviḷakkamum, anta iṉattaik kaṇṭu koṭuttavarkaḷukku uṇṭākiṉṟa iṉpaviḷakkamum kaṭavul karaṇattil ēkatēcamum cīvakaraṇattiṟ pūraṇamumākat tōṉṟukiṉṟavaiyātalāl atu apara iṉpam eṉṟaṟiya vēṇṭum.*
43 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:164): *paciyiṉāl varun tuṉpattai nivartti ceyvippatil varum iṉpam para iṉpamākum.*
44 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:164): *paci nīriṭṭapōtu peṟṟavarkaḷ piḷḷaikaḷai viṟṟum, piḷḷaikaḷ peṟṟavarkaḷai viṟṟum, maṉaivikaḷaip puruṭaṉ viṟṟum puruṭaṉai maṉaivi viṟṟum antap paciyiṉāl varun tuṉpattai māṟṟik koḷḷat tuṇivārkaḷ eṉṟāl, aṉṉiyamākiya viṭu, māṭu, nilam, uṭaimai mutaliyavaikaḷai viṟṟup paciyai nīkkik koḷvar eṉpatu colla vēṇṭuvatillai.*
45 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:167).
46 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:170): *paciyiṉāl varuntukiṉṟavarkaḷ eṉta tēcattārāyiṉum entac camayattār-āyiṉum, entac cātiyārāyiṉum, enta ceykaiyārāyiṉum, avarkaḷ tēca oḻukkam, camaya oḻukkam, cāti oḻukkam, ceykai oḻukkam, mutalāṉavaikaḷaip pōtittuvicāriyāmal, ellāc cīvarkaḷiṭattum kaṭavuḷ viḷakkam potuvāka vaḷaṅkuvatai aṟintu potuvākap pārttu avaravar oḻukkatiṟkut takkapaṭi avarkaḷ paciyai nivartti ceyvippatē cīvakāruṇyam.*
47 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:171): *ākalil, cīvakāruṇyam eṉkiṟa mōṭcavīṭṭu tiravukōlaik kālam uḷḷa pōtē campātittuk koṇṭa camucārikaḷ, cariyai, kiriyai, yōkam, ñāṉam eṉkiṟa cātana cakāyaṅkaḷai vēṇṭāmal, ekkālattum aṭaiyāta iṉpavīṭṭai aṭaintu avvīṭṭuk katavait tiṟantu koṇṭu uḷḷē pukuntu nittiyamuttarkaḷāy vāḻvārkaḷ.*
48 Ibid.: *cīvakāruṇyam eṉkiṟa tiravukōlaic campātittuk koḷḷātavarkaḷāl, mōṭcam eṉkiṟa mēlvīṭṭiṟku muṉṉum piṉṉumāka ēṟic camīpattiṟ kāttiruntu mīḷavum attiṟavukōlaic campātikkat tirumpuvārkaḷ allatu, katavait tiṟantu uḷḷē pukuntu iṉpattai aṭaintu vāḻamāṭṭārkaḷ eṉṟu uṇmaiyāka aṟiyavēṇṭum.*
49 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:176).
50 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:172–173).
51 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:174–175).
52 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:181–182).
53 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:182): *aṉta aruḷai etaṉāṟ peṟakkūṭum eṉṉ aṟiyavēṇṭil – cīvakāruṇiya oḻukkattālē peṟakkūṭum eṉṟaṟiyavēṇṭum.*
54 Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1997:180).
55 Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1997:183): *itaṉāl cīvakāruṇya oḻukkamē caṉmārkkam eṉṟṟ aiyappaṭum.*
56 For a deeper consideration of this concept, see the next section.
57 Halbfass (1990:320–321).
58 Halbfass (1990:347).
59 Halbfass (1990:347).
60 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:166–167). The terminology of this passage relies on the reader's familiarity with classical *Sāṃkhya* categories as much as it does on Āyurvedic ones. I will return to this point later in this section. What exactly is meant by the terms *pantam, narampu, nāṭi* (translated here as ligaments, muscles, and channels of the heart, respectively) can, to a certain extent only be conjectured. On the problems of translating physiological and medical Āyurvedic terminology, see Wujastyk (1998:38).
61 For the subsistence crises and famines of the 18th century, much prior to the codification of a "Famine Policy" by the colonial government, see Ahuja (1999) and a summary of his conclusions in Ahuja (2004:161): "It is clear, however, that dearth and famine struck the city [Madras] and its hinterland rather frequently:

10 subsistence crises, ranging in severity between temporary dearth and major famine, are discernable for the five decades between 1747 and 1798". This situation reached its dismal climax in the Great Famine of the early 1780s. For an examination of the subsistence crises and famines of the 19th century, within and just after Ramalinga Swamigal's own lifetime, see Arnold (1984, 1988).

62 Francis (1906:180–181).

63 Arnold (1984:66).

64 Richman (1988:53–78). In fact, at a micro-level, such a direct citational can be shown between *Puṟam 18* and *Maṇimēkalai 11.92–96* and also between the latter and a verse from the later 10–12th-century didactic collection, *Nalvaḻi 26*, attributed to Auvaiyār.

65 On this poetry, refer to Zvelebil (1973b), Hart (1979), Ramanujan (1985), Marr (1985), Tieken (2001) and, most recently, Thangappa (2010), among others.

66 This has been acknowledged as much by Ramanujan (1985) and Tieken (2001).

67 Ramanujan (1985:134–135).

68 Hart and Heifetz (1999:102–103).

69 For a rather Victorian translation of this poem, see Chelliah (1985:147–163).

70 Lehmann and Malten (1992:287).

71 re. K. Kailasapathy (1968:217) with reference to *Puṟam 142*.

72 Kailasapathy, 219. Lehmann and Malten show that the word *īkai* occurs in 25 instances in *Puṟam*.

73 Kautamaṉ (1997:34–39).

74 Subbaiah (1991:136).

75 Richman (1998) and Monius (2001).

76 On the dating Zvelebil (1995:409), Richman (1998:7), and Monius (2001:13–14) who all decide on the 5th–6th century.

77 This expression,"the affliction of hunger", already appears in *Puṟam 173.11*.

78 U.V. Cāminātaiyar, (1981:11, 76–81). The *Maṇimēkalai* translations are my own.

79 See Aracu (1997:31–45) for an introduction to and edition of this particular *kummi*.

80 Re. *Puṟam 134* for *aṟa vilai* and a similar understanding of generosity. Here, I translate the Tamil word *aṟam*, related in many of its connotations to the Sanskrit *dharma*, as, "right conduct".

81 *Maṇimēkalai* 11:92–96. The famous phrase in these lines "*uṇṭi koṭuttōr uyir koṭuttōrē*" is also an echo from *Puṟam* 18.18–19: *nīr iṉṟu amayāyākkaiy ellām/uṇṭi koṭuttōr uyir koṭuttōrē*.

82 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:168–169).

83 There are other ways not explored here in which *Maṇimēkalai* echoes, inverts, and carries forward *Caṅkam* themes. For, let us consider, who is the chief giver in the story. It is this young girl Maṇimēkalai. And what is her lineage? The answer to this question is given by her distraught grandmother, Cittirāpati, in Chapter 18. Cittirāpati goes to the Prince Utayakumāraṉ, who desires Maṇimēkalai, to persuade him to deflect her from becoming a Buddhist nun. She laments that neither Maṇimēkalai nor her mother have rightly understood their own background which is not that of chaste housewives (*pattiṉip peṇṭir*) but that of "those who live by receiving food from the hands of several others". They are themselves like the stringed instrument (*yāḻ*) that passes from the hands of one bard to another when the former dies. Thus does Cittirāpati place Maṇimēkalai in the world both of the wandering bard and his stringed instrument, the world of *Puṟam* and post-*Puṟam* poetry. Is it not then, however indirectly, an inversion of the conventions of the latter, through gender, that our bard and the stringed instrument are now united in the figure of a woman? Also, that it is now she who has the limitless resources to feed the hungry and come to the rescue of kings like Maṇimēkalai does, coming to the help of the king of Kāñcīpuram when the city is suffering from famine in Chapter 28.

84 On this, see Halbfass (1995:211–223), on Vivekānanda; Raymond Brady Williams (1984) on Sahajanand Swami, and J.T.F. Jordens (1997) on Dayananda Sarasvati – to name a few of the studies of activist-renouncers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
85 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:167).
86 *Maṇimēkalai* 12:109–115.
87 See, for instance, how this logic is played out to its horrific extreme in the story of Ciṟuttoṇṭar in the 12th-century Śaivite hagiography, the *Periyapuṟāṇam*, explored insightfully from different perspectives by Hudson (1989:374–404) and Shulman (1993). Shulman, in particular, focuses on the relationship between the demanding and insatiably hungry god and the feeding devotee. It must be further made clear that this is not to suggest that a general motif of excessive giving is unique to Tamil literature. Rather this is a motif that might be considered pan-Indian, in languages as diverse as Pāli and Sanskrit, as the *Jātaka* tales relating to the excessive generosity of the Buddha-to-be. On this, see Ohnuma (2007). Similar too is the story of King Hariśchandra from the Purāṇas. On this, see Sathaye (2009:131–159).
88 *Maṇimēkalai* 20.41–65.
89 *Maṇimēkalai* 20.67–69.
90 Wilson (1996) and Klima (2002).
91 See translations of Paṭṭiṉattār in Zvelebil (1973a:93–109) and particularly poems 9 and 10.
92 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:7.10)*: miṉṉāḷum ṭaimaṭavār alkulāya veṅkuḻiyil viḻntāḻntu melintāṉ.*
Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1972:18.9): *paṭiyiṉ mākkaḷai viḻttum paṭukuḻi*
pāvam yāvum paḻakuṟum pāḻkkuḻi
kuṭikoḷ nāṟṟak kuḻicṟu nīrtarum
koṭiya ūṟṟuk kuḻipuḻuk koḷkuḻi.
See, in addition poems 1.2–3, 3.8, 9.10, 19.8, 22.5, and 25.6 in the first book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* for the recurrence of this imagery.
93 See, for instance, the brief but striking description of the dying human in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa, Preta Kalpa: II.2.40–47.*
94 Cf. Wujastyk (1998:5) on how the paradigmatic Āyurvedic body is male.
95 Wujastyk (1998:39–40).
96 *Caraka Saṃhitā, Indriyasthānam 12.43–61.* I have been greatly assisted in my translation by the comprehensive glossary of medical terms in Wujastyk, 1998, though certain terms remain obscure in spite of their literal meaning, such as *kāyaśchidram.*
97 See his references to himself repeatedly as such in the final book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā,* Book 6. These include poems 49, 81 (*Aruṭperuñjōti akaval*), 84, 85, 89, 94, 100, 112, and 125, among others.
98 Weiss (2009).
99 See Scharfe (1999).
100 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:151).
101 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:155): *kaṭavuḷ vētattil vitittirukkiṉṟapaṭiyāl . . .*
102 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:176).
103 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1997:176)*: carva caktiyaiyuṭaiya kaṭavuḷ cāṭciyāka cattiyañ ceyyappaṭumeṉṟu aṟiya vēṇṭum*
104 Ūran Aṭikaḷ (1997:176).
105 On the emergence of the protestant sermon as a new form of oratory invoking a new Protestant textuality and performative culture in the Tamil region, see Bate (2010).
106 On the history of Protestant Christianity in South India, see, among others, Bergunder (1999), Blackburn (2003), Bugge (1994), Fenger (1863), Grafe

(1990), Hudson (2000), Israel (2010a, 2010b), Lehmann (1956), and Sugirtharajah (2005).

107 Bugge, 1994.

108 Rajarigam (1958:22–24).

109 Blackburn (2003:55).

110 See Hudson, 38–40, on a typical such sermon preached by Ziegenbalg.

111 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959:105): *karuṇai kūrntu eṉatu tantaiyārākiya ellām valla tirucciṟṟampalakkaṭavuḷ pārvatipuramcamaracavētacaṉmārkkaccaṅkattarumacālaikku eḻuntaruḷi kātcik koṭukkum taruṇam mikavum aṭutta camīpamākavirukkiṉṟatu. antat taruṇattil cālaikku uriyavarkaḷākiyiruntu iṟantavarkaḷaiyellām eḻuppik koṭuttaruḷuvār. itu cattiyam. itu cattiyam.*

The Christian influence on Ramalingar's later theology becomes particularly clear when we consider the prose writings in entirety and look at his discourses (*upadeśa*) as well as his public notifications in the last decade of his life.

112 See, for example, the description of a murdered and dying person in his first prose piece *Maṉumuṟaikaṇṭa vācakam* dealt with in Raman (2009b).

113 A close scrutiny of how the figure of Christ was perceived in specific vernacular textual traditions – such as the 18th- and 19th-century Tamil one – would be a desideratum if we are to understand, in its specificities, the imbrication of Christianity in non-Christian religious traditions. For the theological narratives about the resurrected Christ in patristic and medieval literature, as well as the discussions about the nature of and the need for the resurrected body, see Bynum (1995). For the representation of the suffering Christ in late medieval English devotional texts, see Beckwith [1993]1996. For how Christ's Passion was an important trope in Indian-Catholic martyrdom narratives already in the 16th and 17th centuries, see Županov (2005).

5 Anti-Hagiography

In Chapter 2 we saw that the earliest hagiographies of Ramalingar, as well as his poetry itself, had set up certain messianic expectations about his departure and eventual return all centred around the notions of his *Siddha*-hood as well as his direct access to a new religious path. The inspirational and utopian doctriness of his later years were clearly also the most contestable in that they hinged upon an absolute belief in the claims made by him or not. If they were not believed, then almost anything said about him or what he himself said could be rejected. In this chapter we will see a work that did precisely this: repudiated, through savage polemics, all that the early hagiographies sought to achieve. I call this text an anti-hagiography inasmuch as it questions and subvert the hagiographical assumptions and *topoi* discussed earlier through a comprehensive genre inversion.[1] Belonging to the category of polemical tracts it is part of a tradition of polemical literature that have a long lineage in the Indian religious traditions, an issue that I will take up later. This particular work rose in the context of the dispute between Arumuga Navalar of Jaffna and Ramalinga Swamigal, discussed at length in Chapter 1. The dispute was carried out also as a war of words in the writings of their students and disciples. The occasion that triggered the war of words was the publication in 1867, by Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, of the first four books of Ramalinga Swamigal's poetry as the *Tiruvaruṭpā*. The debate and polemics were conducted in two phases: the first within the chief protagonists' own lifetime and the second, in the first years of the 20th century. The very fact that the debate continued to excite attention a good half-a-century after it first emerged, involving, as Venkatachalapathy has pointed out,[2] a list of the who's who of the Tamil literary scene in the early 20th century speaks for its hitherto unexplored ramifications and its significance for Tamil religion, that I hope to address in this chapter. But, prior to that, an account of the text corpus as well as the persons involved is given, to enable us to contextualize both the personages and the issues involved.

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Texts and Counter-Texts

The broad outlines of the textual dispute that emerged as a result of the confrontation are as follows:[3]

- In 1867, the first edition of Ramalinga Swamigal's selected poetry was brought out as *Tiruvaruṭpā* under the editorship of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār.[4]
- In Chidambaram, Arumuga Navalar began to criticize the work in the Friday discourses that he gave, in continuation of the tradition established at Jaffna.
- The *Tiruvaruṭpā* camp, consisting of Ramalinga Swamigal's well-wishers and disciples, took action in 1868, in print. The first publication was *The Redressal of the Calumnies against the Tiruvaruṭpā* (*Tiruvaruṭpā tūṣaṇa parikāram*) of Tirumayilai Caṇmukam Piḷḷai.
- In October 1868, Navalar's disciple Ci.Vai. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai advertised the imminent publication of Navalar's edition of the grammatical work *Tolkāppiyam collatikāram*. The advertisement blurb included conspicuous praise of Nāvalar as the greatest Tamil scholar of his time.
- The *Tiruvaruṭpā* camp seized upon this advertisement as additional provocation that implicitly devalued other Tamil scholars. The antagonism, on their part, took on the additional dimension of Tamil literary culture in Madras and environs versus Jaffna/Īḻam literary culture. A scurrilous pamphlet was now published by one Naraciṅkapura Vīrācāmi Mutaliyār. Called *A Letter-Petition* (*Vijñāpanap pattirikai*) it came out the same year and provoked an immediate counter-response, *The Burning of the Light of Good Sense* (*Nallaṟivu cuṭar koḷuttutal*) of Nāvalar's disciple Civapātanēca Piḷḷai. The attacks and counter-attacks culminated in 1869 in the two works that defined the controversy: *The Refutation of the False Songs of Divine Grace* (*Pōliyaruṭpā maṟuppu*, henceforth, *The Refutation*) attributed to Māvaṇṭūr Tiyākēca Mutaliyār but later acknowledged to be the work of Navalar himself[5] and the response to it by Toḻuvūr Vēlayuta Mutaliyār with the ponderous title *The Refutation of the Refutation of the False Songs of Divine Grace or the Great Thunderbolt which Destroys that which causes False Reasoning* (*Pōliyaruṭpā maṟuppiṉ kaṇṭaṉam allatu kutarkkāraṇīyanāśamakāparaśu*). In this chapter I am concerned exclusively with Navalar's *The Refutation* as an anti-hagiographical work, illustrating the contested understanding of Ramalingar in the colonial period.

Navalar's *The Refutation* or The Unmasking of Ramalinga Swamigal

The Refutation is a work whose rhetorical and stylistic features can best be understood through a comparison with Navalar's other famous

polemical tracts, particularly the 1854 *Destruction of the Calumnies Against Śaivism* (*Caivatūṣaṇaparikāram*), which he wrote to tackle Protestant Christian missionary polemics in Jaffna. This tract, which catapulted Navalar into fame as the champion of Śaivism, has been seen as "successful translation of the terms of Protestant Christianity into the conceptual world of Caivam".[6] In terms of framework, rhetorical style, and aims *The Refutation* is very similar to this tract. Thus, *Destruction of the Calumnies Against Śaivism* begins also as an edifying text: Christian missionaries attack Śaiva religion and gain adherents among Śaivites because the latter are both gullible and ignorant – they do not know enough about their own religion. It is this gap that Navalar will step in and redress – he will expose missionary polemics as false and show his fellow Śaivites what they should believe in.[7] Similarly, *The Refutation* is about exposing Ramalinga Swamigal in order to educate a gullible public about both his true nature and the real Śaiva canon. Thus, a detailed comparison of Navalar's first polemical tract and *The Refutation* would give us a good sense of his hermeneutical strategies and ideological agenda in general.[8] But this is not the intention of this chapter. Rather, we will look in detail at how, in *The Refutation*, Ramalinga Swamigal is shifted from a world of hagiographical perfection into a world of biographical ambivalence, into a form of thinking about the holy life as constructed of subterfuges and lies, of gaps and contradictions, that had to be mercilessly exposed. In short, to write about him one had to write the biography of a holy scoundrel. Yet, we will see that *The Refutation* is a remarkable document, not so much for what it consciously sets out to achieve as what it unwittingly does, complicating the question of what we can know and how much we can know about a person, showing the unreliability of facts in that they might well generate the opposite effect of what they intended to generate. For, an anti-hagiography may, in fact, create empathy and affection for the very subject that it seeks to satirize and debunk. Further, *The Refutation* functions as the fulcrum or pivot around which hagiographical and biographical interpretations of Ramalingar revolve – pushing them in the direction of rejecting its premises by transcending them, moving Ramalinga Swamigal into a space beyond the claims of traditional Tamil Śaivasiddhānta.

The True *Aruṭpā*

The Refutation begins by giving us an outline of how Śaiva religion is to be understood in terms of its canonical literature and its holy persons. This is a framework not so much as to enlighten an ignorant audience as to remind a learned and discerning one about the parameters of the tradition that is intramural, that all have agreed upon. Navalar begins by discussing which texts of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta are collectively called the *Aruṭpā*. He explains that these are the *Tēvāram*, *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiruvicaippā*, the *Tiruppallāṇṭu*, and the *Periyapurāṇam*. These five, he tells us, function as the ordained sacred utterances for daily and occasional rituals, both

private and public, for Śaivism.[9] Composed by a few among those 63 poet-saints who are considered Teachers of the Doctrine [of Śaivasiddhānta] (*samayācāryas*),[10] these teachings known as the *Aruṭpā* are considered to be a product of those poet-saints (*nāyaṉmār*) whose sensory instruments are no longer subjected to the cycle of transmigration but have become divine. Therefore, these works too are not of human but of divine origin.[11] In stating this, Navalar produces the list of authorities for this assertion: Śiva himself who is omniscient, the sages who have worshipped him, and the Kailāśa lineage of preceptors (*cantānācāriyarkaḷ*).[12] The texts that assert these truths are mentioned in the Purāṇas such as the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, and *Śivarahasya*.[13] Thus, *The Refutation* lays the groundwork for establishing the authority of the canon of Śaivasiddhānta as a preface to establishing the lack of such sanctioned authority for Ramalingar's poetry. This view of Navalar, of the divinity of the Śaiva canon, it has been suggested, was unique to a Sri Lankan literary tradition as opposed to a more "secular" account of the Tamil literary canon in Tamil Nadu. It was a Sri Lankan literary tradition also shared by other compatriots of Arumuga Navalar, by scholars such as Capāpati Nāvalar (1845–1903), who wrote the treatise *The Dravidian Illumination* (*Tirāviṭa pirakācikai*) in 1899, asserting the divine origin and authority of the Śaiva āgamas.[14] Yet, it has to be understood that the project of both the Nāvalars was not about the development of a Tamil literary history in a secularist mode, employing historical methods, but very much about asserting a much older notion of what constitutes canonical literature redefined now in new ways as "tradition". This particularly in the light of the dangers posed to it by temporality and periodization as employed in literary history as a discipline.[15] Thus, the linking of the Śaiva āgamas with the Vedas and both with divine origin, originating in Śiva himself, goes back to the earliest strata of Śaivasiddhānta literature. So too does an alternative model of seeing the Tamil language and literature from its inception as linked to the sage Agastya and, through the latter, to Śiva and the Śaivite religious tradition.[16] It is by drawing upon these older literary tropes and cultural projects that Arumuga Navalar presents his view of what constitutes *Tiruvaruṭpā* in the 19th century. Yet, it is clear that Navalar's restriction of the notion, if not the name, of a corpus of poetry that is divinely inspired to the authors of the *Tirumuṟai* alone is a somewhat specious argument in the light of notions of literary inspiration and canonicity in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. While the *Tirumuṟai* occupies a special, sacrosanct position the tradition also constantly acknowledged the emergence of post-*Tirumuṟai* religious poetry that was divinely inspired. As late as the 15th century (Aruṇakirinātar) or the 17th–18th century (Tāyumāṉavar), the story of the poet-saint who was first an ordinary, uninspired mortal, who has a life-changing encounter and, through it, becomes divinely inspired and composes his poetry remained a standard hagiographical topos into early modernity.[17] What, therefore, motivated Navalar's determination to delimit this notion to the *Tirumuṟai* was to demonstrate a large temporal

gap between those Śaiva saints who were divinely inspired long ago and those of yesteryear and today who cannot be allowed to inhabit this same religious status. We will return to this theme again and again and conjecture as to why this might be the case in *The Refutation*.

Next, with this framework for canonical authority in place, Navalar turns to new and dubious developments in the Tamil religious world:

> Nowadays, a person called Karuṅkuḻi Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai has sung a few songs with the intention of having people worship him through believing that he has obtained the experience of Śiva (*śivānubhūti*). Naming them, entirely on his own, the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and himself Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār, he has, through one of his students, had a purāṇa done for [the text], called *The History of the Tiruvaruṭpā*, for himself, appended it to the text, had it printed and thus is selling it. Seeing this, some witless persons, considering Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai equal to the *samayācārya*s [Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṉacampantar and Māṇikkavācakar], praising his poetry as equivalent to that of the *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam*, worshipping it, recite it when they are doing daily ritual, *pūjā*, getting *śivadarśana* etc. On some occasions, during the time of the festivals (*utsava*s), in certain temples in Ceṉṉappaṭṭiṉam, they have stopped the recitation of the *Tēvāram* etc., and recite only Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's songs.
>
> There is no other reason for why these poor wretches are infatuated and led astray other than that he and his disciples are roaming around saying that it is stated in both Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's own songs and that of his disciples that he has obtained God's grace, that he knows alchemy, and that he has performed several miracles. Therefore, out of compassion for those poor wretches, some of his songs and sayings are taken up here to demonstrate clearly that he has not in the least obtained God's grace, and that he has undertaken to trick people and win false fame for himself.[18]

Let us consider some of the implications of this opening salvo. The first shot is delivered when Navalar calls Ramalingar Karuṅkuḻi Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai. A significant aspect of the hagiographical narrative that centred around Ramalingar from the earliest days was to shift his location, and hence also his identity, from the places where he was born (Marutūr), and lived (Madras, Karuṅkuḻi, and Mēṭṭukkuppam), to the place to which his religious identity is tied – particularly in his poetry and religious activities in the later years of his life – which is Chidambaram. Thus, the title page of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's first edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* underscores this claim with the words, "*Tiruvaruṭpā* as uttered graciously by Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai known as Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār".[19] Navalar's replacement of Chidambaram with the name of the actual place where Ramalinga Swamigal resided at the time of the publication of the poetry, Karuṅkuḻi, does several things – it denies him and his disciples the right to associate

him with the aura attached to Chidambaram as the location of Śaivite orthodoxy as much as it denies him and his disciples the exclusive right to naming him. Navalar abrogates this right to do so because, he argues, the conferring of a religious title on a work or its author can be authorized by only others not by oneself nor by one's intimate acquaintances. As von Bruck and Bodenhorn have pointed out,

> That identities can be stolen, traded, suspended, and even erased through the name reveals the profound, political power located in the capacity to name; it illustrates the property-like potential in names to transact social value; and it brings into view the powerful connection between name and self-identity.[20]

One might add to this the significance of the name as adding to religious status and value. Hence, by de-naming and renaming Ramalingar's name, Navalar is also suspending and annihilating the intimate contact between the poet-saint and the locale/locales with which traditional Śaivite hagiography associates a poet-saint – the temporal place where Śiva resides, which he sings of in his poetry and where he enters into an intimate relationship with the divine.[21] De-naming Ramalinga Swamigal is the first step in delegitimizing the claims made both by himself and his followers. Claims pertaining to alchemy, magic, and miracles. It is the first step in checking his popularity among the poor and in the temple-context, where the influence of his poetry is strikingly in evidence. Exposing Ramalinga Swamigal as a confidence trickster would be to strip away the charisma and erode his popularity. Here, Navalar's own agenda for regulating temple-based worship, removing it from what he saw as a corrupt, sadly degenerate, and constantly innovative local custom and usage and returning it to "tradition", to an āgamic textually prescribed form of Śaiva worship is very much in evidence.[22] From this perspective Ramalingar's form of Śaivism in its popularity seemed to pose a particular danger to Navalar's reformist agendas, its very attractiveness to the masses subverting the return to a new textual orthodoxy, to an invented tradition. In considering how to stem Ramalinga Swamigal's popularity Navalar seems to have felt that the only way to do so was through a form of investigative anti-hagiography: debunking systematically the chief claims regarding Ramalingar's holiness. This is what he proceeds to do next.

Ōtātu uṇartal or Knowing Without Learning

An important claim that Navalar seeks to tackle is the hagiographical emphasis that Ramalingar attained levels of great scholarly and spiritual knowledge without ever learning or being taught by anyone. The early hagiographies speak of this process, (using a particular phrase which Navalar echoes in his critique) as "unlearnt knowing" (*ōtātu uṇartal*) – and attribute

this acquisition of knowledge to the grace of God.[23] When we consider the basis of such an assertion, the textual trail shows us that that they were not plucking this motif from thin air but from an expertise that came from a deep familiarity with every poem of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*.

The most recent definitive 1972 edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, which has become the de facto critical edition, lists altogether 5,818 individual verses. In this vast corpus there are many verses which describe Ramalinga Swamigal's acquisition of divine grace and powers but very few which use this specific phrase cited earlier. To be precise we have only eight verses and they are very useful in helping us contextualize the meaning of the phrase and its significance in shaping his religious persona. In going into these verses in some length I take recourse to the only commentary on the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, the *Tiruvaruṭpā mūlamum uraiyum* (henceforth, the *TMU*) of Auvai Cu. Turaicāmippiḷḷai.[24] The first reference to a phrase that combines these two words is fairly late in the poetic corpus, in the fourth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, in *TMU* 4.15.47, as part of the poem "The Single Poem in the *Viruttam* Metre", (*Tanittiruviruttam*) addressed to the deity Naṭarāja at Chidambaram, where the poet says: "You made me one who serves you and *making me experience [the state of] knowing without learning*, you stood within me".[25] Turaicāmippiḷḷai's commentary elaborates on this verse thus:

> *Ōti uṇartal* means going to someone and learning the texts taken up for study with him, coming to know them through his teaching. *Uṇartal* is also when one comes to know a text by reading it several times. Unlike either of these, *ōtātu uṇartal* is to take within one's consciousness the meaning of the text.[26]

The implication is that one imbibes, as experiential, direct knowledge, the true meaning of the text, directly, without being taught it by anyone, without a preceptor or through some kind of intensive self-study but rather, possibly instantly, through revelatory insight. These significant meanings of the phrase are reinforced in the poem "The Garland of Love" (*Aṉpu mālai*), to be found in the fifth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*. Here, in verse 25 of the poem we have, "You lifted up this insignificant person who has been ignorant, dwelling in darkness, and gave him a little knowledge. Residing in his consciousness, you made him experience without learning, the Vedas and its branches of learning".[27] Here, Turaicāmippiḷḷai points out that this verse refers to the history of Ramalinga Swamigal's intelligence (*aṟiviṉ varalāṟu*). Thus, he suggests the word *ciriyēṉ*, which I have translated as "insignificant person" here, refers literally to a child, the child Ramalingar who had been ignorant and educated only nominally through conventional schooling. The Vedas, too, are taught through the transmission of knowledge from father to son. This, he says, is what is meant by the phrase *ōtum maṟai*. Thus, *ōtāmal* refers to not learning them in this traditional way.[28] Two further verses elaborate on what, instead, enables Ramalingar to obtain this

expansive knowledge. Thus, in the final book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, in the forty-sixth poem titled, "The Sight of the Divine" (*Iṟaittirukkāṭci*) each verse of the poem ends with the refrain, "I saw and understood" (*kaṇṭukoṇṭēṉē*). Verse 8 expresses the following sentiments: "I saw that light, that space (*veḷi*), the First Reciter who made known [to me everything] without learning".[29] There is the space of Supreme Knowledge, the commentary tells us, "that makes known to the poet everything, in its entirety and perfectly, unlike in the case of living beings who learn texts by reciting them one by one".[30] Much the same sentiments are expressed in *Tiruvaruṭpā* 6.57.23 in the poem titled, "The Elucidation of the Garland of Grace" (*Aruḷmālai viḷakkam*): "O Kinsman who made me the only embodied person with the experience that knew without learning, so that all who knew through learning listened to me".[31] In the remaining four verses where this phrase occurs, all of them in the sixth book (Poems 81, 112, and 125), we have these same views being repeated with virtually no modification.

The phrase *ōtātu uṇartal* consists of two highly polysemic words: the first, *ōtu*, has the connotations of to "recite, utter, repeat, learn" and refers specifically in this context to the memorization, repetition and, hence, knowledge through such processes, of the Vedas and, by extension, the Tamil Śaivite canon. The word *uṇar* is similarly rich in connotation in that it can mean to both "know" and to "feel" combining, therefore, the perceptual and the experiential dimensions of knowledge and proving to be particularly useful, in the Śaivasiddhāntic context, in speaking of direct religious experience as enfolding both these dimensions. In the brief references to them in his work Ramalinga Swamigal suggests to us that this direct experiential knowledge was not only given to him by God but that it, in turn, gave him the mastery of the sacred corpus of texts that others would have only through studying them with a teacher. This wisdom was what made others turn to him for their own learning. The commentary elaborates on these claims by making implicit gestures towards a kind of book learning and understanding that does not come from mere memorization and recitation, claims which might be there but are not explicitly articulated in the poetry itself. Nevertheless, Ramalinga Swamigal was not the first to use this phrase within the context of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. Fascinatingly, it appears to be used for the first time, of a Śaivite devotee, in the one text of the *Tirumuṟai*, which is also a hagiography and, hence, directly concerned with the nature of the enlightened Śaiva devotee, the *nāyaṉār*. This is the 12th-century hagiography, the *Periyapurāṇam* of Cēkkiḻār.

Ōtātu uṇartal in the *Periyapurāṇam*

We have, in the *Periyapurāṇam*, several instances where variations of the meaning of the phrase appear to describe the state of mind of the *nāyaṉār*. Here are a few examples: in the story of Cuntarar (*Periyapurāṇam* 1.6.72) Cuntarar says of Śiva's intervention in his life, "Giving experience to the

one who was ignorant of the gain, and making me live" (*ūtiyam aṟiyātēṉ ukku* ***uṇarvu tantu uyyak koṇṭa***); in the story of Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār (*Periyapurāṇam*, 3.16.157) Śiva himself says of his devotee, "His entire intelligence is an intelligence that knows me" (*avaṉ uṭaiya aṟivellām nammai aṟiyum aṟivu*); the story of Māṉakkañcāṟa Nāyaṉār of whom it is said (*Periyapurāṇam*, 3.18.7), "He knew and experienced the True Reality" (*meyp poruḷai* ***aṟintu uṇarntār***): and, finally, in the story of Taṇṭi Aṭikaḷ, the very first verse of his hagiography states that he had "abandoned the feeling that saw outwardly and was fixed in seeing within, having taken as the object, within the heart, the red-gold feet [of Śiva]", (*cem poṉ maṉattuk koṇṭa karuttiṉ aka nōkkum kuṟippē aṉṟip puṟa nōkkum kaṇṭa uṇarvu tuṟanttār*). Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that a central thread running through all the lives of the poet-saints in the *Periyapurāṇam* is that, in some sense, they all experience and come to know Śiva through the mysterious descent of that knowledge, unasked for. Nevertheless, it is entirely significant that the exact phrase *ōtātu uṇartal* is repeated in only one story – in that of one of the three *samayācārya*s, Tiruñāṉacampantar, whose poetic compositions form the first three books of the *Tirumuṟai*. This is in *Periyapurāṇam* 12.28.840 in one of the chapters dealing with the life story of Tiruñāṉacampantar.[32] The story of how the boy Campantar becomes "Campantar of the Divine Knowledge" (Tiruñāṉacampantar) bears recollection, however briefly, in being one of the most charming stories of the *Periyapurāṇam*. A brief account, with rather Victorian overtones, with all the salient details is to be found in P. Sundaram Pillai, in his 1909 article on Campantar in *The Tamilian Antiquary*.

> He was born of good Brahman parents of the Kaundinya gotra at Sirkali or Shiyali, a few miles to the South of Chidambaram. His father bore the name Sivapādahridaya, and his mother was called Bhagavati. Evidently, they had no other children. At the age of three, Sambandha, who was then called Pillai or Aludaiya Pillai, accompanied his father, one morning, to the bathing ghat of the local temple tank. Busy with his own ablutions, the father forgot the presence of his son; and the boy, left to himself, cried and wept, and called to his mother. The local goddess heard the cry, and appearing before the boy gave[33] him a cup of her own milk. The boy drank the holy draught, and forthwith became Tirujnanasambandha, or, the one related to (the godhead) through wisdom. In the meantime, the father having finished his ablutions, came up to the boy, and wished to know about the cup in his hand. The child broke out into verse, and pointing to the divine figure, still but vanishing through the sky, proclaimed the source of the gift.

What Sundaram Pillai's genteel version does not convey adequately is what gives the *Periyapurāṇam* version its poetic power – the helplessness and terror of the infant when he is no longer able to see his father, the descent of Śiva as the Lord of Tiruttōṇipuram together with Pārvatī and how she

expresses her own breast milk and gives it to the child in a golden cup, transforming him from a mere infant to one with divine knowledge. Sundaram Pillai begins his article by stating that "Among the Saiva community of Southern India, no name is held in greater veneration than that of Tirujnanasambandha".[34] This veneration is linked, I would suggest, to an understanding of the nature of his wisdom, acquired in the purity of childhood and through a hagiographical motif that is particularly significant in South Asia, the purity and significance of imbibing the mother's milk. Indeed, whether an infant saint drinks or does not drink the mother's milk is a recurring motif in sacred biographies that seems to be introduced specifically to create a cleavage between caste/birth identity and true, spiritual identity. Thus, in the Tamil Vaiṣṇava hagiographical literature emerging around the same period as the *Periyapurāṇam*, we have in the story of the equally famous saint Nammāḻvār a direct inversion of the story of Campantar: of a poet-saint as a baby who refuses the mother's milk. Thus, Nammāḻvār is born not as a Brahman but in a caste considered as *śūdra* in the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies, yet transcends caste identity, revealing his true nature as a portion of Viṣṇu, by not drinking his mother's milk from birth.[35] As Böck and Rao have pointed out in their book on the construction of kinship in South Asia,

> In the Middle East and many parts of South Asia it is the mother's milk that is held to be the determining element. Depending on one's cultural perspective this is the last of the long chaîne reliant nourriture, semence et filiation . . . or the first in the Ayurvedic system where food is transformed successively to bone marrow, then to blood, and finally to semen . . . Relationships constructed through blood, semen, and milk between children and parents and even across generations, seem to lay the foundation for ties of kinship.[36]

The *Periyapurāṇam* describes the milk that Campantar drinks as "a nectar of the knowledge of Śiva which is beyond comprehension" (*eṇṇariya civañāṉattiṉ amutam*).[37] Certainly, one of the reasons for the special status that Campantar enjoys among the canon of the Śaivasiddhānta saints is undoubtedly due to this kinship that he comes to have with the Goddess and Śiva, through the drinking of the milk of divine knowledge directly given from her breast. Thus the particular potency of the direct, unmediated, and nourishing wisdom that he is considered to have acquired as a child becomes a powerful interpretive tool for the religious experience particularly of those who wished to speak of an unmediated religious experience. It is one such figure from around the 15th century, Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal and his work the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, which we already encountered in previous chapters. It is Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal whose hagiography is shadowed by Campantar, who proves to be the direct inspiration for Ramalingar's own "unlearnt Knowing".

A Brief Excursus into Ramalinga Swamigal's Introductory Commentary on the Laudatory Verse (*Ciṟappuppāyiram*) of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal

Ramalinga Swamigal, as we know, not only printed the *Oḻiviloṭukkam* but also framed it with an erudite commentary that has come to be incorporated in all subsequent editions of the text. The preface is framed as a detailed commentary on an anonymous verse which Ramalingar understands as paying direct homage to Tiruñāṉacampantar as the real, divine guru of Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal. The frontispiece of this first printed edition has the words "Taught by Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal, who had obtained the grace of Cīkāḻi Tiruñāṉacampantacuvāmiḷal".[38] In holding this view Ramalingar was preceded by the interpretation of the earliest commentator, Tiruppōrūr Citamparam Cuvāmikaḷ who explicitly says this in his commentary on certain verses of the text. These are verses in which the poet Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal makes it clear that his own teacher is Campantaṇ of Cīkāḻi, thus allowing for the assumption, in all subsequent hagiographies, that this might refer to Tiruñāṉacampantar himself.[39] The text proper begins with invocatory verses (*kāppu*), one of which explicitly refers to the "the feet with flower anklets of our Lord, from the Tamil Cīkāḻi which destroy one's bonds".[40] In verse 11 the author tells us that the one learned in the Vedas, Campantaṉ of Cīkāḻi, has given him the true liberation that guarantees salvation, and directly taught him this text, making the claim, therefore, that this is a revelation that comes not just from the author but from one of the original hallowed teachers of the tradition.[41] In verse 42 these themes again come together and seem to be particularly pertinent to our focus:

> He who experienced, without learning (*ōtāmal uṇartōṉ*), the Vedas, he said that the Conclusion of the *Vedānta* is itself that abode of no birth – being the first, second and third persons, the bliss in the extinction of the "I" and the state that does not say, "This is Bliss".[42]

In saying this the poet is not just reiterating the hagiographical position on how Campantar acquired divine wisdom but links his own experience to this lineage, also making it an unlearnt knowledge. Certainly, by the time of the second printed edition of the text in 1906, and in Aṉavaratavināyakar's preface to it, an established hagiographical motif is that Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal's teacher referred to repeatedly within the text is Tiruñāṉacampantar himself. This also has to do, as I suggest later, with the textual tradition relating to Campantar's own biography that becomes much more elaborate after the *Periyapurāṇam* and links him directly to texts that focus on an unmediated experience (*anupūti*) of Śiva.

When we turn to Ramalingar's short but dense laudatory preface, there are certain passages that are central to our understanding of his interpretation of both Campantar and of "unlearnt knowing". The entire preface

is structured as an extended interpretation of a single, anonymous verse which reads as follows:

> Placing on his head the powerful lotus feet of that *Vaḷḷal*, that King of Gurus (*kururāyaṉ*), who won the polemical debates, he uttered, after deep thought (*ōrntu*), this work, the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, so that all our people may consume of that nectar within his heart, that wells up upon extinction of the self.[43]

Ramalingar's preface consists of a detailed analysis of each word and phrase of this verse. I cite here only one passage that is crucial in that it illuminates his own understanding of Campantar and what he means for the transmission of "unlearnt knowing" as well as reinforce his importance as the wise teacher (*ñāṉācāriyar*) who, in fact, is either a portion of Śiva or Śiva himself. The passage is concerned with parsing the phrase, "the King of Gurus" in the verse cited previously.

> The King of Gurus – This is an honorific, a derivative name that confers honour upon Tiruñāṉacampanta Piḷḷaiyār. There are those teachers who know from learning, who have tried again and again different means [to acquire knowledge], and having acquired with great difficulty, to a certain extent, the ability to be a teacher, now and then run into difficulties and become confused. Unlike them, knowing completely without learning the Vedas, Āgamas etc., without making any effort towards a means [of knowledge] that leads to greatness, he [Campantar] had, abiding in him and filling him, all the marks of grace of a wise teacher. Standing within the intelligence of each of those teachers who had knowledge from learning, in the very form of grace, he taught them, and conferred benefits upon them, externally, in the form of a teacher. . . . Or else "the King of Gurus" means . . . Piḷḷaiyār is Kumāra, the true guru, in the incarnation that is higher than this incarnation. . . . Understand his preeminence as the teacher who taught Śiva and Agastya.[44]

Here, there are two significant developments in the hagiography of Campantar, which undoubtedly can be understood further only through a study of the texts extolling him much prior to the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*. These would include and start with those *prabandha* texts especially dedicated to Campantar which form a part of the eleventh *Tirumuṟai* such as the *Āḷuṭaiyapiḷḷaiyār tiruvantāti, Āḷuṭaiyapiḷḷaiyār tirukkalampakam*, and the *Āḷuṭaiyapiḷḷaiyār tiruttokai*, among others. What is clear is that by the time of Ramalingar there is an established tradition to see Campantar as the teacher par excellence, who is able to offer others wisdom from within their intelligence, functioning as the internal guide. This view is also linked to an additional tradition, for which Ramalinga Swamigal quotes the *Kallāṭam* (ca. 11th century) and

Aruṇakirināthar (ca. 15th century), which is the equating of Campantar with Kumāra/Skanda as the son of Śiva, such an identification evidently arising from his kinship ties, through the drinking of the Goddess's milk. Indeed, the textual evidence I have unearthed thus far establishes that this identification is reinforced largely by Aruṇakirināthar in poems such as the *citrakāvya*, the *Tiruveḻukūṟṟirukkai* (verse 7 particularly must be noted) and the till today immensely popular *Tiruppukaḻ*.[45] More significantly, such an identification also elides into regarding Campantar as a form of Śiva himself who has come forth as the *jñānācārya*, to offer direct initiation and wisdom to the author of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*.

Hence, in some sense, Campantar becomes a metonym for Śiva and, in a further step, Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal becomes a metonym for both Campantar and Śiva. Indeed, these multiple levels of identification are reinforced by the name "Vaḷḷal" itself that, in its various forms are used of Śiva himself in the *Tēvāram* hymns.[46] It is Śiva who is the internal guru, working within one's consciousness, initiating one even while being none other than oneself. These views are both to be reinforced and taken up in an act of religious mimesis by Ramalingar in his own writings.[47] Such views, in turn, were seen by Navalar, for his part, as part of a religious pretension that had to be firmly repudiated.

Miracles

Navalar first quotes a verse from the fourth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* addressed to Naṭarāja at Chidambaram, where Ramalingar speaks of how God had graced him by giving him the ability to learn without learning.[48] He supplements this with verse 21 from Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's praise-poem that reiterates this same trope only now also carried over to Ramalingar's disciples. Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār states that, just as his master had learnt without being taught, he teaches his disciples without educating them.[49] The explicit comparison here, as Navalar also agrees, is with Tiruñāṉacampantar who drank the Goddess's milk as a three-year-old child and achieved instant erudition and insight. Seeing this hagiographical motif applied not just to Ramalinga Swamigal but also to his students infuriates Navalar. He asks sarcastically:

> If it is true that Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai and his disciples learnt without memorizing, then did they not study with anyone using palm-leaves? Have not several people seen that they have done this? Is this not like trying to hide a whole pumpkin inside one's food? If it is said we know everything without being taught, then does this mean all languages? Or does it mean only the two languages of Sanskrit and Tamil? Or just Tamil? Does it mean all the books written in Tamil? Or is it restricted to the three known as grammar, literature and scriptures (*jñānaśāstra*)? If this is the case how is he going to excuse the mistakes in his published works?

This passage articulates a historical position that reconfigures the attitude towards the miraculous without fundamentally endangering religious belief. Here, the miraculous event – that of being taught by God – is not repudiated but, as we saw earlier, shifted back to a distant time, to semi-mythical and personages. Navalar is, in effect saying that this was true of Tiruñāṉacampantar, indeed this is an article of faith that the *samayācārya*s did perform miraculous deeds, but this is not true of Ramalingar. In the case of the latter quotidian reality intrudes: Ramalinga Swamigal is a mere mortal, people have seen him pouring over palm-leaves, they have seen him teaching his disciples. Hence, the claims are not tenable. Exaggeration abounds – reason poses hard-hitting questions that undermine the claims, unravel the contemporary story while preserving the pristine and miraculous Śaiva past. The claim of being in possession of knowledge acquired through divine grace is also attacked in other ways. Navalar makes a long list of scribal and theological errors in Ramalingar's published works to show the deficiencies in his learning. Listing approximately 25 or more linguistic errors in Ramalingar's edition of the *Oḻiviloṭukkam*, Navalar makes a mockery of his erudition and questions whether anyone with such poor scholarly credentials can be considered as endowed with special knowledge.[50] This section of *The Refutation* also gestures to the cultural attitudes that centred around publishing and printing in the mid-19th century, where printing seemed to offer a new, historical opportunity to both bolster or criticize and shatter scholarly reputations.[51] Demolishing Ramalingar's worldly reputation as a learned scholar becomes part of the two-pronged strategy to unravel his divine reputation.

Next, Navalar proceeds to return to the theme of specific claims in Ramalinga Swamigal's poetry. He quotes a verse from the fourth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, where Ramalingar speaks of the divine epiphany in his life when a water-lamp burnt like a ghee-lamp in front of the temple.[52] Quoting, in addition, verses composed by Ramalingar's disciples that celebrate this event Navalar seeks hard evidence for it. If Ramalingar is able to accomplish such a miracle, one that has been formerly attributed to the mythical saint Naminanti Aṭikaḷ Nāyaṉār in the *Periyapurāṇam*, then he should perform it in front of a large audience consisting of also fellow religionists and others and set any doubts to rest regarding his powers.[53] Similarly, several hundreds of Ramalingar's verses, says Navalar, speak of how Śiva-Naṭarāja came and took hold of him in his waking state, how he obtained sight of him, how God embraced and caressed him, and told him things.[54] If this is the case, challenges *The Refutation*:

> [If all this is true] then, like the camayācāriyas, he should perform miracles (*atputaṅkaḷ*) that people can witness, like awakening the dead etc., and annihilating other religions, he could establish the Śaiva religion![55]

Obtaining God's grace, Navalar continues, is for one's own satisfaction (*āṉmacukam*) not for the satisfaction of others. One need not make a book out of this experience and proclaim it to others. One need not give oneself

special names. One need not speak of special powers or invent purāṇic stories to the effect of having incarnated to make Śaivism flourish, on the one hand, and at the same time to have his sister's son, Cuntaram Piḷḷai, write that it is he, Ramalingar and not Śiva who can destroy the bonds of transmigration of all the souls.[56] With these words Navalar ends a certain section of *The Refutation* devoted to addressing the issues of religious authority and miracles in the context of the Śaivite, holy life.

In seeking to understand this discourse, we need to also see that there exists very little scholarship that has looked at the genealogy of miracles, of terms that might or might not approximate to the Judaeo-Christian sense of the term, in the context of South Asian religions.[57] The few significant works, both published and unpublished, that have done so are in general agreement that a crucial Western distinction that pertains between "magic" and "miracles", where magic is seen as a means of exercising power and the miracle as a proof of being anointed, of holiness on earth, of the intrusion of the "religious" into the "secular" sphere, does not bear upon South Asian materials, both textual and oral. Rather, as Granoff (1996) and Fiordalis (2008), among others, suggest, South Asian materials see magical powers, such as *siddhi*s, as often mediated by yogic powers and meditation, and resulting from the latter. Hence, such *siddhi*s are reflective of learnt capabilities that might or might not be the result of stages of spiritual advancement and greater virtue. The scholarly awareness of "miracles" as a religious phenomenon that needs to be considered as common to several religious traditions is reflected in the description of them as, "manifestations of the supernatural power of the divine being fulfilling his purpose in history, but they are also caused to occur 'naturally' by charismatic figures who have succeeded in controlling their consciousness through vision, dreams, or practices of meditation".[58] In this context, Granoff's 1996 article is particularly interesting for its broad typology of Buddhist miracles in the period spanning 2nd century BCE to 5th century CE, as found in the *avadāna* literature about the Buddha's past lives and what it might tell us about the Buddhist attitude towards miracles. Granoff suggests that we can, broadly, speaking, distinguish between miracles that are concerned with external circumstances, such as conversion and those that are concerned with the internal matters of the community, such as appealing to faith. The Mahāyāna scriptures regularly demonstrate that miraculous powers are particularly effective tools of conversion and, as performed by the Buddha and certain senior monks, they become a means of convincing non-believers about the superiority of Buddhist doctrine. In contrast to this, there are certain kinds of miracles that are not necessarily aimed at an external audience but are in circulation among the faithful as a means of reinforcing belief. But, and this issue is crucial, all miracles need to be contextualized and it becomes crucial to distinguish who is doing them for what purpose. Since, from the Buddhist perspective, miracles can be done by anyone who has acquired certain powers, regardless of their religious affiliation, it is

possible for those other than Buddhists to replicate the Buddha's deeds for purposes of trickery and deceit. There is nothing in miracles that is intrinsically self-validating that can vouch for their ethical purpose. Navalar's challenge flung at Ramalingar can be usefully interpreted in the light of this twofold typology of miracles that must, nevertheless, be considered a heuristic device and no more, for there is considerable overlap between the two categories. Navalar is challenging Ramalingar to perform his miracles in front of others in order to convert them to Śaiva religion. This type of miracle is to be found also in the medieval Śaiva, hagiographical literature, especially the *Periyapurāṇam*, as well as the Vaiṣṇava hagiographies, such as the *Guruparaṃparā*s.[59] In challenging Ramalingar to do miracles as a means to conversion Navalar is arguing from a position that, at least in this context, accepts the possibility of miracles in the context of certain holy lives. We do not see a rational discomfort with them, as we will in later biographies of Ramalinga Swamigal. At the same time, the challenge has several implications. One explicit assumption, which Navalar himself states, is that Ramalingar will decline to perform miracles of conversion because he is not interested in converting anyone to Śaivism. He is, in other words, not a true Śaivite himself. This is because Ramalingar has abrogated several powers to himself that only Śiva can possess, thus espousing a form of Śaivism that is far from orthodox.

The second, implicit issue is closely connected to the nature of miraculous deeds themselves, their capacity for deception and the ambivalent status of miracle workers particularly within the context of colonial British India. In simultaneously challenging Ramalinga Swamigal to do his miracles while condemning him for doing so, saying that religious achievement is a private matter concerning only oneself, Navalar is decrying public displays of religious virtuosity and liminality much as the British administrators did. And even for the same kind of reasons – because the charisma of popular, itinerant religious figures threatened established institutional structures and authority. We will return to this point later.

The next sections of *The Refutation* concentrate on exposing the gap between claims and reality. Navalar begins by speaking of Ramalinga Swamigal's stated goals and continues to savagely mock the discrepancies between words and deeds, between claims and reality:

> It is now several years since his [Ramalingar's] disciples have tom-tomed in shops, in institutions and in houses that Śiva has taught alchemy to Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai; that he has made and kept six *pāram*s of gold; that he is going to build a city called Pārvatīpuram and, within it, a golden hall where he was going to have Śiva-Naṭarāja come and stand there, so that the whole world may see; that he was going to give food to all the hungry; that he was going to cure the all the sick of their diseases; that he was going to educate all those who wanted schooling. It is now more than two years since he laid the foundations for his city. Why has

> all this not yet happened? . . . If he is someone who knows alchemy then why does he go around begging for money and grain from several people? Why is he reviled by others for taking petty loans and not repaying them? . . . Why are his *Tiruvaruṭpā* editions pawned against his debts? Does not the poverty of someone who calls himself an alchemist, the disease of someone who calls himself a great physician, the betelnut-stained-spittle that others aim at someone who calls himself a great hero, the knowledge of sensory objects in someone who calls himself a man of wisdom – does not all this give the lie to his words? If what Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai's disciples say about his attainment of the experience of Śiva and his knowledge of alchemy is true, then why does he go to several people in this city of Ceṉṉapaṭṭiṉam, and falling at their feet, sorrowfully earn his livelihood several times? Why does he now praise those he previously reviled and wander around, seeking to get one or two *āṇa*s for meat and alcohol? Why does he enter into business with others, then appropriate their share of the goods and, thus, fling mud into their mouths? Why does he go to prostitutes and goldsmiths and, dissimulating, feigning devotion to Śiva, obtaining, for free, ornaments from them, takes to his heels?[60]

Is this the point when we, the readers, start to feel a twinge of sympathy for Ramalinga Swamigal? When we are compelled to ask – is it such a bad thing to beg in order to feed others, to have dreams of accomplishing much and seeking to accomplish much even while struggling to do so? Can someone who seeks to feed some swindle others in order to do so – are there some inconsistencies in this portrait? Do we begin to comprehend the harsh reality of poverty that applies to him not just to others, though the poetry and prose is mainly about the others? That he refers to only his own poverty in the form of suggested evocations in the poetry and in the reticent spaces in his letters?[61] Is there not a Don Quixote like grandeur in the folly of attempting to work towards what one wants to do, even while one will be made the butt of satire? This sympathy heightens when, as in the next passage of *The Refutation* we are made privy to some information that is revelatory in terms of Ramalinga Swamigal's biography. This is the fate of his wife.

The Wife and Other Anomalies

The hagiographies, from the beginning, remained reticent about Ramalinga Swamigal's marriage and about what happened to his spouse. Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār does not mention her at all in any of his writings. The 1930 Balasundaram Pillai hagiography dismisses the marriage in two sentences.[62] *The Notes* of Kantacāmi Mutaliyār, our first really detailed account of biographical incidents, gives us that which has remained the standard account. It says that when Ramalingar was still living in Ceṉṉai, he was being pressurized to marry by his relatives. Though he remained unconvinced

they finally brought a *Śivayogī* to convince him, which the yogi succeeded in doing. Treating this event as something staged for the sake of worldly appearances from the beginning Ramalingar consented to the marriage. The girl chosen for him, as is usual in the Tamil kinship system, was his own niece, Taṉammāḷ. The marital night approached. Ramalingar walked into the bedroom, carrying a copy of Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam*, softly reciting it. He asked his bride to bring the lamp to him and, when she remained demurely passive, he took the lamp himself and spent the whole night reciting the poetry, with tears rolling down his cheeks. After several days passed like this, Ramalinga Swamigal's family realized the futility of their efforts and regretted having compelled him to marry.[63] This story is repeated, more or less verbatim, in the 1936 official hagiography of the *Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* with the slight modification that his wife's name is given as Taṉakkōṭi Ammāḷ.[64] The 1953 Vasudeva Mutaliyar biography frankly alludes to the hagiographical topos that undoubtedly formed the inspiration for the standard account of the wedding night:

> Danacoti ammal daughter of Unnamalai Ammal sister of Swamigal was married to Swamigal. Swamigal spent the night in the nuptial room by reading "Tiruvachagam" to his spouse till the dawn just like Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to Sarathamani Deviyar. Finding Swāmigal was no use to family life Danacoti Ammall [sic] lived a life of purity and devotion.[65]

Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's 1971 biography[66] gives us the further information that the wedding took place in 1850, when Ramalingar was already 27, an advanced age for a first marriage in those days. Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ discreetly adds that what happened to Ramalingar's wife, Taṉammāḷ after this is unclear and that the oral information that one gets is contradictory.[67] In other words, the hagiographers from the earliest ones may have wished to incorporate a Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Sharada Devi like *topos* into Ramalinga Swamigal's biography, where the spouse of the saint becomes a part of the holy life herself and a mother to his disciples,[68] but they seem unable to do so – there is a certain reticence and an open-ending that leaves room for speculation as to what happened to her at all. *The Refutation* will now demolish the reticence of the disciples and show their stories to be fabrications with the following account:

> Approximately ten years ago, apparently, when some businessmen were talking to Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai in Chidambaram he had moved away from them a certain distance and when they asked why he did so he had replied, "My wife has just died in Ceṉṉapaṭṭiṉam. I came to know of it here". Seeing this [incident] followed, on the third day, by a letter with the news of the death, the businessmen had considered him omniscient from that day and worship him say his disciples, wandering around

> everywhere, praising him. Well, Well! Well Done indeed! He indeed has just one wife. Till today anyone can see her, can see her – wandering around, in Ceṉṉappaṭṭiṉam and its environs, leading an immoral life, with a destitute mendicant. . . . If it is true that Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai is Śiva himself who is omniscient, and has incarnated, hiding his three eyes and his blue throat, and incarnated for the welfare of people, then would he have married without knowing that his wife was this kind of person and then, afterwards, fearing ignominy, would he have fled from Ceṉṉappaṭṭiṉam?[69]

We, the readers may well accept the plausibility of the story in its essentials: that Ramalingar's wife fled him, after an unconsummated marriage, and led her life with another man. It is not too difficult to believe that Ramalingar did not have any further contact with her and that she was dead, for all intent and purposes, as far as he was concerned. It is Navalar's framework of the story, with its prurient and voyeuristic overtones – presented, not as a common enough tale of a marriage gone wrong but as one which is again exploited by Ramalingar to further his own reputation as a miracle worker, that is disturbing. The sympathy that the reader might begin to feel for Ramalingar is undergirded by the nature of Navalar's observations which particularly relates to the manner in which the former lives and goes about his work – central to this issue is his peregrinations as a wandering ascetic, a figure who presented a major threat to various emerging institutional structures and the British imperial project even before this time.

From the perspective of British Administrators, wandering yogis and *sādhu*s in colonial India formed a dubious category of citizen, as these observations of H. A. Rose on the castes and tribes of north-west India show:

> Every rascally beggar who pretends to be able to tell fortunes or to practice astrological and necromantic arts, in however small a degree, buys himself a drum and calls himself, and is called by others, a jogī . . . . They are a thoroughly vagabond set, and wander about the country beating a drum and begging, practicing surgery and physic in a small way, writing charms, telling fortunes, and practicing exorcism and divination; or sitting in the villages, eke out their earnings from these occupations.[70]

Is not this account of the itinerant and dubious yogi very similar to the following account we have of Ramalinga Swamigal written by the Danish missionary C. Ochs in an 1871 pastoral letter written in the *Danish Missions Blad*?

> At Vadalur a swindler is going around these days. He pretends to be able to raise the dead. The missionary at Pannurutti told me that in these days this man shall perform the trick which he has promised for a long time. People are coming from far-off places to see him. He is in a hurry to perform this miracle. Recently, his booty was stolen by thieves.

> Now he wants to make the lost money by deceiving people . . . In Pannurutti, a man who was dying is reported to have ordered his wife not to cremate his body but instead send a sum of money to the miracle-worker so that he would raise him to life when he had died.[71]

This missionary letter breathes the same air as of Navalar's missive and foregrounds those who "go around" conning others. In this context, it is significant how frequently Navalar speaks of peregrinations in *The Refutation*, using words such as roaming (*alai-tal*) and wandering (*tiri-tal)* in the context of speaking of Ramalingar's life. Ramalingar himself wanders around tricking people and running away from exposure, his disciples wander around making false claims regarding him, his wife roams around with an itinerant ascetic. In all these repetitions of wandering we see several colonial discourses and strategies of governance converging together. There is the discourse of citizenship in the Tamil country of this period that made imperative the creation of a sedentarized and disciplined local population, which was part of the larger historiographical project of the creation of a "Tamil country" between the late 18th and late 19th centuries. This, as Irschick has shown, resulted in a new valorization of sedentary agriculture. "This judgment separated those who practiced agriculture from groups who wandered and traveled across the land in search of a livelihood, to pursue commerce, to beg, or to become saints".[72] The latter were to now be regarded as both marginal and threatening to civic order. There is, also, and not unrelated to the aforementioned development, the beginnings of an ideology of "public space" that brought together colonial notions of the "public" with jurisprudence. "Public space", in contradistinction to older Indian notions of "public" and "private" or "inside" and "outside", was now slowly being reconstituted as that urban space which was linked to the idea of "good governance". It was a location of municipal order, and its maintenance was closely linked to safeguarding propertied interests and the "public good".[73] This reconfiguration of colonial space meant that certain older, pre-colonial spaces, such as the bazaar, and those itinerants who constantly traversed them or inhabited them with ease, came to be thought of anew as transgressive and in need of control. These spatial and social configurations, linked to processes of citizen-making, led to the creation of new subjectivities and the questioning, not just of social categories, but also of religious typologies, including that of the traditional, wandering ascetic. We thus see, ironically, in this contempt for the wandering ascetic figure, Navalar's mimetic bonds with the very paternal figures and institutions he repudiated so strongly in other contexts, who constituted the religious and political "others", such as the Christian missionaries and British administrators, of his time. This was a historical moment when the ascetic and others like him had to not just be regarded with suspicion but, in an ironic mirroring, be policed by the state through a surveillance personnel that, like them, would also haunt these very spaces.[74]

Further, Navalar's observations are classic rumours in that they do not follow any evidentiary process. The mode of transmission is anonymous, multiple, composed mainly of hearsay, and consists of truth-claims that rely entirely on the credibility and authority of the speaker, who is Navalar himself. We are not confronted with "harmless" gossip or hearsay – entertaining but without the intention to harm.[75] We are not talking about the sort of conversation, enjoyable and private, between trusted companions – a form of sociability in Bengali culture termed *adda* which Chakrabarty (2000) speaks of. Nevertheless, there is some common cause between what fuels rumours, as we read of them in *The Refutation* and discussions about *adda*, as Chakrabarty describes it. Behind all the talk about *adda* or the loss of it, he points out, lurks, "an unarticulated anxiety: How does one sing to the ever-changing tunes of capitalist modernity and retain a comfortable sense of being at home in it?"[76] Similarly, reading between the lines of *The Refutation*'s polemical stance, innuendos, and rumours, behind information that is being circulated as a matter of public concern, we see underlying anxieties operating with regard to religion, to Śaivism itself – to what constitutes the religious canon and the preceptors of the canon – in colonial modernity. Indeed, this becomes very clear when we see how Navalar winds up his personal remarks on the matter and, thus, for all intents and purposes, concludes *The Refutation*.[77]

> Everybody should read this work with a quiet mind and [according to the words of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* about examining the truth of any matter] understanding the truth, abandoning worldly utterances, should take up only those true works that are divine utterances, such as the *Tēvāram* etc., in accordance with prescription, and recite them with faith and commitment.[78]

Thus, ultimately, the attack, Navalar makes clear is less about Ramalinga Swamigal himself than about the need to school a new kind of Śaiva public: in educating it to understand what constitutes the canon and who must be considered to speak for it.

The locally situated nature of Ramalinga Swamigal's influence and popularity, the immense success that the songs of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* enjoyed among people, which Nāvalar himself is forced to admit and speaks of repeatedly in *The Refutation*, was a nuisance if not a threat to such a regulation and regimentation of Tamil Śaivism. This popularity could be curbed only by polemics, and the 19th century was particularly conducive to the growth of polemical discussions due to opportunities offered by print.

Polemics

The polemical refutation of the theology of one's opponents as the prima facie position (*parapakkam/pūrvapakṣa*) followed by the establishment of one's own views (*cuvapakkam/siddhanta*) has a long history in both Sanskrit

and Tamil pre-modern religious, commentarial literature and the classic commentaries on the *Vedāntasūtra*s of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva all contain sections of this kind. At the same time, you had individual works that were devoted to a refutation of the opponents' position alone and, frequently, the pan-Indian reputation of a polymathic scholar was established on the basis of his reputation for composing such works. Thus, the 14th-century Śrīvaiṣṇava theologian Vedānta Deśika was conferred the title "Lion among Poets and Logicians" (*Kavi-tārkika-siṃha*) for works such as *The Refutation of the Doctrines of Others* (*Paramatabhaṅgam*) and *The Six Types of Censure* (*Ṣatadūṣaṇī*), both of which attacked, among others, the Kevalādvaita of the school of Śaṅkara. In fact, the latter work is considered by the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition to be a reply of sorts to another polemical attack by the advaitin Kṛṣṇa Miśra on Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta. Taking a stance and meeting one polemical attack by another, therefore, was common practice in medieval Sanskrit commentarial literature. Often, refutation and assertion were also seen as the best modes of clarifying one's own theological position in the best way, working out subtleties of differences, from that of others. Thus, the *Civañāṉacittiyār* is considered the definitive work precisely because it follows this format in delineating the specific advaitic position of the Siddhānta as opposed to Kevalādvaita. The genre of polemical literature collectively known as *khaṇḍana*s, as well, have a long history in both Sanskrit and Tamil literature and these genres, too, have undergone changes over time. A significant shift, as McCrea has shown, already for the 16th century in the works of the Dvaita theologian Vyāsatīrtha, was the move from an attack on a generic and de-historicized theological opponent to a specific historical engagement with the views of his contemporaries.[79] Bronner and Tubb (2008)[80] also suggest that, on the eve of colonialism in the 17th century, a new critical attitude towards the near past combined with a reverence towards the distant past led to a re-fashioning of the *khaṇḍana* as a much harsher form of critique of living authors, incorporating very precisely specific quotations from their work.[81] To condemn works such as these as *ad hominem*, nitpicking attacks, would be to misunderstand their import since they, "pursued innovative ways of grappling with the fundamental issues of the tradition and with the serious tensions that had grown up around them".[82] This certainly is what we also see in the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy and, particularly, in *The Refutation*.

Nevertheless, polemical positions long rehearsed and anticipated, through centuries of intertextuality, had to be rethought and crafted anew with the decisive emergence of Christianity – both Jesuitical and Evangelical – in the Tamil literary scene, both in Jaffna and southern India, starting from the 17th century.[83] After the mid-19th century much of these polemics, among the traditional elites, was conducted in the new medium of printed books.[84] There was, in general, an increased literary competitiveness in the air as those other than the traditional religious establishment, who formed a category of self-invented, new, and "lay" religious leaders such as Ramalingar, began to

give voice to their views in print, thus provoking the critical response of the former.[85] It has, therefore, has been suggested that the mid-19th-century literary landscape saw a surge in the production of polemical refutations of newly edited and published literary works.[86] This picture is confirmed, not just for the pan-Indian scale but for South Asia in general, for the late 19th century.[87] Print, particularly in a mobile and urbanizing society, provided a means to reach across to and constitute new reading publics at the same time that a shift was taking place from traditional modes of education. A system of learning involving intense one-to-one apprenticeship, literary and religious, between teacher and pupil was giving way to more formalized and institutionalized modes of education. As Mitchell remarks,

> Attitudes towards language, definitions of accuracy and error, the functions of orality and memory, the meaning of truth and fiction, and the very role of "meaning" itself all underwent revolutionary changes in nineteenth-century southern India in conjunction with the introduction of printing.[88]

The picture for the Tamil region in the colonial period is substantiated when one looks at catalogues of Tamil printed books for the 19th century, such as those in the British Museum collection. One sees that, among the books most frequently printed and disseminated, polemical tracts that related to Hindu–Christian polemics are as plentiful as those that pursued older sectarian rivalries between the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, on the one hand, and the Teṅkalai and Vaṭakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas, on the other.[89] This was not a period when objectively marshalled and calm arguments set the tenor of the engagement. Instead, we find the polemical thrust aimed at the personal, with an emphasis on the scandalous, as in Navalar's tract, where Navalar is drawing, I would suggest, on two kinds of polemics. The first is an older, pre-modern Śaivite tradition of "othering" opponents, who one refused to take seriously doctrinally, through a denigration of their physical appearance and habits.[90] The second is the new kind of polemics which Christian missionaries indulged in regularly, in tract literature and in cheaply printed handbills, to debunk popular and local religious leaders.[91] An example that illustrates this is not only the observations of Ochs, quoted earlier in the chapter but also a Tamil handbill aimed at denigrating Vaikuṇṭa Cuvāmikaḷ, a religious leader whose radical teachings enjoyed widespread popularity in the southern Tamil region, in Travancore and Tirunelveli in the 1830s. It is worthwhile quoting a section of it to see the obvious similarities between its tone and that of *The Refutation*:

The Worship of Muttukutty
A criticism of the path of Muttukutty

> In this country are many paths. Many new ones come up often. For example, some years ago a person called Muttukutty died and was

> worshipped as the divine. His upadesam spread like wildfire in South Travancore. It seems a wonder. I will tell you his life in a few words. He was born in Kottarada. He led a dissolute life and went to Trichendur. There he fainted. He saw himself as an avataram of Vishnu and took on the garb of a pandaram (priest-nonbrahman). To beguile people he began to perform miracles and borrowed from the teachings of Christ. He got many women to his side. Many of his wives and children are still alive. All his wives gave him love potions which made him a dissolute wreck. How can he then be a Vishnu Avataram? The shastras say that the tenth avatar will be a horse. HE did not come as a horse. Are the shastras false or is he a fraud? What were his evil teachings? At his shrine, men and women mix in worship without shame or restraint. This shameful action cannot be described. Is this how God is worshipped? The wise men are disturbed and wonder how such a man can be seen as a *devata*. When God takes human form – as an *avataram* there should be a larger objective in mind. What is his objective? He has only shown the way of lust greed and robbery. How can he be a divine mind when he did not even know he was being given love potions by his wife! Can we believe that he is the all knowing lord?[92]

Navalar's *The Refutation* might therefore be considered an act of mimesis, where he takes on the mantle of the very same Christian missionaries who he so strongly repudiated in other contexts, and who he now mirrors and merges with, when faced with the uncontrollable threat of popular Śaivism.

Printing, Authorship, and Copyright

Equally important perhaps was the role that the emergence of copyright in this period meant for notions of authorship. Venkatachalapathy has pointed out that Act XX of 1847 provided damages for the infringement of copyright and we know from the title page of the first edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* that there was a claim to having registered the work under the copyright act.[93] At the same time, there was much confusion as to what "copyright" meant – the early Tamil printing presses seemed not yet to have grasped the fact that this referred to some kind of official imprimatur. Rather, they saw it as part of the typesetting design of the title page of a printed book and thus incorporated the words "Copyright registered" without the sanction that it implied. In other words, the introduction of the law into the realm of literature in 19th-century India led to a period of confused transition, not unlike the similar situation in 18th-century England. It led to an almost immediate creation of a literary marketplace and new forms of patronage. Navalar with his own printing and publishing activities must have been well aware of the implications of copyright for authorship. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the very modern idea of the author as the individual who has ownership rights over the text he or she composes emerges in conjunction with

copyright.[94] More significantly, as Susan Stewart has pointed out, when we "consider the relationship between authority and writing practices" we begin to grasp that the concept of authorial originality or authenticity itself is a concept emergent only with the "advent of mechanical modes of literary production".[95] In the light of this, Navalar's response to Ramalingar's poetry must be seen from another perspective: his insistence on hyper-literalism, on seeing the references to miracles in the poetic work as truth statements of a very literal sort made by Ramalingar, is also part of the insistence that the poet-saint, so to speak, stand by his work, since he has ownership, is the author, of it. In other words, Ramalinga Swamigal is to be held accountable in new ways for his poetry. This hyper-literalism is a strategic refusal to recognize that the poetry is embedded within a long tradition of devotional Śaivite poetry that employs the same tropes that Ramalingar does and, therefore, that one might need to speak of the conventions of a poetic persona, "the ideogram of the author"[96] rather than the person of the poet himself when engaging with the poetry. Here, one would have to adopt the notions that Navalar is all too familiar with, where the poet is a "site of attribution", as is understood by pre-modern hagiographical conventions, and not a unitary, modern, authorial self. Navalar's hyper-literalism hinges upon implicit notions of poetic authenticity that dismantle the free-flowing relationship between orality, memory, and writing, a relationship reconfigured by the age of printing. Print here also becomes a means to reflect upon and reconfigure elite discourse, here Śaivasiddhāntic discourse, in another register. It is this attitude that underlies the accusations regarding grammatical solecisms, which are in reality also the solecisms of religious and caste identity that Ramalingar is seen to be guilty of. There is no doubt that all these new and novel intersections between elite punditry, polemics, and printing contributed significantly to and sustained the Ramalinga Swamigal–Arumuga Navalar or, more popularly, the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy as it came to be known over many decades.

At stake was not simply the critical reception of the work of one scholar by another more established one but rather the very nature of what constitutes Tamil Śaivasiddhānta at a particular historical moment, at a time of colonial modernity. There were several dimensions to this project, in all of which Navalar played a significant role in his time. The first was to construct a modern literary canon that was both authentically Tamil and authentically Śaivite.[97] This activity, Navalar undertook through his own literary activities. Equally important, it was necessary to reform Śaiva activity – that is, worship at the temples. Navalar, in his entire life, passionately espoused a purified form of Śaiva worship. Knowledge of such worship was to be derived and reconstructed anew through textual studies of the Śaiva āgamas. Such worship, in fact, bore little resemblance to actual ritual practices in Śaiva temples, grounded as they are on a complex balance between textual, regional, and local tradition and authorized by custom and usage. Navalar's views thus brought him into unceasing conflict with the priests of temples both in Jaffna

and southern India. Finally, Navalar appears to have aimed at what might be called a deliberate "protestantisation" of Śaivism in the sense of the creation of an informed lay Śaiva public[98] that would also regulate Śaiva religion and function as arbiters of what was authentically Śaivite.[99] It is significant as to what the creation of such a public meant. For it laid down new lines of "inclusion" and exclusion" with its foundations in a narrowly defined religious authority and textual community. Generally, what was being pushed through here, as in a great deal of religious reform happening in the 19th century, were "high cultural, normative standards" that veered decisively away from the local towards greater centralization and standardization.[100] Ultimately, it was what was authentically Śaivite and what constituted the canon, narrowly and newly recast as "tradition", and what was not, that also brought Navalar into conflict with Ramalingar. For, in his polemical assault on Ramalinga Swamigal, Navalar argued that in naming Ramalingar's work as *Tiruvaruṭpā* both he and his followers were elevating his work to the same status as the Śaiva *Tirumuṟai*.[101] Thus, outrageously, they were making a claim for Ramalingar, this trickster, this, oddly enough, poverty-stricken yet self-proclaimed alchemist, as someone on par with the poet-saints of the canon, the *nāyaṉmār* and for the open-ended nature of the canon itself.[102]

For much of the controversy, the heads of the important Śaiva *maṭha*s in southern India appear to have been in solidarity with Navalar. Navalar, as we know, came from the same community of Śaiva Vēḷāḷas from which the religious heads were drawn: these were the Kārkkāttappiḷḷai sub-caste, which has the highest caste-ranking among the piḷḷaimārs, the other two sub-categories being the Cōḻiyappiḷḷai and the Karuṇīkars. In this grouping, Ramalingar, a karuṇīkar, came from the least prestigious group, destined never to be heads of Śaiva *maṭha*s.[103] Thus, the *maṭha* heads' support for Navalar might be seen as evidence for elite caste solidarity at work. Even while this must not be overlooked, it need not necessarily have been the predominant reason why the religious heads would instinctively support Navalar against Ramalingar on the matter of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*. In that case both caste feelings and religious sensibilities would be united: as guardians of the Śaivasiddhānta tradition they would have been incredulous at the claims made by and on behalf of Ramalingar and hence disdain his writings. It is not likely that these very same religious heads would have been fully comfortable with Navalar's decidedly new and revivalist views on Śaivism, but in this instance there would have been a meeting of minds: there could be no uncontested place for Ramalinga Swamigal in the immediate aftermath of 1867, within this network of Śaiva orthodoxy and this recast Śaivism. Yet, such was his transformation in the 20th century that it is these networks of Śaiva orthodoxy or even the scathing judgement of Navalar that came to be consigned to irrelevance and Ramalingar rehabilitated as the prophet of a new kind of Tamil religion.

Part II of this book, with which the next chapter commences, will show how the last decade of the 19th century onwards witnessed the proliferation

of Śaiva institutional activity, which, together with changes in the colonial economy and print culture, transformed the religious landscape and also created the conditions for certain Tamil public intellectuals to play an active role in such a re-imagining of Ramalingar.

Notes

1 For an understanding of the anti-hagiography as a genre form that uses hagiographical *topoi* to construct an archetype of a life the opposite of saintly, see Tolan (1996).
2 Venkatachalapathy (2010:38).
3 This section relies on Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (2000, 2010a)'s extraordinary archival research over several decades that resulted in a publication of the texts of this dispute in 2010a. As Caravaṇaṉ has (2010a:50) has pointed out several of the texts are no longer available, having suffered the general fate of manuscripts, both paper and palm-leaf, in Tamil Nadu. Thus, his collation of the remaining texts and the printing of them has enabled us to retrieve a significant chapter in Tamil literary and religious history before more of it crumbles to dust.
4 For an extensive history of the publication of the text, see Weiss (2014).
5 See Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:696).
6 Ambalavanar (2006:15). For, earlier detailed analyses of this tract, see Hudson (1994) and Young and Jebanesan (1995).
7 Ambalavanar (2006:66–150).
8 For a study of Arumuga Navalar as orator, his debt to Christian sermonizing, and the role of oratorical and linguistic practices in constructing both a new Tamil and a new religion, see Bate (2005).
9 In his addendum to this comment, Navalar's disciple Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai is anxious to include not just these five works but the remaining seven works considered to comprise the 12 *Tirumuṟai* in all, to form part of this sacred core of the *Śaivasiddhānta* corpus [Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:697)]. For the most part of this analysis I do not take into consideration Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai's additional comments on the original text unless I specifically state that I do.
10 The four meant here are the authors of the *Tēvāram* – Appar, Cuntarar and Tiruñāṉacampantar, and Māṇikkavācakar.
11 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:698): . . . *mēṟkūṟiya nāyaṉmārkaḷ pacukaraṇa nīṅkic civakaraṇam peṟṟavarkaḷ eṉpatu teḷivuṟa nāṭṭappaṭum. ātalāl, innāyaṉmārkaḷ aruḷicceyta tēvāra mutaliya aiyntum . . . pativākkeṉṟē teḷḷituṟṟuṇiyappaṭum; pacuvākkeṉṟu niṉaikkiṉum atu piṟavit tuṉpattukkum narakat tuṉpatukkum vittākum.*
12 On the *Kailāśa paramparai*, see Nambi Arooran (1984) and Koppedrayer (1990:137–138). Considered the lineage of preceptors who undergird the religious authority of the orthodox Śaiva institutions of Tiruvāvaṭuturai and Dharmapuram and the other institutions that accept their authority the *Kailāśa paramparai* begins with Śiva as Śrīkaṇṭhaparameśvara as its head, followed by Nandideva, Sanatkumāra. Satyajñānadarśi and Parañjyoti as its divine authorities followed by the human authorities of the first *ācāryas* of the *śāstras*, Meykaṇṭār, Aruṇaṉticivācāriyār, Maṟaiñāṉacampantar, and Umāpati. The eight thus listed divide up into two categories, with the first four called the *akaccantāṉam,* symbolically "inside" the tradition yet not of this world but residing in Mount Kailāśa, and the remaining four the *puṟaccantāṉam,* those who are "outside", in this world. According to tradition, Meykaṇṭār and Aruṇaṉti lived just prior to Umāpati, whereas Maṟaiñāṉacampantar was Umāpati's living guru. The abode of all these mortal gurus was Chidambaram and tradition associates Maṟaiñāṉacampantar and Umāpati with *maṭha*s established in the Chidambaram area around the 15th century.

13 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:698–699): *ivarkaḷ tiruvākku aruṭpā veṉpatum, vētattiṉum parkka ivaikaḷiṟṟāṉe civapirāṉukku atika pirītiyuḷḷatu eṉpatum, civapirāṉ umātēviyārukkuk kūṟiṉāreṉac civarakaciyattiṟ kūṟiya kirantaṅkaḷiṉāṟ ṟuṇiyappaṭum.*
14 See Venkatachalapathy (2010:166–167).
15 On these issues, see Raman (2011).
16 On this Śaivite interpretation of *Caṅkam* literature and its canonicity in commentaries on medieval (11th–13th centuries) Tamil grammars, see Clare (2011). Clare shows that what constituted the Tamil literary canon in pre-modern texts was constantly being negotiated in the light of differing cultural projects, historical contexts, and readership.
17 The story of Aruṇakirinātar is paradigmatic in this regard. Long in circulation as oral tradition and put together as late as the late 19th–early 20th century, along with printed, partial editions of his works, the story came to be standardized in Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ's *Pulavar purāṇam, Aruṇakirinātar Cuvāmikaḷ carukkam.* The story goes that the poet, having long led a dissolute life, becomes suicidal and decides to throw himself from the temple gopuram of the Aruṇācaleśvara temple in Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. Murukaṉ appears and saves him and also gives him the gift of song, after which the poet travels through the Tamil landscape sacred to Murukaṉ, singing his praise. Finally, he reaches the temple of Tiruttaṇi, where he transforms into a parrot and unites with the god there. For details of the biography, see, further, Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005b:2–10) and Zvelebil (1995:71–73).
18 Caravaṇaṉ (2010:699).
19 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:328). Fascimile of the title page of the first edition: *Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalāreṉṉum Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai tiruvāymalarntaruḷiya Tiruvaruṭpā.*
20 Von Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006:2).
21 On the significance of localizing the deity and the distinctive form of Śiva in each of the sacred places sung about by the *nāyaṉmār*, see Peterson (1989) and Pechilis Prentiss (1999).
22 On Navalar's critique of contemporary temple worship and his ongoing battles with the priests of both the Nallūr Kantacāmi Kōyil and *the dīkśitar*s of the Chidambaram temple, see Hudson (1992) and Ambalavanar (2006:377–386).
23 Literally, *ōtu-tal* means to learn by rote, to memorize and refers to the traditional, pre-modern system of learning. By extension, it means learning itself or the acquisition of empirical and intellectual knowledge. But there is another range of connotations that might be well worth taking into consideration, where a semantically related term, "*ōtuvār*" refers to hereditary singers of the *Tirumuṟai.* The singing of *bhakti* poetry is an entirely different dimension of affective experience to reading it or even hearing it merely recited. The *ōtuvār,* particularly those gifted with powers of musicality, bring the experience of the poet-saints of the *Tirumuṟai* in its immediacy to those who can only imagine it vicariously. God-experience, in this sense, becomes possible only through this vicarious experience of hearing the *Tirumuṟai* sung. It might therefore be suggested, here, of someone like Ramalinga Swamigal, that he had been graced with the divine gift of having this experience himself, without a vicarious substitute for it. In contrast, reflections on the contempt for *ōtutal* as a stage of rote learning that has to be transcended for real scholarship are also found in the didactic literature. Thus, in the 32nd chapter of the *Nālaṭiyār* titled *The Knowledge of the Assembly* (*avaiyaṟital*) there is a concern with how public rhetoric and scholarship must be held to certain standards and one of the topics is what distinguishes real learning from mere memorization and false learning. In this context, the use of the word *ōtu* becomes particularly interesting, giving us an insight into how it might be insufficient.

See *Nālaṭiyār,* verse 316:
pāṭamē ōtip *payaṉṟeritaṟēṟrāta*
mūṭar muṉitakka colluṅkāl – kēṭaruñcīr
cāṉṟōr camaḻttaṉar nīṟpavē maṟṟavarai
īṉṟāṭkiṟappap parintu.
Verse 318 praises the scholars, *pulavar,* who understand the meaning of books and make them clear to others (*poruṭerintu tēṟṟum pulavar*) as opposed to those who merely hoard them at home without understanding their meaning (*puttakamē cālat tokuttum poruṭeriyār*).
Verse 312 castigates those false scholars (*tīppulavar*) who repeats lessons by rote (*nāppāṭañ colli*) as if they understood their worth (*nayamuṇarvār pōl*).
Finally, the association of *ōtutal* with the Vedas and *śāstra*s seems to have been pan-sectarian. See, for instance, Vedānta Deśika in *Rahasyatrayasāra,* on the Chapter on "The State of Potency" (*prabhāvavyavasthā*): *pratiṣiddhamallāta svabhāva-artha-śāstra-prāptaṅkaḷiṟē samarpaṇīyaṅkaḷāka* ***ōtappaṭṭatu.***

24 The decision to initiate a project to bring out a new, critical edition of the *Tiruvaruṭpā,* as well as a commentary on it in the 1970s, appears to have been spearheaded by the prominent businessman and philanthropist Na. Mahalingam (1923–2014), who had single-handedly revived and financially supported Ramalingar's organizations in Vadalur. He commissioned the standard hagiography of Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's which came out in 1971, and the two of them chose Auvai Cu. Turaicāmippiḷḷai, then a faculty member in the Department of Tamil Studies at Annamalai University, as the person most suited to writing the commentary. The first sections of this commentary were published and released in 1983 at the golden jubilee celebrations of the University. This information is provided by Veḷḷai Vāraṇaṉār in the very first edition of the *TMU* from 1983 and included in all subsequent reprints. All citations of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* as well as its commentary in this section are from the 2013 edition of the *TMU.* All translations are mine.

25 *TMU,* Vol.7, p. 401: *eṉṉaip paṇikoṇṭellām*
ōtātuṇara uṇartti *uḷḷē niṉṟu*

26 *TMU,* Ibid.

27 *TMU,* Vol.7, p. 618: *ētum aṟiyātiruḷil irunta ciṟiyēṉai*
eṭuttuviṭṭut aṟivucīṟitēyntiṭavum purintu
ōtumaṟai mutaṟ kalaikaḷ ōtāmal uṇara
uṇarvil iruntuṇartti

28 *TMU,* Vol.7, pp. 618–619.

29 *TMU,* Vol.9, p. 234: *ōtiyayōtātuṇarttiya veḷiyai*
oḷi taṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭēṉē

30 *TMU,* Vol.9, p. 234–35.

31 *TMU,* Vol.9, p. 406: *ōti uṇarntavar ellām eṉaik kēṭka eṉattāṉ*
ōtāmal uṇarntuvām*uruvuṟuc cey uṟavē*

32 In *Tēvāram* 6.26.2 and 6.55.11 (the *paṇmuṟai* edition) Śiva himself is referred to as one who knows the Vedas, without learning (*ōtātu uṇarntāṉ*). Hence, here, there is the transference of the attributes of Śiva to his devotee, with implications that I discuss at the end of the next section.
The relevant verse is as follows:
vētamutalvaṉ eṉum meyttiruppāṭṭiṉil nēr
āti ulakōr iṭar nīṅkiṭa ētta āṭum
pāta mutalām patiṉeṇ purāṇaṅkaḷ eṉṟē
ōteṉṟurai ceytaṉaryāvum ***ōtāt uṇarntār***

33 Sundaram Pillai ([1909]2004:6).

34 Sundaram Pillai ([1909]2004:1).

35 Kiruṣṇamācāriyār, Cē and Vai. Mu. Kōpālakiruṣṇamācāriyār (1927:61): *avatarittaruḷiya āḻvār muttuṇaiya muruva ceytu mūkkuruñci* ***mulaiyuṇṇātē maunattōṭēyeḻuntaruḷi.*** For an insightful discussion of this motif, see Hardy (1979).

36 Böck and Rao (2000:11).

37 *Periyapurāṇam*, 6.34.68.

38 This frontispiece is reproduced in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:72).

39 This tradition of linking Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal with Tiruñāṉacampantar culminates in the 20th century with the authoritative version of the sacred biography in Mu. Aruṇācalam's work.

40 *Oḻiviloṭukkam, tiruñāṉacampanta cuvāmikaḷ stotra*: *eṉ panta nīkkum iṟaivaṉ ṟamiḻk kāḻic campantaṉ pūñcataṅkait tāḷ.*

41 *Oḻiviloṭukkam,* verse 11: *cattiya nirvāṇattāṟ ṟaṟpōtat tākkaṟuttu*
vaittu vaḷikāṭṭu maṟaip pulavaṉ cuttaṉ
ṟamiḻk kuriciṟ ***cīkāḻic campantaṉ eṉpāṉ***
emakkaruḷic ceytatitu

42 *Oḻiviloṭukkam, verse 42: taṉmaiyu munnilaiyum tāṉāyp paṭarkaiyumāy*
eṉ oḻivil iṉpumāy iṉpum ituveṉṉāta
vētānta cittāntamē piṟavāvīṭeṉṟān
ōtāmal vētam uṇarntōṉ.

43 *Oḻiviloṭukkam,* prefatory verse: *vaḷḷal kururāyaṉ vātuveṉṟacampantaṉ*
vaḷḷaṉ malarttā ṭalaimēl vaitturaittāṉ uḷḷataḻivil
aṭukkun tēṉaiy aṉpar ellām uṇṇav-oḻiviloṭukka nūl ōrntu.

44 Kaṇṇuṭaiya Vaḷḷal (2004:3–4).

45 *Tiruppukaḻ,* Song 68:
Lines 11–12**:** *upayakula tīpa tuṅka virutakavi rāja ciṅka*
uṟai pukaliyūri laṉṟu varuvōṉē
You who are the light of both the *kula*s (of mother and father), who is the peak among poets of the *viruttam* metre, O King of Lions who came that day (as Tiruñāṉacampantar) in that dwelling of Puliyūr [the abode of Murukaṉ].

46 Thus there are 17 references to Śiva as "Vaḷḷal" (4.75.10, 5.82.4, 6.27.2, 7.39.6, etc.), in the vocative as "Vaḷḷalē" (2.9.2, 2.9.8, 6.32.8, 7.34.8, etc.), and one instance specifically of "Vaḷḷalār" (5.87.5). All *Tēvāram* references are from the *paṇmuṟai* edition.

47 The troubling unforeseen implications of such an interpretation of Campantar, which would permit someone such as Ramalinga Swamigal, without any established Śaivasiddhānta guru–disciple lineage, to establish his own religious lineage, meant that the religious status and interpretation of Campantar himself became a hotly contested issue in the 19th century. See, for example, the long section on, "The Ascertainment of the Real Nature of the *Camayācāriya*s" in Capāpati Nāvalar's *Tirāviṭap pirakācikai*, where he refutes the view that Campantar is literally to be understood as Kumāra/Skanda.

48 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, 1976:4.15.2775.

49 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:604), *tiruvaruṭpā varalāṟu, vs.21:*
mītāṉat tuyarpaḷḷi mēvanamai vaikkumeṅkaḷ
mētāvaip paḷḷiviḻain taruḷiṟṟēṉṟuraippatevaṉ
ōtāmē emai ellām uṇarttum uru veḷiyai accō
ōtāmē uṇarntateṉpār uṇarkilār oru viyappō.

50 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:701).

51 As Venkatachalapathy writes, (2010:28–31) the landmark project of bringing out a *Caṅkam* classic, the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, by U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar in 1887 might have taken on mythical hues in retrospect but was a project fraught with danger at the time of its undertaking. The edition was received with as much censure as praise and criticized roundly in a series of polemical tracts that were refuted by U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar's admirers. Indeed, print brought to the fore the issue of the variability of manuscript traditions, recasting this variability or non-standardization as "error". On this, see further Mitchell (2009:144–146).

52 *TMU,* vol.7, p. 573:
meyviḷakkē viḷakkallāl vēṟu viḷakkillai eṉṟār mēlōr nāṉum
poyviḷakkē viḷakkeṉa uṭpoṅki vaḻikiṉṟēṉ ōr putumai aṉṟē

ceyviḷakkum pukam uṭaiya ceṉṉanakar naṇparkaḷē ceppak kēḷīr
neyviḷakkē pōṉṟoru taṇṇīr viḷakkum erintu cannitiyiṉ muṉṉē.

53 The story of Naminanti Aṭikaḷ lighting the lamps at the temple in Tiruvārūr with water instead of oil at the behest of some sceptical Jainas is told *in Periyapurāṇam*, verses 1866–1897.
54 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:702–704). Here, Navalar cites *Tiruvaruṭpā, 4th Tirumuṟai*. 27.
55 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:704).
56 Ibid.
57 An exception is the unpublished dissertation of Fiordalis (2008), which I refer to in this section as well as the edited volume of Demsey and Selva J. Raj (2008). In contrast, we have some outstanding work by medievalists on the role of miracles in medieval Christianity. The work of Peter Brown (1998) on elite practices worked into popular religion in the cult of saints, that of Benedicta Ward (1982) on a variety of genres of medieval literature, including theological works that deal with miracles and their typologies, Bynum's (1997) on "wonder" and miracles and, most recently, Yarrow (2006) on the miracle stories of 12th-century England have all contributed greatly to our understanding of medieval Christian miracle literatures.
58 Waida (2005:6049).
59 The lives of the *samayācāryas* in the *Periyapurāṇam* are replete with miracles that relate to conversion. A famous one is the conversion of the Pāṇṭiyaṉ king of Madurai from Jainism to Śaivism by curing him of fever in *Periyapurāṇam*, verses 2600–2668. On miracles and conversion in the Śrīvaiṣṇava literature, see Raman (2007).
60 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:706–707).
61 The letters of Ramalinga Swamigal, particularly those written to Irukkam Irattiṉa Mutaliyār – the man most responsible for convincing him to allow the poetry to be published, were written between 1858 and 1869. These letters, numbering 37 in all, also allow us a glimpse into the man in relation to his intimates, ungoverned by poetic conventions. Certain of the letters, (such as letters 6, 15, 16, and 33), hint at requests for money, the promise to repay the sums, as well as expressions of his poverty. See Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, Ā (2010:28–73).
62 Balasundaram Pillai (1930:14).
63 Kantacāmippiḷḷai (1970:9).
64 Anon (1936:25–26).
65 Vasudeva Mutaliyar (1953:18–19). The standard hagiography of Ramakrishna called, for short, the *Kathāmṛta* gives an account of how Ramakrishna treated the eight months of sharing a room with his wife as a trial where he took on the role of a female servant to his 16-year-old wife and worshipped her instead of consummating the relationship.
66 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:67–69).
67 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:69).
68 For similar motifs in the life of other religious figures, see Manring (2005:193–219) on the wife of Advaita Ācārya, Sītā Devī and Peter Heehs (2008) for "The Mother" as the spiritual partner of Aurobindo and the leader of the community after his death. More pertinently, the variant and more frequent motif in the hagiographies of Ramalingar, regarding the reluctant marriage and the irrelevant wife, may have been influenced by the identical topos in the life of Tāyumāṉavar, the 17th-century Śaivite poet whom Ramalingar is deeply influenced by and with whom he is frequently compared.
69 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:707–708).
70 H.A. Rose's observations, based on the Punjab census reports of 1883 and 1892 quoted in White [2009]2011:240. The problem that British authorities had in containing itinerant yogis and warrior ascetics in colonial India is well demonstrated in Pinch (2006).

71 Quoted in Francis (1990:15–16).
72 On this, see Irschick (1994:191ff).
73 See Glover (2007) on this. For further studies of this colonial construction of "public space" in South Asia and its exclusionary consequences, see the Bibliography in Glover, 2007: footnote 4.
74 It would be a mistake to assume that the liminality of the ascetic and the anxiety regarding his/her peregrinations was an entirely modern, colonial development. Classical treatises on Indian polity, such as the *Arthaśāstra* (150 BCE–300 CE), not only voice similar concerns but also recommend that the king put this wandering to pragmatic use, with the ascetic as a spy, or more precisely, have agents disguised as ascetics, in order to conduct a secret surveillance of the kingdom. See, for example, *Arthaśāstra, 4.4–4.5*. The difference lies in the kinds of discourse this anxiety generates, requiring specific historical contextualization.
75 The grave consequences of rumours and gossip and how they can ruin reputations and families has been explored in other genres of Tamil literature in the late 19th century. The most famous example is the 1896 publication in book form of one of the earliest Tamil novels written by Pi.Ār. Rājam Aiyar titled *The Fatal Rumour or the History of Kamalāmbāḷ (Āptatukkiṭamāṉa apavātam allatu Kamalāmpāḷ carittiram)*. For an excellent translation with introduction, see Blackburn (1998). For a further analysis, see Ebeling (2010a:232–244).
76 Chakrabarty [2000]2007:182.
77 The very last section of *The Refutations* is like an addendum, consisting of Navalar's printing of a letter written in December–January 1868 by one Vīrācāmi Piḷḷai to Navalar, regarding an exchange that took place between Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār and other disciples of Ramalingar, on the one hand, and Irāmacāmi Piḷḷai of the orthodox Śaiva *maṭha*s. This letter, which reveals the orthodox displeasure with the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and portrays Ramalinga Swamigal's disciples as apologetic with regard to the controversy, is given by Navalar as a further evidence for his case. See Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:710–713).
78 Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:709).
79 McCrea (2015).
80 They are speaking of the *Citramīmāṃsākhaṇḍana* of Jagannātha attacking Appaya Dīkṣita"s work on poetics, the *Citramīmāṃsā*.
81 See also Minkowski (2010) on the vituperative texts occasioned by sectarian disputes in 17th- and 18th-century Benares.
82 Bronner and Tubb (2008:75).
83 *On the polemical tracts* against local religion composed by Roberto de Nobili in the 17th century and the refutation of them by Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ as well as the 18th-century polemical wars between the Lutherans and the Jesuits, see Venkatachalapathy's Introduction to Pa.Caravaṇaṉ (2010a:19–21).
84 The history of printing in 19th-century Madras can be divided into two phases in Stuart Blackburn's nuanced 2003 study, with the dividing period, the 1840s. Prior to then, printing was the monopoly of the British and centred at the College of Fort St. George founded in 1812. This institution linked government patronage of Tamil literature with the sponsorship of Tamil pandits in the service of publishing. After the 1830s, the situation changed with the development of commercial printing in Madras and the production, by a new category of pandit-publishers, of Tamil literature for a Tamil readership. As Blackburn (2003:183) sees it, the 1840s are a watershed because it was then that the native publishing houses also became involved in local politics, lending their resources to the anti-missionary campaign: "By mid-century the use of print to inform the public had assumed a new political thrust, and the fear of cultural loss through anglicisation and Christianity had turned Indian publishers into political organisations".

85 I take this concept from Metcalf (1992:232) where, in speaking of the new sources of religious authority in colonial India, she writes: Ever more important in claiming the moral leadership of the communities were a new category of leaders who one may call "lay" leaders . . . Although they became experts in the religious tradition, these people did not receive traditional teaching or initiation like the religious elites, the 'ulamā and pandits, who were heirs of the historically transmitted traditional learning. . . . The successful were able to support themselves simply by their writing and preaching activities. Sometimes teachers and translators seemed to play a significant role as people especially well prepared for interpreting and translating across and within the body of learning., They redefined the basis of religious authority.
For the harshness and polemical nature of religious debates on a pan-Indian scale in the 19th century, see Jones (1992).

86 See Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (2000:11) and Venkatachalapathy's Introduction to Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (2010). Rājacēkaraṉ (2008:19ff) refers to Tamil Śaiva polemical production between 1854 and 1920 in the "Age of Polemical Literature".

87 See for example, Jones (1992) on this.

88 Mitchell (2009:131).

89 In the catalogue of Tamil books in the British Museum first published in 1909, we see close to 50 polemical works listed, the single largest category alongside biographies and autobiographies.

90 Here, one is particularly thinking of the Śaivite invective against the Jains, both in the *Tirumuṟai* and beyond, focusing on their physical appearance and disgusting habits rather than doctrine. On this, see Peterson (1998). Also, I am grateful to Anne Monius for pointing out this historical connection between older Śaiva polemics and Navalar's polemic against Ramalingar.

91 An example of this polemical style, which we have already seen in the Och's letter quoted earlier, is in the Tamil handbill distributed by missionaries against Vaikuṇṭa Cuvāmikaḷ, a religious leader whose radical teachings became widely popular in the same period in the Southern Tamil region.

92 On this incident, see Raman (1999:118–119). This handbill, translated by her, is quoted in full in Raman (1999:119, footnote 33) and referred to as Tamil Handbill 11, Tirunelveli Tract and Book Society, Nagercoil, 1878.

93 Venkatachalapathy (2012:184–187).

94 re. Bennett (2005) on the distance between modern and pre-modern notions of authorship.

95 Stewart (1992:9).

96 Hawley (1988).

97 On canonization and modern Tamil literary histories with regard to the Śaivites, see Sivathamby (1986), Blackburn (2000), and Venkatachalapathy (2005). On the Vaiṣṇavites, see Raman (2011) and on the Jains, Emmrich (2011).

98 Ambalavanar (2000).

99 Ambalavanar (2000).

100 On this, see Metcalf (1992:235).

101 Here, Navalar was clearly stretching the point. Other Śaivite religious texts, prior to or even at the same time as Ramalingar's, which were usually in the form of devotional poetry, had been composed and named *Tiruvaruṭpā* without attracting this kind of attention or opprobium. Thus, for instance, the tenth head of the Tarumapura *ātīṉam*, one of the most illustrious of the Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s, whose regnal dates are probably the early years of the 19th century, composed ten devotional verse compositions all named *Tiruvaruṭpā*, such as the *Kāci Aṉṉapūraṇi tiruvaruṭpā*, *Kāci katirkāmavēlar tiruvaruṭpā*, etc.

102 See Caravaṇaṉ (2010:706) for the relevant passages of *Pōliyaruṭpā maṟuppu*.

103 The *ādīnakarta*s who are the institutional heads of all the *maṭha*s all follow the footsteps (*piṉṉaṇi)* of the high castes. All the Śaiva *maṭha*s have been in the control of one particular caste. Where other castes are concerned, however much they may have studied the *Śaiva* ā*gama*s and be learned, they cannot become the *ādīnakarta*s of the *Śaiva maṭha*s. All the *maṭha*s are in thrall to the castism of vaidika religion. It is well-known that, to become the *paṇṭāra canniti* of *maṭha*s such as Tarumapuram, Tiruvāvaṭuturai, Tiruppanaṉtāḷ etc., one should be qualified according to caste and that this fact is lauded without *piṟaḷcci*.

Thus Civatampi (1994:146) quoted in Caravaṇaṉ (2000:88, my translation). See, in addition, Koppedrayer (1990:6): "only members of four groupings of the Velala caste and one of the cettiyar are eligible to be initiated into the spiritual line of each of these matas, although members of other castes sometimes have informal associations with them". And in footnote 13, she adds: "These five groups are the pillais, tondaimandala mutaliyars, karkatta pillais, tecikars, and the caiva cettiyars".

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Part II

Recreating Ramalinga Swamigal

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6 *Śaiva* Ferment

Neo-Shaivism and Colonial, Religious Modernity

The *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy dragged on for much longer after the chief protagonists ceased to exist. In Caravaṇaṉ's 2010 edition of the available documents we see that there is a spurt of polemical activity in the early years of the 20th century, between 1903 and 1905. This is followed by several decades of a substantial lull until after the mid-1940s. Meanwhile, starting with the 1920s, we see a new portrait of Ramalingar emerging, a re-evaluation that transforms him from the pre-modern Śaivite holy person of the early hagiographies to the modern socio-religious reformer and harbinger of a new, ethical Śaivism. This apotheosis found its culmination in a hagiography of the 1960s, Ma.Po. Civañāṉam's *The Unity Envisaged by Vaḷḷalār* (*Vaḷḷalār kaṇṭa orumaippāṭu*) which will be looked at in detail in Chapter 9.

The biography of Ma.Po.Ci functions also as a certain culmination in the reception of Ramalinga Swamigal within the context of a Dravidian religious nationalism, refracted through the writings on him and his doctrines by key literary and political figures who participated in Dravidian nationalism as a social, cultural, and political movement. The writers examined in Chapters 8 and 9 (Tiru.Vi.Ka and Ma.Po.Ci) were both closely linked to the metropolitan circles of the city of Madras and moved in overlapping non-Brahman circles which engaged in a religious discourse that reframed Śaivism against the backdrop of Dravidian regional nationalism in the latter half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries.

One mainstream strand of this discourse, defined as a "reformulated religion", has been succinctly summarized by Ramaswamy (1997:25) as follows:

> [It was] a wave of religious revivalism which surfaced in the Madras Presidency in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, primarily centered around a reworking of Shaivism, declared the most ancient and authentic religion of those Tamilians who were not Aryan Brahmans. Neo-Shaivism, as I will refer to this reformulated religion, began to make its presence felt from around the 1880s through the publishing and organizational activities of some its principal exponents, such as P.

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> Sundaram Pillai, J. M. Nallaswami Pillai (1864–1920), P. V. Manikkam Nayakar (1871–1931), K. Subramania Pillai (1888–1945), Nilambikai Ammai (1903–45), and, most prolific of all, Maraimalai Adigal (1876–1950). These reformers typically hailed from the ranks of the new elites spawned by colonialism everywhere in India: they were educated, urban, middle-class, upper caste "non-Brahman" professionals and government employees. They may have disagreed with each other on finer points of terminology or doctrine, but they were unanimous in their demand for the removal of "polytheistic" religious practices, claimed to have been introduced into a pristine Shaivism by Aryan Brahmans from the North through their linguistic vehicle, Sanskrit. Their program was puritanical and elitist as well in its advocacy of vegetarianism and teetotalism, and in its call for the excision of "irrational" customs and rituals (animal sacrifices, the worship of godlings, and the like) which were the very stuff of village and popular religion. For the true "Tamil religion" (*tamilar matam*), they insisted, was the monotheistic, "rational" worship of Shiva using pure Tamil rituals based on Tamil scriptures performed by Tamil ("non-Brahman") priests through the liturgical medium of divine Tamil.[1]

Thus, the contours of the discourse were premised on sets of binaries of ethnicity, caste, language, and religion – Aryan/Dravidian, Brahman/non-Brahman, Sanskrit/Tamil, Brahmanical religion/Śaivism – which were considered mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. This discourse, implicitly or explicitly, also fed into the understanding of Tamil literary history and the historiography of Tamil religion as a discipline emerging in the same period. Therefore, it effectively led to a metanarrative that privileged Śaivism as the marker of the authentically religious, the "insider" religion of the Tamils, as Sivathamby has pointed out.[2]

Nevertheless, the Neo-Shaiva response, as this became known, was not the only one in the construction of Śaivism in Tamil modernity. Rather, there were an entire range of responses emerging from different Śaiva publics in the colonial period. These fall within the spectrum of a rethinking of traditional positions on Śaivism, which it would be more appropriate to speak of through the umbrella term of Modern Śaivism rather than Neo-Śaivism, as narrowly defined earlier.[3] The Neo-Shaivite response with its very specific binaries, within such a spectrum of responses, is only one, but it exercises a dominant influence in Tamil literary histories that function within the parameters of Tamil nationalism. Through the dominance of its narrative, which is also premised on the dominance of the metropolitan city as the locus of late colonial religious modernity, the sparse studies of Tamil religion in late colonialism until recently have almost overwhelmingly drawn lines of convergence between Neo-Shaivism, the transformation of Tamil religion in the 19th–20th centuries, and Tamil nationalism as a political and cultural movement. At first glance, this book on Ramalinga Swamigal might seem to

be subscribing to this same narrative in that it deals, in Chapters 8 and 9, with the writings of those who were prominent in the urban milieu of Madras and contributed to such a convergence or were associated with it. Nevertheless, in this chapter and the next, and throughout much of the book, I hope to have shown that this monograph, through its emphasis on the micro-textual history of colonial Tamil religion and through a study of the lives and writings of specific social actors, interrogates this all-too familiar plotline.

This book seeks to problematize our understanding of Tamil religious modernity in two interconnected ways: first, rather than assuming Modern Śaiva-tinged Tamil nationalism to be a radical and emancipatory discourse, as some recent studies do through as uncritical acceptance of its self-representation,[4] or even as a monolithic one, this book hopes to render the discourse more transparent by telling the story also of its many iterations, as well as the omissions and erasures on which it was necessarily premised. In other words, how a majoritarian, largely Modern Shaivite historiography of Ramalingar, which claims him for Tamil religious nationalism, emerged and was consolidated through a privileging of a particular reading of Tamil Śaivism and, simultaneously, the strategies of elision, silence, and omission of other forms of Śaivism that existed in and before his time, and which have continued to exist in the Tamil region. I hope to have shown that Modern Śaivism came to be constructed by the many voices that were involved in interrelated or even contradictory discourses on Śaiva religion. Further, and most importantly, that one such voice was Ramalinga Swamigal himself.

Ramalingar is illustrative of an important second factor regarding the development of Tamil religion in colonial modernity, a factor that would make it very difficult to align its development within the parameters of an urban-based bourgeois Modern Hinduism, particularly as it has been articulated for Bengal. This has to do with the spatial and geographical dimensions of Tamil religious modernity that belies and undermines a strict rural–urban divide. Such a divide in the case of Śaivism would result in the assumption of a Śaivite population in the rural and semi-urban areas as somehow peripheral to the intellectual and religious musings of the urbanizing and metropolitan circles of Madurai or Madras, even while the latter, in fact, was itself not much more than a shanty town in the early years of the 19th century.[5] In fact, this was far from the case. The circles of discussion and impact were **both** in semi-urban and urban centres, facilitated through the nodal networks of Śaiva-centric sacred locations and publics both traditional and newly empowered in the colonial period.

Śaiva Institutions: The Early Phase

In order to understand the rapidly changing Śaiva social and religious contexts in the aftermath of Ramalingar we must first turn to the proliferation of Śaiva non-monastic associations that began to make their presence felt in the late 19th- and early 20th-century Tamil region – as the spaces which he

created, interacted with, and which influenced his own discursive strategies. These associations were markedly different from those that existed through much of the 19th century, in the light of the meagre information we have for the latter today. A survey of this early religious associational activity also enables us to contextualize the changing Śaiva religious landscape after the late 19th century. If we were to create a broad heuristic typology of these early associations we can speak of two kinds: those headed by predominantly Śaivite elites that fostered new approaches to Śaivism against a background of anti-Christian polemics and, those that were inspired by pan-Indian "Hindu" reform, sometimes led by subaltern and charismatic religious leaders also, with the utopian aim of founding a new religious movement.

The catalyst for elite Śaiva associational activity, particularly around the mid-19th century, was undoubtedly missionary work in South India. Biblical Tract Societies formed by Protestant Christian organizations and already very active in this period, combined with the cessation of state monopoly on printing after 1835, had alerted local, non-Christian elites to the power and spread of the printed word. This awareness combined with the societal disruptions created by successful Christian proselytizing and low-caste mass conversion, particularly in the southern districts of the Madras Presidency such as in Tirunelveli, generated a deep unease and anger that turned to associational activism.[6] As it has perceptively been pointed out, this activism was the result of disquiet produced among both rural and urban elites, mutually feeding each other.[7] It resulted directly in the creation around 1841 of associations such as the *Vipūti Caṅkam* in the Tirunelveli district and the *Catur Vēta Cittānta Capai* in Madras that engaged in producing anti-Christian petitions, literature satirizing Christianity, and advertising non-Christian public preaching. There is very little original material that survives regarding their aims, intentions, and activities and that which is available is culled mostly from accounts of them in missionary reports. Nevertheless, Young and Jebanesan (1995) suggest that they were most active in the 1840s, were transitional, and that though they converged in terms of some of their activities, they each had a distinctive and separate profile. The *Vipūti Caṅkam* emerged in Tirunelveli in direct response to missionary conversion and the resultant new assertion of the lower castes against the agricultural elite. Bolstered by the overwhelmingly Śaivite population of the region, the *Caṅkam* attempted to disrupt and overturn missionary outreach. The *vipūti* or "sacred ash" of Śiva was to signify the assertion of or re-conversion to a Śaivite identity. The *Catur Vēta Cittānta Capai*, in contrast, sought to project a pan-sectarian identity – the *Catur* or "Four" referring not to the four Vedas but to the Śaivite, Vaiṣṇavite, Madhva, and Smārta traditions of South India – yet it was founded and run by Śaivite urban elites. It was also called the "Salay Street Society" a nomenclature deriving from its location in this particular street in the "Black Town" part of Madras. These associations seemed to have been most active around the mid-19th century, fading out sometime after that. In contrast, it was after the mid-19th century that

pan-Indian reform came to exert an influence on the socio-religious imagination of Tamil India, in the form of the *Brahmo Samaj*, whose powerful influence for a period of a few decades in South India in the 19th century is yet to be thoroughly researched.[8] The anti-Christian Śaivite associations as well as the *Brahmo Samaj* branches in South India converged in recognizing the popularity and need for congregational activity that mimicked and replaced Protestant, congregational worship. Between the *Vipūti Caṅkam* and the *Catur Vēta Cittānta Capai* the aim was to create, "Hindu schools for Hindus; Tamil literature for readers offended by missionary productions; and a Protestantized worship for those averse to Protestantism itself".[9] The move towards Protestantized worship involved congregational singing and praying now conducted from some kind of "pulpit" by "Hindu" preachers and the closing of such religious meetings, along the lines of Christian service, with a benediction in the name of the *Trimūrti*.[10] These very features, as well as the *Brahmo* insistence on a non-iconoclastic monotheism repugnant to mainstream Śaivism in the Tamil country, found resonance in the associational activities of figures like Ramalinga Swamigal.

Most of the older hagiographies of Ramalingar are muted on the organizations he founded. When any such organization is mentioned at all, it is the *Cattiya Taruma Cālai*, set up for the sole purpose of feeding the poor, whose date can be put down, fairly reliably, to 1867. We glean this from the two invitations that were sent out for its inauguration announcing the description of its facilities and the stated aim of offering a free meal to the needy. There was also a written proclamation (*viḷamparam*) to explicate the aims of the *Cālai* called "The Proclamation Regarding the Conduct of Compassion towards Living Beings" (*Cīvakāruṇyavoḷukka viḷamparam*), which largely repeats Ramalinga Swamigal's views from the text *Cīvakāruṇya oḻukkam* (discussed in Chapter 4 earlier), a portion of which was read out at the inauguration. Although the definitive hagiographer of Ramalingar, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ mentions that the former had founded an organization called the *Camaraca Vēta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* in 1865, whose name was changed after 1872 into *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkka Cattiya Caṅkam*,[11] the founding and formal existence of this organization and its activities within Ramalingar's own lifetime remains murky and doubts can be raised as to whether it even existed at all in any formal sense. Thus, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's testimony to its existence is not corroborated in the older hagiographies such as Ca.Mu. Kantacāmi Piḷḷai's *Carittira kīrtaṉai* and the larger version of this text with the title of *Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmi carittira kuṟippukaḷ* (under the joint authorship of Mōkūr Kantacāmi Mutaliyār) published in 1923. Being composed by a younger contemporary of Ramalingar himself, this work might be considered a reliable, eyewitness account, and it is conspicuously silent on the *Caṅkam* while corroborating the coming into being and activity of the *Cālai*. When we consult the testimony of another reliable early eyewitness source, that of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār as given to the Theosophical Society (also discussed in Chapter 2 earlier), we find that he does mention that

such an association was founded in 1867, which contradicts Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's assertion of its existence already two years earlier.[12] In effect, all the evidence points to some informal association of Ramalinga Swamigal's close friends, associates, and disciples who designated themselves an association once the *Cālai* was launched.[13] Undoubtedly, a source of inspiration for Ramalinga Swamigal would have been the *Brahmo Samaj,* which he was well aware of and came into contact with around the time of the founding of the *Cālai.*[14] The vicissitudes of the institutions he launched and their precarious existence are documented for almost an entire century until they were put on a firmer financial footing from the 1950s.[15] The scholarship on them indicates that particularly by the 1930s, the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai* had fallen into a state of decrepitude and was kept going by a few well-wishers. It, and the Ramalingar movement in general, acquired a new lease of life after the 1950s, with the personal interest taken in it by O.P. Rāmacāmi Reṭṭiyār (OPR), more popularly known as Ōmantūrār, who became the first Chief Minister of Madras State in 1947. He founded the *Cutta Caṉmārkka Nilayam* in 1951 and revived the movement. In his biography of Ōmantūrār, Rājakumāraṉ (2013) describes the conditions in Vadalur that were prevalent when the former moved there in the 1950s and began to take an interest in Ramalingar. There was no place where the devotees who came to visit the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai* (then run by the Vīraśaiva guru Kirupāṉanta Vāriyār) could get a meal, no electricity, or even a regularly used railway stop. All that seems to have existed were the *Capai,* the almshouse or *Taruma Cālai,* and a few sadhus camped in them. On arrival there, Ōmantūrār started the *Cutta Caṉmārkka Nilayam* and related institutions and eventually handed over its reins to Poḷḷācci Makāliṅkam and Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ in 1969.[16]

The nearest parallel to Ramalingar's *Caṅkam* would be something like the religious movement that coalesced around a remarkably similar contemporary figure, Vaikuṇṭacāmi (1809–1851) in the south-westernmost part of South India, in the area of the former kingdom of Travancore (Tiruvitāṅkūr). In the case of Vaikuṇṭacāmi as well, a subaltern religious figure from the *Cāṇār* caste, many of the formal features of the organization founded by him – *Ayyā Vaḻi* – consolidated only after his demise. In contrast to these two kinds of early associations, the Śaiva organizations that emerged and proliferated in the Tamil area after the 1870s were of a very different nature.

Śaiva Institutions: The Later Phase

When we attempt to conceptualize the Śaiva associational activity in the years between 1874 and 1960, the period after Ramalingar's disappearance and his apotheosis as a Tamil national saint, we must speak of multiple communities of self-directed persons, constituted at their core through caste, kinship, and sectarian affiliations, involved in activities related to debates about and the propagation of Tamil Śaivism in the form of both Tamil-oriented

and Śaiva-oriented work. Indeed, to do either came to be seen, from the first decades of the 20th century, as doing both. These institutions ranged from those monastic ones embedded within local networks and having a long history premised on pre-modern modes of mediation between the non-monastic religious community,[17] the state, and the temple, such as the Śaiva *maṭha*s, to newer voluntary associations propagating Śaivism through their branches and similar such associations in both urban and *mofussil* areas, in the metropolitan case functioning as "a form of agency perfectly suited to the cultural and socio-economic aspirations of a new hybrid urban elite".[18] All these associations – *capai*s, *caṅkam*s, *maṉṟam*s, and *kaḻakam*s as they were known – were strongly influenced and transformed by the possibilities for organizational religious activism and dissemination offered by print. Print, in effect, and the circulation of weekly and monthly journals, biographies, and pamphlets, allowed for the forging of broader "affective communities" beyond the traditional ones and was aided in this by the cohesive potentialities of an increasingly assertive Dravidian nationalism.

A perfunctory count of such associations listed in the encyclopedia on Tamil Śaivism, the *Caiva Camaya Kalaikkaḷañciyam* (henceforth, *CCK*), for the period under consideration gives us the staggering number of more than 1,500 such entities, most of them no doubt small local clubs while others, as we will see, were larger organizations. We might get a fairly accurate sense of the work of these associations in helping re-calibrate not just the relationship between the *maṭha* and its environs in new ways but also in collectively constituting the institutional basis of Tamil religion in modernity if we look at research on some such Śaivite associations that emerged in the same period.

Much of our information for the colonial period and beyond relate to those organizations that first came into existence through the inspiration provided by the activities and tours of figures such as Arumuga Navalar and Maraimalai Adigal. Many of them also took instruction and help from the Śaiva *maṭha*s proximate to them and were often supported by devout, local "Big-men", who took an active interest in their day-to-day running and supported them through charitable donations, their influence on local religious leaders, and their pan-Tamil prestige. While our evidence for such organizations is meagre for the latter half of the 19th century, we see them burgeoning in the first half of the 20th century. Significant is the fact that small town and village associations, especially when located in close proximity to a bigger city, run by dynamic and wealthy local Śaiva devotees, could become important centres of learning, scholarship, and publication in their own right. One such classic example was the *Mañcakollai Tiruñāṉacampantam Capai*, founded as early as 1911 in the village of Mañcakollai, in close proximity to the big centre of Nagapattinam. A brief look at its activities in the early decades of its existence is illustrative of the dynamic nature of Tamil Śaivism in the semi-urban context.[19]

The *Capai* had been founded by Ca. Cokkaliṅka Mutaliyār who had appointed as its first head Mu. Cāmiṉāta Tēcikar and as administrative help

Pa.Lē. Veṅkaṭarāma Cāstiriyār. Intimately involved in supporting the organization were local wealthy Śaivite devotees such as those belonging to the Vīraśaiva family of Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār. The *Capai*'s activities might be categorized, broadly, as twofold. The one was to foster and support a lay Śaivite childhood that would encourage the emergence of the devout Śaiva adult. In this context rituals and activities that reinforced one's existence in a Śaiva world were made available from childhood to adulthood. The *Capai* actively propagated the giving of Śaivite names, such as those of the *samayācārya*s, to children through the naming ceremony. Children were taken out in procession through the streets of the village chanting the list of names of the saints of the *Tēvāram* (*Tēvāranāmāvali*). Regular pilgrimages for members to visit Śaiva religious centres such as Varanasi and Rameshwaram were organized. The virtues of a Śaiva personhood had a performative dimension that not just pilgrimage but also the acts of public magnanimity of the chief patron devotees illustrated. Thus, Irāmacāmi Mutaliyār not just regularly hosted the speakers who came to give lectures on Śaivism in the village but kept the local *pāṭhaśāla* affiliated with the *Capai* solvent, (which taught Śaiva scriptures to young people), even through times of food scarcity. The illustrious Śaiva visitors, who included those such as Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (dealt with in the next chapter), would have ensured that the association was kept abreast of the latest developments in the orthodox Śaiva world and its response to the Dravidian Self-Respect Movement. In addition, the *Capai* organized regular classes on canonical texts such as *Tiruvuntiyār, Tiruvaruṭpayaṉ,* or the *Civañāṉacittiyār.* Luminaries of the Śaiva world then, such as Taṇṭapāṇi Tēcikar (b. 1905) gave weekly classes on the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. The objectives and activities of the Mañjakollai *Capai* might be considered paradigmatic for several such associations dotting the Tamil landscape in this period.[20] Thus, another such association was the even older *Tirucirappura Caiva Cittānta Capai* founded in 1888 in Tirucirāpaḷḷi, with the blessing of Arumuga Navalar. The aim of the organization was to present regular lectures by visiting Śaiva public intellectuals to the city. This it did with great success and we hear of a roll call of who's who in the Śaiva world who gave talks in the association including, among others, Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (1846–1901), Maramalai Adigal (1876–1950), Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (1873–1942), and Kirupāṉanta Vāriyār (1906–1993).[21] A historical survey of such institutions for the period between the late 19th and mid-20th century shows them to be scattered over the length and breadth of the Tamil region, in places varying from renowned pan-regional Śaiva centres such as Chidambaram (where the *Tillat Tirumuṟai Kaḻakam* existed from 1923), Tiruvārūr (*Aṉapāyaṉ Ātikka Caṅkam,* founded 1930) to Pāḷayaṅkōṭṭai in the Tirunelveli district (*Caiva Capai,* founded in 1886), to places smaller and less well known in the colonial period, such as Mēlaiccivapuri (in the Pudukkottai district, with the *Mēlaiccivapuri Caṉmārkka Capai* founded in 1909). The activities of these institutions varied greatly – some such as the *Tirucirappura Caiva Cittānta Capai,* founded in Tiruchirapalli in 1888 officially with

the blessings and support of Arumuga Navalar, was an organization that functioned up to the mid-20th century as a place for regular visits by the Śaiva intelligentsia to stay at and give speeches and conduct regular reading sessions, where Śaiva scriptures were discussed in detail. Again, the institutional memory regarding those who passed through the portals of the place shows how closely knit the main players in the development of Modern Śaivism were, and how they circulated among each other and converged in these Śaiva organizations. Thus, the *Capai* was actively supported by J.M. Nallasami Pillai (Nallacāmippiḷḷai) (1864–1920), himself a native of the city and the founder of the journal *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika and Agamic Review*, rightly called, "the central mouthpiece of the Shaiva Siddhanta revival".[22] The *Capai* received regular visits from Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ,[23] Maraimalai Adigal, Tiru.Vi.Ka, Kirupāṉanta Vāriyār, Cuvāmi Vipulāṉantar, A. Natēca Mutaliyār, etc., who either came for a single lecture or stayed and gave classes on Śaiva texts.[24] Other organizations were brought into existence in the early 20th century particularly to take advantage of the opportunities offered by print. Thus, in the region of Ceṭṭināṭu (traditionally to the east of Madurai and comprising parts of the contemporary districts of Sivaganga and Pudukkottai), we find the founding in 1916, in Tēvakōṭṭai, of the *Civākama Cittānta Paripālaṉa Caṅkam*, by locale notables solely for the purpose of conducting classes in the Śaivāgamas both in Sanskrit and Tamil and to bring into print several books relating to this task. The institution appears to have lasted for three or more decades.[25] Other organizations in the same region, such as the *Mēlaccivapuri Caṉmārkka Capai*, founded in 1909 by the affluent *ceṭṭiyār* families of the locality had the primary objective of organizing local, annual literary festivals for bringing together an interest in both Śaivism and Tamil: the annual festival invited scholars who were well known in either of these fields to create a forum for discussion.[26] In these myriad organizations we see, again and again, the involvement of local elites who worked for their success, which, in turn was often considered as achieved when the organization was able to draw the attention and bring to its premises on a regular basis those individuals who had garnered pan-Tamil influence on modern Śaiva scholarship and/or Tamil studies.

A factual listing of the number of such organizations and their activities does not do justice to their impact on the lives of individuals or the immensely important role they played at the intersection of popular religion and social life in specific locations across the entire Tamil country. Fortunately, we have at least one account that leaves an indelible impression of how such a Śaivite organization may impact an individual's life in the very first years of the 20th century, in the charming memoir of Tiru.Vi. Kalyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār, the protagonist of Chapter 8. In his memoir Tiru. Vi.Ka speaks of his youthful involvement in a Śaivite organization founded in 1903. This was the *Srī Pālacuppiramaṇiya Paktajaṉa Capai* founded by Nā. Katirvēṟpiḷḷai (1871–1905), the eminent Tamil and Śaivite scholar as well as student of Navalar we had already encountered as crucial to the polemical

disputes of Chapter 5. Kativēṟpiḷḷai obviously had tremendous charisma and was particularly capable of inspiring many young, idealistic people like Tiru. Vi.Ka to take a serious interest in the study of Tamil and Śaiva literature and to model themselves as part of an emerging civic and Śaiva public.

In 1903, Tiru.Vi.Ka and his friends who had already been part of a youth association called *Iḷaiñar Kalvik Kaḻakam* dissolved it into the *Srī Pālacuppiramaṇiya Paktajaṉa Capai* founded by Katirvēṟpiḷḷai. Tiru.Vi.Ka's talks about how he and his friends helped build the first meeting place for the *Capai* by renovating a dilapidated room in the house of a local Śaivite, Appācāmi Mutaliyār, and how they felt a sense of civic pride in being useful members of this community. Then, he gives us a vivid description of the annual festival that the *Srī Pālacuppiramaṇiya Paktajaṉa Capai* organized:

> The activities would already start one month before the annual festival. . . . On the night of the day before the festival [the entire district of Rāyapēṭṭai] would not sleep. It would become the land of Śiva (*civalōkam*). The streets drenched with water; the fish ornamented decorativions hung a foot apart everywhere; here and there flowered arches; in the houses bananas, areca nut and coconut palm [would be offered]; *kolam*s in the front entrance; buttermilk, *pāṉakam*,[27] sugar candy and sugar everywhere; in the morning the procession through the streets (*ulā*) from the temple of Cuntarēcar together with the musical orchestra of Murukaṉ; behind the milling crowds of those [chanting] the Tēvāram; in the midst of the street procession the Śaiva brilliance of Katirvēṟpiḷḷai; the roar of, "*Namaḥ Pārvatī patayē – hara Mahādeva*". Is this not a vision of the land of Śiva?[28]

In this vivid account of the annual festival of the *Srī Pālacuppiramaṇiya Paktajaṉa Capai* we see the real and felt impact that these Śaivite organizations had in fostering both Śaivism and a sense of a religious community among the local populace.

It is important to state that though this was a field of activity almost completely dominated by men there were also specifically women-founded associations. Among such women's associations, for which we have scant information in terms of the current state of research, two stand out: these are the *Pākampiriyāḷ Mātar Kaḻakam* founded in 1928 and the *Maṅkayarkkaraciyār Mātar Kaḻakam*, founded possibly also in the early decades of the 20th century in Erode. Often, the entire growth and longevity of such an association rested on the shoulders of a single individual. In the case of the *Pākampiriyāḷ Mātar Kaḻakam*, located in Tūttukkuṭi (Southern Tamil Nadu), the person concerned was Civakāmi Ammāḷ, who founded and ran it for 50 years. Also, she taught the classes in it, exclusively for girls and encouraged them to write in the journal, which was the print organ of the association, even as she herself wrote commentaries on some of the more popular Śaivite devotional works such as the much loved

Nālvar nāṉmaṇimālai on the first four Śaiva *samayācārya*s by Turaimaṅkaḷam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ[29] and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's *Aṟputa tiruvantāti*.[30] The work of involving and training young women in knowledge of the *Tirumuṟai*, in the singing of it and congregational worship, in the reading and oral commentary on the Śaiva scriptures had all been activities carried forward by her successor Kuḻantai Ammāḷ (died 2009).[31] The retrieval of the history of these women's organizations[32] – and there is no doubt that there were several of them – starting from those founded in the late 19th to the mid-20th century is a desideratum for giving us a more nuanced understanding of the growth of Tamil Śaivism within a modernizing religious landscape, which encouraged some pioneering women to seek out a role for themselves at the intersection of civic and religious life.

In this chapter I dealt with non-monastic Śaiva organizations as a constituent feature of Śaiva associational activity, for which we have currently recorded information from only the late 19th century. Yet, it would be highly deceptive to regard all non-monastic Śaiva organizations which functioned in the 19th century at the intersection of the Śaiva *maṭha* and the devotional community as an entirely new feature of the colonial landscape. Certain Śaiva practices had long demanded associational activity on the part of the community – such as days devoted to the "Worship of the Guru" (*Kurupūcai*) established solely to celebrate and honour the birth asterism and conduct worship of one or all of "the Four" (*nālvar*) *samayācārya*s (Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṉacampantar, and Māṇikkavācakar) and Cēkkiḻār, or, even older, the activity of spending specific days of the religious calendar cleaning, maintaining, and beautifying Śaiva places of worship, particularly the temples – an activity called *uḻavārappaṇi* – that brought together, in an associational fashion, the non-monastic community of men, women, and children. Particularly seen from a longue durée perspective these practices have an extended history in pre-modern Śaiva social life and continued to be reflected, albeit modernized and transformed, as part of the activities of the examined Śaiva institutions in the colonial period.[33] Even as these community-run institutions burgeoned in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the traditional religious heads of Śaiva monastic institutions were not left behind in the reconfiguration of Śaivism. Rather, as we will see in the next chapter, religious figures like Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ participated vigorously in and contributed substantially to rethinking religion in this period even as their contributions may not have lingered in public memory as potently as that of Ramalingar.

Notes

1 Ramaswamy (1997:25).
2 Sivathamby (1986).
3 For a recent look at this diversity of responses, see Steinschneider (2015). Klöber (2017) favours the phrase, "Modern Tamil Saivism" to speak of the formations that emerge through the encounter of Tamil religious culture with global modernity

in the 19th century. Further, he sees these formations as in a continuous process of transformation with a particular resurgence starting after the 1990s.

4 Such as, for instance, the recent study of Vaithees (2015) on Maraimalai Adigal.

5 This point has also been made cogently in Bhavani Raman (1999:9–10).

6 On the conversion of the Tirunelveli Cāṇārs, Robert Caldwell, and the generation of social conflict due to missionary activity and conversion, see Irschick (1969), Kent (2004), and Schröder (2010), among others.

7 Young and Jebanesan (1995:82). Their work on the Church Missionary Society (CMS) archives and collation of the previous research of both Frykenberg (1976, 1979, 1986) and Hudson (1970) gives us the account that informs this section of the chapter. For further discussion, also see Suntharalingam (1988), Raman (1999), and Nehring (2003).

8 For the scant information we have, see Srinivasan (1975–76), Jones (1989:164–167), and Paramarthalingam (1997:53–71). Given an impetus with the lecture tour of Keshub Chandra Sen to Madras in 1864, informal meetings gradually led to the formation of the *Veda Samaj,* an organization based on the same creed, in terms of its refutation of idolatry, sectarianism, and its monotheistic base as the *Brahmo Samaj.* Branches of the *Samaj* were rapidly opened in other towns, such as Salem and Chingleput. Around 1864, the *Veda Samaj* was renamed the *Southern India Brahmo Samaj* with activities that included the translation of Bengali *Brahmo* texts into Tamil and Telugu and the successful campaigning for the enactment of the *Caste Disabilities Removal Act* in 1872, which legalized inter-caste marriages.

9 Young and Jebanesan (1995:83).

10 Young and Jebanesan (1995:91).

11 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:284).

12 Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār quoted in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:613).

13 This is also the conclusion that is arrived at in the only full-length study of Ramalinga Swamigal's movement as an ideology by Aruḷcelvī (1991).

14 For the most comprehensive account of Ramalinga Swamigal's encounter and dispute with a Brahmo Samajist on idolatry in Kūṭalūr, see Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:296–308).

15 These details were confirmed to me also by Dr. R. Selvaraj, Director of the *Vaḷḷalār Kurukula Uyarnilai Kallūri* on 6th February 2000 during my visit to Vadalur.

16 Rājakumāraṉ (2013:128–131). The movement entered a second phase of expansion and significant scholarly activity when the sugar baron, public figure, and philanthropist Na. Mahalingam (1923–2014), in addition to his work with the *Cutta Caṉmārkka Nilayam,* took over the leadership of the *Sanmarga Samaj* from his father Nāccimuttu Kavuṇṭar (1902–1954) and put the institutions on a firm financial footing as well as encouraged a spate of serious scholarly activity, including the work of Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, through the establishment of the *Irāmaliṅkar Paṇi Maṉṟam* in 1965. For further details on Na. Mahalingam's decisive, single-handed, and overwhelming contribution to the Ramalingar movement in the 20th century, as well as his remarkable life, see his biography by Alladin (1998).

17 Here, I deliberately avoid drawing a dichotomy between "monastic" and "lay" within the context of religious communities in South Asia, a distinction that is both misleading and artificial when one closely examines the porous boundaries between the two. On the theoretical implications and critique of this dichotomy, see Christoph Emmrich, Strategies of Corporatization in the Anthropology of Buddhism. Unpublished Paper delivered at the Workshop *The Laity in Contemporary Buddhist Religious Fields: Categories, Actors Roles,* Centre Asie du Sud-Est, Paris, 22nd May 2015.

18 Stark (2011:4).

19 There exists till date no comprehensive textual, social, or institutional history of Tamil Śaivism. In the absence of such a history, we remain reliant on the heroic efforts of a few Tamil scholars working assiduously on the collation of primary

sources, enabling us to do further research. Among such heroic endeavours, Mu. Aruṇācalam's exhaustive literary history, even when lopsided due to its strong Śaivasiddhānta bias, has gained some traction among scholars working on Tamil literature in pre-modernity, in recent English language scholarship. Lesser known, because it is more recent, is the work of Irā. Irājacēkaraṉ which attempts to offer us the only comprehensive survey of the institutions, individuals, and publications of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta world from the late 18th century to the contemporary period. In a magisterial mapping of this world, Irājacēkaraṉ has categorized it in a commonsensical fashion, which also leads to much overlapping into the following groups: 1) Śaiva scholars (This is the subject matter of Volume 1: *Caivapperuviḻiyil kālam* (2003); 2) The Śaiva *maṭha*s, other local institutions and individuals. This is the subject matter of volumes 2 and 3 titled *Eṉṟum uḷḷa caivam* (2006) and *Ūrellām civamaṇam* (2008), respectively; 3) The institutional history of the *Ōtuvār* titled *Coṟṟamiḻ Cūṭuvār* (2008), and 4) Śaiva publications of the 19th–20th centuries titled *Caivattōraṇaṅkaḷ* (2008). A great deal of the historical data regarding institutions and persons in this chapter could not have been unearthed without his pioneering work. His research, as far as I can gauge, subsequently comes to be incorporated in the ninth volume of the multi-volume *Caiva Camaya Kalaikkaḷañciyam* (2013).

20 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:122–128).

21 On this association, see Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:195–196).

22 Bergunder (2010:30). There exists very little work, in English, on some of the leading 19th–20th-century figures instrumental in the foregrounding of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta in the colonial period. Bergunder's is a valuable and nuanced contribution that attempts to tackle this lacuna.

23 Tiru.Vi.Ka forms the subject matter of Chapter 8. Kirupāṉanta Vāriyār (1906–1993), from a traditional Vīraśaiva lineage of Śaiva/Murukaṉ devotees, was a prolific author and public speaker who, almost single-handedly popularized the praise poem to Murukaṉ, the *Tiruppukaḻ* of Aruṇakirinātar (ca. 15th century), leading to the widespread revival of the work in the devotional and performative landscape of 20th-century Tamil Nadu and making it a staple of the devotional repertoire of Classical South Indian Carnatic music. Cuvāmi Vipulāṉantar (1892–1947) was a Sri Lankan Tamil scholar and literary critic who joined the Ramakrishna Mission and was ordained in it in 1924 and went on to serve as an educationist within that institution and having a distinguished career as Professor of Tamil at both Annamalai University in Tamil Nadu and the University of Ceylon.

24 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:195–196).

25 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:235–236).

26 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:240–241).

27 *Kōlam* are the rice flour decorative designs drawn in front of the entrances of houses and *pāṉakam* is a summer drink made of jaggery water, lemon, ginger, and cardamom.

28 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:458).

29 On Turaimaṅkaḷam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, see Steinschneider (2016).

30 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:285).

31 Irājacēkaraṉ (2006:285).

32 On one such early Tamil Advaita Vedānta female association going back to perhaps as early as the late 19th century, the *Kaivalya Mātar Caṅkam* of Virudhunagar is currently the research focus of Eric Steinschneider.

33 On these, see *Caiva Camaya Kalaikkaḷañciyam*, Volume 9:142–143.

7 The Life and Times of Ñāṉiyār Āṭikaḷ (1873–1942)

The study of Neo-Śaivism has led to the fallacy that the transformation of Tamil religion in the colonial period was led primarily by those who wrote both in Tamil and English and were keenly aware of each other's works. Yet, as the previous chapter showed, extensive Śaivite networks of communication and interaction came into existence and flourished in the colonial period in which we can see the emergence of a vernacular Tamil Śaivism. Once these networks are examined in detail they decisively undermine and belie the notion of the Modern Śaivism that emerged in the colonial period as exclusively the construct of a scholarly enterprise spearheaded by those who had access to or were themselves part of a colonial elite in one or two specific locations, in dialogue with English language Orientalist scholarship. This chapter is but a gesture in this direction but points towards the detailed future research that needs to be done to map the textual and social history of Tamil Śaivism, or indeed that of Tamil religion in general, in the colonial period and beyond. Thus, here, attention is not on the hitherto well-known "big actors" in the formation of Modern Śaivism such as Cūḷai Cōmacuntara Nāyakar (1846–1901), P. Sundaram Pillai (Pē.Em.Ē. Cuntaram Piḷḷai, 1855–1897), J.M. Nallaswami Pillai (Je.Em. Nallacāmippiḷḷai, 1864–1920), and Maraimalai Adigal (Maṟaimalai Aṭikaḷ, 1876–1950),[1] to name a few. Rather, it points to significant others whose lifespan stretched from the last decades of the 19th century to well into the 20th century, who were part of the many Śaiva publics, including the traditional Śaiva *maṭha*s in the semi-urban areas and small towns of the Tamil region. They participated vigorously in the transformation of Śaivite religion in the period under consideration but have been either forgotten or relegated to the sidelines in mainstream Tamil religious historiography. One such figure is Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, an excursus into whose life and works is the focus of this chapter.

Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (1873–1942) was the head of a Vīraśaiva *ātīṉam*[2] with its main location, by the 20th century, in Tiruppātirippuliyūr (now a part of Cuddalore, south of the town of Pondicherry), known as the Kōvalūr/Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam*, which was well known but not as well endowed or had the reach of the traditional Śaivasiddhānta *ātīṉam*s such as Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai. Yet, through his own charismatic qualities, erudition, as well

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as his dynamic intervention in the reformulating of Śaivism in the early decades of the 20th century, he was able to catapult himself and his institution into prominence by participating vigorously in the emerging discourses of Modern Śaivism. His life and intellectual trajectory, this chapter will argue, are exemplary for the heterogeneous discursive field that came to comprise Modern Śaivism and helps trace the latter's evolution in the immediate aftermath of Ramalingar (Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ was born one year before Ramalinga Swamigal's disappearance) through the many changes that occurred during the middle decades of the 20th century. Further, understanding his religious thought, as reflective of his context, is one way by which we can enter into an understanding of the religious landscape within which the reception of Ramalinga Swamigal and his teachings emerged in the immediate decades and century after his own lifetime.

Civacaṇmuka Meyññāṉa Civācāriya Cuvāmikaḷ, known more popularly as Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, was born in 1873, one year before the disappearance of Ramalinga Swamigal. The 69 years of his life coincided with some of the most radical developments in Tamil cultural and political history in the 19th–20th centuries, developments that might be encapsulated under the general rubric of Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement.[3] When Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ was born the most significant literary event, with repercussions far beyond the literary field for the Tamil cultural and political landscape, was the ongoing "re-discovery" and publication of the *Caṅkam* literature pioneered by Ci.Vai. Tāmōtaram Piḷḷai (1832–1901) and U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar (1855–1942). By the time of his demise, on the cusp of Indian independence, we are looking at the consolidation of Tamil political nationalism with the formation of the *Tirāviṭa Kaḻakam* in 1938 and its subsequent growth into the many offshoots that dominate Tamil politics even today. In is within this crucial period that, as we continue to examine Śaiva associational activity as it emerged, evolved, and transformed in the long 19th century within the Tamil country, that we concentrate on the microhistory of such developments through the life and work of one man. This was Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ who played a significant, if now largely forgotten, role in Modern Tamil Śaivism.

All our information for Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's institution-building activities comes from the 1973 hagiography commissioned by his *maṭha* at Tiruppātirippuliyūr, on the 100th anniversary of his birth and written by a disciple of his Ka.Pā. Vēlmurukaṉ.[4] In the narrative we see that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ starts to become active in creating or enabling the creation of associations after the first decade of the 20th century, when he was in his late thirties. The hagiography lists between 20 and 30 such associations, the majority of them emerging after 1911. When we examine the kind of associations he was involved in we can classify them into, approximately, three different types. First, there were the associations concerned with spreading the influence of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ himself or the *ātūṉam*. Thus, some of them were started by his direct disciples who wanted to either run the equivalent

of a Śaivite study circle where he would directly give lectures or advise them on what they might study and who, in turn, would support the *ātīṉam* in myriad ways. Such was the nature of the *Ñāṉiyār Māṇava Kaḻakam* founded by his ardent devotee and disciple Ma.Rā. Kumāracāmi Piḷḷai or the *Ñāṉiyār Caṅkam* started in Kāñcīpuram by another disciple, Civacāmi Tēcikar. Other associations sprouted in the small localities which were directly connected to the *ātīṉam*, being part of its geographical sphere of influence in having a branch *maṭha* located there or nearby. They were brought into existence to show that *the ātīṉam* now had a dynamic and charismatic head, who gave discourses on Śaiva literature and presided over ritual events also locally. Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ himself often passed through these villages on his way to one or the other of his branch *maṭha*s, to renew and reinforce the bonds between the *maṭha* and the local Śaiva community. Associations such as *Vākīca Paktajaṉa Capai* founded in 1910 at Nellikuppam or the *Kampar Kalāmrita Caṅkam* at Tiruveṇṇainallūr founded in the same period were of this kind. Second, there were associations that reflected the specific interests of close disciples, were started and run by them, and received the approval of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ through his presence, his benediction, and his speeches on festive occasions. These included associations as diverse as the *Pārkava Kula Caṅkam*, founded in 1911 by the indefatigable Ma.Rā. Kumāracāmi Piḷḷai. This was, in effect, a caste association meant for the *Uṭaiyār* caste, of whom the founder himself was one. The *Uṭaiyār* were a middle-ranking, agricultural caste group with aspirations, already in the early 19th century, to social mobility, who were designating themselves Veḷāḷas.[5] Not infrequently, they were also Vīraśaivas and were particularly prominent in the South Arcot district. It was therefore pragmatic for Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ and the *ātīṉam* to be supportive of their associative activity and function as their religious authority. Another such association, which reflected Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's outreach efforts, was the *Aruṭcōtināta Pakta Pāla Camājam* founded by the aforementioned Ma.Rā. Kumāracāmi Piḷḷai and Ca.Mu. Kantacāmi Piḷḷai, the early hagiographer of Ramalingar. Founded in 1908, with the blessings of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, the *Caṅkam* organized speeches and congregational singing on Thursdays and Saturdays. The third kind of association he seems to have patronized were those that arose as a direct inspiration in the aftermath of the 1905 creation of the umbrella Śaivite organization, the *Caiva Cittānta Makā Camācam* under the aegis of both Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ and Maraimalai Adigal. We see similar sounding organizations at the local level – the *Uttaramērūr Caiva Cittānta Capai*, the *Kāvitaṇṭalam Caiva Cittānta Capai, Tirucirapura Caiva Cittānta Capai* – which he personally visited and gave speeches at. We have scant information for the specific activities that all these associations undertook, those the hagiography stresses, repeatedly, that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's activities were undergirded with the aim of bringing together "Tamil" and "Śaivism". This also involved forging a strong connection with local elites under the changing economic conditions of colonialism, resulting in a new kind of Śaivism which was a "civic religion".

Civic Religion, Cloth Trade, and Religious Patronage: The Life of Ti.Nā. Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār (1841–1921)

Theoretical reflections from medieval studies, particularly with regard to "civic religion", prove particularly useful for us to think about the institutional and social basis of multivocal, local, and heterogenous responses that fed into the emergence of what we might call "Modern Śaivism" from the latter part of the 19th century.

In a survey article of the usage of this phrase, Tepstra (2014) concedes that this is entirely a modern term but a useful one for "framing the particular context of religion in medieval towns and city". The focus is on "a collection of religious phenomena – cultic, devotional and institutional – in which civic power plays a determining role, principally through the actions of local and municipal authorities". In terms of institutional transformation Terpstra and other historians of medieval Christianity in Europe see a general shift away from "classical institutions like convents and monasteries and towards lay-run religious institutions like confraternities and hospitals" particularly after the mid-14th century. At the forefront of this shift, from the longue durée perspective, was also a class dynamic at work, described as "ennobling", whereby the benefactors of such a civic religion moved from being the ordinary laity to local elites.[6] The manner in which "civic religion" functioned in the context of Tamil Śaivism in modernity enables us also to see the clear divide between medieval Christian institutions and their historical development and the differences that emerge in the Tamil case. On the one hand, also in the Tamil context, we see that the Śaiva institutions are spearheaded by local elites who are consolidating their social influence through their support for religious activity. On the other hand, unlike the kind of increasing laicization and the tension between the clergy and the laity which the paradigm of "civic religion" assumes, Tamil Śaiva institutional activity sees a seamless overlap between what might be considered trade and economic interests, on the one hand, and religious, charitable, and social endeavour, on the other. Thus, we have local elites working closely with religious heads towards common goals, particularly where the former belongs to the mercantile castes of South India. This becomes evident when we consider the evidence from printed works in the first decades of the 20th century, linked to the Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam* of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ.

Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, from the early years of his incumbency, showed a keen interest in bringing forth and publishing unpublished works of the *ātīṉam* as well as to commission new works that would highlight its history in the light of the general historicization of Tamil religion in this period. A historicization that went hand in hand with the need to engage in the public arena through print culture within the context of Dravidian nationalism. Thus, he had himself begin to compose a biography of the founder of the lineage, Āṟumuka Meyññāṉa Civācāriya Cuvāmikaḷ (1672–1769), which eventually came to be incorporated into a full-length biography commissioned by his successor.[7]

He had also searched for, and eventually located at Tiruvāvaṭutuṟai, a manuscript copy of the *Tiruppātirippuliyūr Purāṇam* and had it published in the eighth year of his incumbency.[8] In the early decades of the 20th century, in 1925 to be precise, the *maṭam* brought out a small, beautifully bound and elegantly printed biography, running to no more than a 100 pages, of an elite, locally rooted individual and one of its most prominent benefactors. A detailed look at this biography of Irāmacantirapuram Ti.Nā. Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār (1841–1921) illustrates perfectly how Śaivite religious and charitable philanthropy was brought into being and sustained by the collaboration between local elites and religious heads.

In the *Preface* (*muṉṉurai*) the author speaks about how reading the lives of great men is edificatory and inspiring. He singles out the excellence of Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's devotional service (*tiruttoṇṭiṉ tiṟam*), as one of the virtues one must highlight when setting forth his life story.[9] Also, he confirms that the person who commissioned the writing of this biography was Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ himself.[10] The biography styles itself along the lines of a traditional "sacred" story or any genre, such as the *kāppiyam* (*kāvya*), which aspires to historical narrative, within the Tamil literary genres. Thus it begins with the praise of the geographical region (*nāṭṭuc ciṟappu*), here the Pāṇṭiya country, which includes praise of the kingdom of Pudukkōṭṭai and then hones in on the birthplace of its hero, the small town/village of Irāmacantirapuram in the south of the kingdom, with an enumeration of all the features that make it special – the other great historical personages born there (Iyaṟpakai Nāyaṉār, Paṭṭiṉattār), its sacredness as a *tīrtha* where the river Kāveri mingles with other waters, and its mention in the great *Caṅkam* works such as the *Cilappatikāram* and the *Paṭṭiṉappālai*.[11] In this place the hero is born in a family of traders (*ceṭṭi*) known as the Taṉavaiciyar caste within which he comes from the Vairavaṉkōyil Teyvanaṅkar sub-caste. Even in his early years he shows great mathematical abilities, is a diligent and obedient child with a devout nature.[12]

Two chapters of the text are of particular interest here. The first is Chapter 9, which goes into some detail regarding the economic basis of Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's wealth. The biographer tells us that the wealth of the family came mainly from the cloth trade.

> At this time [ca. 1900], this family predominantly traded in the *lungi* called *kampāyam*,[13] *kāṅku*,[14] *accaṭippuṭavai*,[15] *paṭṭuk kaili*,[16] long cloth (*lāṅ kiḷāṭ*), cotton (*nūl*), etc., in many places within the country and foreign lands such as Burma, Malaya, Bangkok, Siam and Sumatra. This trade was predominantly done with the Muhammadans.[17]

Then, the biography continues, when more people entered the cloth trade the family decided to supplement its income by entering into the business of money lending for interest (*vaṭṭit toḻil*). What we learn about the source of Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's wealth is corroborated by the excellent historical study of Rudner (1994) on caste and capitalism in colonial India. Rudner focuses

on the Nāṭṭukōṭṭai Ceṭṭiyārs, the caste to which our protagonist also belongs, known also as the Nakarattārs, a mercantile caste. He sees their commercial evolution as consisting of three phases. The first, in a "precolonial and undocumented past" leading up to the mid-19th century, saw them moving from being salt traders to becoming a merchant-banking caste in alignment with the entry of the subcontinent into the global imperial economy. Thus, they became involved in commodity trading – dealing with rice, cotton, and the credit markets within the Madras Presidency and also between Madras, Ceylon, and Bengal. The second phase, seen as properly starting in the mid-19th century, saw them following in the wake of the British army as it moved into Burma and Malaya, where they positioned themselves to finance British military operations.[18] The greatest rise in prosperity for the community occurs post-1850, when the provincial governments of Southeast Asia "adopted policies that encouraged rather than restricted Nakarattar investments in indigenous agricultural industries". Seizing the opportunities offered, which made them immensely wealthy, the Nakarattārs, "made a unique and central contribution to the growth of the plantation economy in Ceylon, the emergence of the Burmese rice market, and the development of Malaya's rubber and tin industries".[19] Thus, one can reasonably assume that Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's family, from the facts divulged in the biography, was very much a beneficiary of the advantages his caste group had seized and profitted from as a result of the imperial economy. This, in turn, enabled its high profile as benefactors of Śaivite religious and charitable causes within Tiruppātirippuliyūr and beyond.[20]

Chapter 13, the second chapter of interest to us, is devoted to his charitable and devotional activities. It begins with a reflection on the need for a temple in each home place (*ūr*) and how the maintenance of the temple confers benefits in this life as well as salvation in the next for the benefactor. Particularly recognizing the greatness of Tiruppātirippuliyūr as a place sung about by the poet-saint Appar, Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār pays generously, and the precise sum of 12,50,000 rupees, a truly munificent sum of money for that time, is mentioned as his personal contribution towards the renovation of the temple of Śiva as Pāṭaleśvarar with which the Ñāṉiyār *maṭam* is intimately associated, as well as for several important temple festivals between 1907–1908 and 1917.[21] Ceṭṭiyār's generosity is linked not just to the religiously sanctioned and approved activities of temple renovation but, above and beyond these, to the ethically and morally sanctioned imperative that devolves upon the rich to feed the poor. The biography contains a rapturous account of how his contribution towards the temple festivities included arranging food for the poor pilgrims. Here, in the light of the theme of feeding which informs this entire study, it is interesting to read the exact words which describe the feeding initiative he undertook:

> Thinking thus about the impoverishment (*eḷimai)* that causes [pilgrims] to go about without money for expenses at hand (*kaiporuṭcelaviṉṟi*), to

> all those innumerable people of various kinds who thronged there, ***in accordance with the differences in religion and caste*** (*cāti camaya vēṟupāṭiṟku takkavāṟu*), he everywhere gave food (*aṉṉam parimāṟiṉārkaḷ*), [which included] the four forms of eating known as licking (*nakkal*), drinking (*parukal*), swallowing (*uṇṭal*) and chewing (*tiṉṟal*), and many snacks (*ciṟṟuṇṭi*) that contain the six [tastes] of bitterness, hotness, astringency, sweetness and sourness, such that throughout the city there spread the fragrance of clarified butter.[22]

The account of his feeding extends into a lengthy description of the delighted and appreciative exclamations of those who have enjoyed the gastronomic delights. Ceṭṭiyār's generosity is repeatedly highlighted as one which extends towards others and not only towards himself or his kinsmen. Instead of celebrating his own significant life-cycle rituals with due ceremony, such as his sixtieth birthday, he instead gifts gold ornaments to the Goddess Tōkaiyambikai at her temple in Tiruppātirippuliyūr. For his eightieth birthday again he establishes a feeding house (*aṉṉacattiram*), with a reading room and a bookstore – extending his philanthropy to educational activities. These educational activities include the building of an institution for the study of the Śaivāgamas (*āgamapāṭacālai / āgamapāṭhaśāla*), out of concern that, unlike the Smārtas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Madhvas, those Ādiśaiva Brāhmaṇas who were still capable of reading, explaining, and understanding the Śaivāgamas were steadily shrinking.[23] Rudner has perceptively remarked, "religion and other forms of gifting provided a continuing mechanism by which cooperating groups of Nakarattar traders gained entrance into local communities".[24] There was no compartmentalization between religious/ritual life and business life for the mercantile castes.[25] Rather,

> [T]here was no separation of religion and politics – indeed, in many ways, worship *was* politics. So, too, there was no separation of religion and economics. The Nakarattar caste and other castes of itinerant traders engaged in worship as a way of trade, and they engaged in trade by worshipping the deities of their customers.[26]

In Ceṭṭiyār's own understanding, as the biography convincingly shows, there was no distinction between his charitable feeding and his temple renovation activities. Even more significantly, they both conferred a prestige which had to be guarded territorially and retained. This is clearly illustrated in the recounting of an episode relating to the renovation of the temple pond in Tiruppātirippuliyūr. Another local family with aspirations to social status requested that the care and maintenance of the temple (which had been entrusted to Ceṭṭiyār's family) be separated from that of the pond and offered to take over the maintenance of the latter. Ceṭṭiyār puts paid to these aspirations by firmly stating that all matters pertaining to the care of the temple lies and will continue to lie in the hands of his family.[27]

Rudner's understanding of the deep interpellation of the personal, the religious, the political, and the institutional among the mercantile castes in South Indian society is, I would suggest, a very useful tool for enabling us to understand not just the way in which the majority of Śaiva associations came into existence in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th century but also their all-too ephemeral nature. A great many of these associations – like the Āgama school founded by Ceṭṭiyār or the several other educational initiatives he undertook – relied heavily on the personal financial investment as well as the time, energy, and resources of particular individuals. A further implication is that institutions thus created tended to wax and wane according to the fluctuating fortunes of the "Big-man" himself or his successors. The constant proliferation and improvisatory nature of new Śaiva institutions from the latter half of the 19th century till today – and this applies also to all of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's initiatives – is concomitant with their precarious and unstable existence.

Norman Cutler early on recognized that the life of the literary poet, in as late as the 19th-century Tamil world, was perpetuated and sustained by "an economy of literary creativity, performance, and patronage in which the currency of exchange was material wealth, talent, reputation, learning, and aesthetic experience".[28] He reiterates that aesthetic elements of this system are no less important than the more tangible social and economic elements. Print, I would suggest in this context, becomes a further medium as well as currency of aesthetic exchange. By commissioning and bringing out a biography of Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār, and then having it printed for popular distribution, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ was extending the aesthetic dimensions of exchange between the religious institution and the patron beyond the world of the temple precincts with its traditional honours, the public recitals, and felicitations of the patron through oral speeches and poetry, to the printed word. And, moreover, in a genre which began to proliferate from the late 19th century in the subcontinent, the biography. It is further significant that Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's biography, even while it focuses on his religious and charitable activities and clearly has as its central narrative his munificent contributions to the Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam*, is also concerned with placing him within the context of the colonial moment and his role as an economic player within the imperial economy, historical factors which have a direct bearing on the financial status and continued existence of the religious institution that honours him.

Moreover, Ceṭṭiyār's biography helps us see that it would be a mistake to regard the Śaiva institutions that have been the subject matter of the previous chapter and this one, including older, institutionally stable *ātīṉam*s such as that of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, as functioning in a purely locally restricted, isolated geographical space of their own. Rather, it must be reiterated that they might be characterized as "terrains of exchange"[29] that traversed an urban–rural divide and were embedded in circuits of colonial and global trade networks, where the activities of "Big-men" religious leaders and

patrons in constant exchange with each other occurred. These encounters continued to produce multifarious and heterogeneous discourses on Śaivism in a period when the heterogeneity was constituted by the plurality of discourses proliferating through print even while there was a deep ideological and political investment in arriving at a homogeneity of "core beliefs", the creation of a single "Śaivism", and a standardization of textual authority. This is the tension and paradox we will next see when we turn to Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's religious ideology.

"Under Adigal's Tutelage Even Grass can Enunciate Grammar; and Stone Pour out Poetry".[30]

The biographies of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ are unanimous about his qualities as a teacher and orator even as they point out, repeatedly, that he wrote or published very little precisely because of his dedication to teaching and giving public discourses.

We are hampered in our research on his thoughts by the fact that he himself published very little of his own writings or even displayed any interest in the transcribing of his innumerable discourses for posterity. It was left to his immediate disciples after his demise to collect and print, to the best of their ability, the talks delivered on various public occasions. The only such significant collection is the 1958 "Recollections of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ" (*Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ niṉaivu malar*, henceforth *Recollections*), which contains 26 of his discourses.[31] Even in this case we cannot assume that these discourses are straightforward transcriptions of speeches Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ gave and, indeed, the *Preface* to the volume explicitly cautions us against making this assumption. In it, Nal Murukēca Mutaliyār, head of the *Caiva Cittānta Peṟumaṉṟam*, who published the speeches, states that, even though the examples given and the phrasing of the texts are Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's, these have been strung together by the disciples on the basis of an overall understanding of what he spoke or meant to say.[32] Inasmuch as his own words have not been marked off by quotation marks in the volume, we will have to take the view that the essays under consideration give us a strong and faithful impression rather than a verbatim reflection of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's thoughts and views on Śaivism. In examining the essays we can broadly classify them into three categories, purely for heuristic purposes: the Devotional, the Doctrinal, and the Ethical Talks. The Devotional Talks aim at elucidating the significance of certain revered deities and figures to an audience which would be deeply familiar with the basic, popular aspects of Tamil Vīraśaiva/Śaivasiddhānta religion. Within this category fall the majority of the talks, which are on individual deities (on Vināyaka, Nantitēvar, Śiva, Murukaṉ, Naṭarāja, Kāmāṭci, Mīnātci, Vaḷḷi, to name a few).

The second category of what I cautiously call the Doctrinal Talks seems to be for gatherings, where Śaivism, in its form as Śaivasiddhānta, has to be elucidated doctrinally and where Ñāṉiyār's own role is to be a public

torchbearer for the religious system. Two of his talks which I discuss – one a keynote address given in 1937 at the annual gathering of the *Caiva Cittānta Makā Camācam* and a second from the same year about Meykaṇṭār – fall into this second category. A third category is the most diffuse – aiming at a "Tamil" audience in order to speak about Śaivism in order to speak broadly and generally about Tamil religion and ethics. A talk he gave on 1st October 1934 to a gathering in Chennai and a second one to a Tamil Youth Association at an unknown date falls into this third category of those I call the Ethical Talks. Though the boundary between these categories of talks is not a clear-cut one we might, nevertheless, reasonably employ them as analytical classifications to detect the comprehensiveness of his Śaiva world view which, in turn, helps us to think through how a "traditional" Śaiva religious head might contribute to the construction of Modern Śaivism.

The Devotional Talks

I consider, in this section, one poetic composition and four talks of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ which reflect his outreach to a specifically Vīraśaiva/Saiddhāntika Śaiva audience. The first, the "Praise of the Guru" (*Kurututi/Gurustuti*), a poetic composition of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ which prefaces the essay collection, is clearly an intramural work. Dedicated to the 17th century-founder of his lineage – Āṟumuka Meyññāṉa Civācāriya Cuvāmikaḷ[33] – and originally of unknown length, the extant 49 verses of this poem were first published in the journal *Cittāntam* and then reproduced in this volume. This poetic composition's significance would be most appreciated by only the Vīraśaiva families and community closely attached to the *ātīṉam* and having Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ as their family guru. In composing the work, at a time of personal distress we are told, when he needed the grace of the founder-guru, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ was also fulfilling one of his primary duties as the present incumbent of *his ātīṉam*, which is to keep the historical memory of the lineage alive and to do his part in paying allegiance to his predecessors, who constituted his lineage, the *guruparamparā*. The poem praises the first guru in standard tropes – as the one who grants illuminating knowledge to the poet who is sunk in *āṇava mala* (verse 2), as someone whose grace is one's very food and sustenance (verse 23), whose feet are the lamp one must worship (verse 31), whose form is necessary for knowledge of Śiva and lasting bliss (verse 36), etc. In composing the poem Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, therefore, is also placing his Śaivism within a long lineage of similar Tamil Śaiva literature, part of the genre of the Tamil devotional poem to the guru, which goes back to at least the 12th century, traversing Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sectarian divides.[34]

The four talks, which I now consider as a group due to their thematic similarity, are about Śaivite deities – specifically Vināyaka and Murukaṉ. Ñāṉiyar's own *ātīṉam* falls into the category of institutions in which equal importance was given, from its founding, to the worship of both Murukaṉ and Śiva. We see this already in the literary output of the founder Ārumuka Cuvāmikaḷ,

who composed two *pirapantam*s, the *Caṇmukar ulā* and the *Caṇmukar akaval*, dedicated to the former. Ñāṉiyār maintained this tradition of worship and we have three talks in the *Recollections* dedicated to Murukaṉ.

The very first discourse on *The Splendour of Vināyaka* (*Vināyakarp pirapāvam*) was delivered on 22nd June 1939 on the occasion of the Brahmotsava festival in honour of Śiva as Cuntarēcuvarar at the temple town of Kōvūr.[35] The discourse begins with a discussion of the traditional Sanskrit etymologies for the name of the God. Thus, Vināyaka is explained as derived from *vi+nāyaka* (the one without a Lord), inasmuch as he himself is the sovereign Lord of all others. Then, the significance of his iconography – the Elephant God holds a noose and a hook in his hand – is discussed. The soteriological import of these is explained – these are usually held by the mahout of an elephant but, here, the Elephant God is himself a mahout guiding souls, which are like elephants, on their difficult path out of transmigration. The identification of Vināyaka with the syllable Om, the *praṇava* is discussed and, hence, his identification with the Absolute Brahman. The musth liquid running down the Elephant God's temples are understood to signify the liquids of compassion (*karuṇai*) relating to both good conduct (*aṟam*) and valour (*maṟam*). His nature of being an exemplary son to his divine parents, Śiva and Pārvatī, is stressed. His capacity to remove the afflictions of *karma mala*, *āṇava mala*, and *māya* are mentioned. The discourse concludes with advice on the offerings that are appropriate to make to the god for worship and an exhortation to worship him on a daily basis. The three other talks are titled *Murukaṉ*, *the Subtle One* (*Murukaṉ nuṇmāṇ*), *The Hand of Protection that Points to His Five (divine) Functions* (*Aintoḻil kuṟikkum apayattirukkaram*), and *The Greatness of Murukaṉ* (*Murukaṉ perumai*) and they all follow the same format. Clearly, in these kinds of talks, delivered on the occasion of temple festivals or simply as part of the devotional curriculum in his own *maṭha*, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ followed a simple formula. The meaning of the name of the deity in question is discussed extensively using traditional etymologies. Then, we have a section on his iconography and, in reflecting on the significance of the iconography, its allegorical meaning is fully elucidated. The talk then ends with an exhortation to worship the deity in order to reap the rewards he confers on those devoted to him. Nevertheless, it would be highly misleading to assume that the simplicity of the format of these talks is supported by a paucity of learning. From a distance of almost a century we do not have any access to or an account of the literature that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ imbibed in the course of his own studies, let alone the material evidence of his scholastic library. Yet, a survey of only these four talks and the wealth of quotations in them carefully preserved by his faithful students and transcribers shows the range of the works that might be considered to form the literary canon of a Śaivite savant in the early part of the 20th century.

First, there is the seamless movement and flow between Sanskrit and Tamil religious texts, but the overall orientation is specific inasmuch as we are looking at the foregrounding of a *bhakti* discourse and, hence, texts

which enable one to construct such a discourse. The Sanskrit texts, therefore, establish the orthodoxy, the Vedāntic basis of Śaiva *bhakti*. The specific citations are from late Upaniṣads like the *Gaṇapati Upaniṣad*, which is utilized specifically to identify the god with Brahman as well as the *praṇava*. Well-known hymns, such as the *Ganeśa Pañcaratna Stotra* attributed to Ādi Śankara, reinforce this Vedāntic layer, as do citations from the *Bhagavadgītā* or from the Sanskrit *Skanda Purāṇa* in the Murukaṉ talks. There is sparse mention of the Śaiva āgamas with the significant exception of the *Vātulāgama*, of particular importance to the history of the Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam*.[36] The Tamil citations, in contrast, are far more numerous and outweigh the Sanskrit ones. They place the god within the vernacular landscape, lovingly dwelling on his specific features and his virtues. Here, the citations, in terms of a relative historical chronology of the texts from the earliest to the latest, are from the following works: *Mūttappiḷḷaiyār Tirumummaṇikkōvai* of Atirāvaṭikaḷ, the *Tiruviraṭṭaimaṇimālai* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, the *Tiruvempāvai* of Māṇikkavācakar, the *Mūttanāyaṉār iraṭṭaimaṇimālai* of Kapilatēva Nāyaṉār, *Tirunaraiyūr Vināyakar iraṭṭaimaṇimālai* of Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi, *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* of Parañcōti Muṉivar (ca. 17th century), the *Amutāmpikai piḷḷaittamiḻkkāppu* and the *Centil nirōṭṭaka yamakavantāti* of Civañāṉamuṉivar (18th century), and the *Tiruttaṇikai Purāṇam* of Kacciyappa Muṉivar (18th century). When we turn to the three talks on Murukaṉ and parse them for their citations, we find the following plethora of Śaivite texts, again listed here in chronological order: the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Tēvāram*, and *Tiruvācakam* (7th–9th centuries), *Orupā orupaḵtu* of Paṭṭiṇattuppiḷḷaiyār, *Civañāṉapōtam* of Meykaṇṭār, *Civañāṉacittiyār* of Aruḷnanti Civācāriyār, *Civappirakācam* and *Tiruvaruṭpayaṉ* of Umāpati Civācāriyār (ca. 14th century), *Kantapurāṇam* of Kacciyappa Civācāriyār (ca. 14–15th century), *Kantar alaṃkāram* of Aruṇakirinātar (ca. 15th century), *Kantar kaliveṇpā* of Kumarakuruparar (ca. 17th century), *Kumāratantiram* (dating unclear), *Pōrūr piḷḷaittamiḻ* of Citamparam Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. 17th century), *Cittāntacikāmaṇi/Siddhāntaś ikhāmaṇi* of Turaimaṅkaḷam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. 17th century), and, finally, the *Āṟeḻuttuvalaṃkāram*, *Mayil alaṃkāram*, *Kuruparamālai*, and *Veṇpāmālai* of Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ (19th century).[37] Scrolling down this list shows us that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ brought to bear a wealth of textual learning to his talks. For the devout Śaiva audience listening to him on auspicious and festive religious occasions, the aesthetic pleasure of hearing for the first time, or hearing anew, citations from works composed by those who were themselves regarded as great Śaiva devotees, would contextualize and bring to vivid immediacy the Śaiva devotional canon, as Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ saw it.

The Doctrinal Talks

Sometime between 29th and 31st December 1937 Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ gave the keynote talk at the thirty-second anniversary of the founding of the

Caiva Cittānta Makā Camājam (in English known as SSMS), held in Vellore. The organization is commonly known to have been founded by reformist Śaiva figures such as J.N. Nallaswami Pillai and Maraimalai Aṭikaḷ to print, publicize, and educate the general Tamil public on the doctrines of the Śaivasiddhānta and its significance as the authentic religion of the Tamils in general. It has been recognized that the organization had always enjoyed close ties with the Śaivasiddhānta *maṭha*s, a fact merely reinforced, as Klöber points out by the honouring of it with the title "The Abode of the Light of the Siddhānta" (*Cittānta Cuṭar Nilayam*) by the Tiruvāvaṭuturai *ātīnam* at the centenary of its founding.[38] In terms of public memory almost all the credit for the formation and success of the organization has gone to Maraimalai Aṭikaḷ. Nevertheless, the biographers of Ñāniyār Aṭikaḷ have assiduously sought to correct this perception, emphasizing that though Maraimalai Adigal was very much an enthusiastic party to its formation, it was Ñāniyār Aṭikaḷ who was the prime mover behind its origins. They tell us that it was explicitly founded in order to bring the knowledge of the doctrines of the Śaivasiddhānta to an urban, specifically Madras audience, who needed to be educated regarding it and that the organization was founded by him at an inaugural function on the premises of his own *maṭha*.[39] In his talk at Vellore, Ñāniyār Aṭikaḷ begins with recollections of his close association with the SSMS and the fact that he had already given the keynote talk at the 1913 annual meeting of the organization.[40] He states that he and the audience are both present to talk about the Śaivasiddhānta. The structure of the talk is carefully built up with an initial section on the ontological realities of the system. He begins with the Highest Reality, which is Śiva.

> My dear Friends, we must know that one thing which is full of intelligence andbliss. That itself is Auspiciousness (*civam*) . . . . The connection with the Auspiciousness is *Caivam* [the religion]. Lord Śiva is that substance that is always there as eternal, as omniscient and as omnipotent. Caivacittāntam has always existed. We need not assume that it originated only when it was made apparent by some people.[41]

Ñāñiyār Aṭikaḷ establishes the doctrinal verities of this knowledge of Śiva by quoting, successively, the *Civañāṉapōtam*, the *Civañāṉacittiyār*, and the *Civappirakācam*, calling them the first (*mutal*), the mimetic (*vaḻi*), and the consolidating (*cārpu*) texts, respectively, of the tradition.[42] He then goes on to discuss how the Siddhānta is the culmination of the Upaniṣads or the Vedānta. "The *Cittāntam* is the clarification of the *Vetāntam*. Both *Vetāntam* and *Cittāntam* are one; They are not different".[43] Saying this, Ñāniyār Aṭikal substantiates this with a verse from the *Civappirakācam* of Umāpati Śivācārya. The Śaivasiddhānta, he further adds, contains within it the conclusions of all religions. It contains within its doctrines the 36 substances (*tattva*s). Just as it contains all these possible substances all religions are contained within it, and it is the Vaidika Śaivism. He then goes on to talk about the real

meaning of non-dualism, as it is explicated in the Śaivasiddhānta and concludes the talk with the following summary:

> Beloved Friends! We saw the following: that the extraneous objects that we see are inferior, their nature is to decay; that there is a higher thing beyond all these; that we need to investigate that and, after investigation, obtain it; that it is by lamenting that we can obtain it; that when there is that lament, with love as its result, the rising flood within one will emerge clearly and the Supreme Thing, which is that eternal Auspiciousness (*civam*) that does not come before, will appear; that *Caivacittāntam* is obtained through the graciousness of the scriptures, the teacher and God and all other religions are incorporated within it.[44]

The second talk I allude to is one for which we have little details, except that he delivered it in 1937. It is a hagiographic account of the figure to whom the first canonical work of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, the *Civañāṉapōtam*, is attributed, known simply by his honorific "He who saw the Truth" (Meykaṇṭār). The hagiographical literature on Meykaṇṭār has a long history in the Śiddhānta, beginning with Aruṇanti Civācāriyār's short poem of 30 verses in the *viruttam* metre, the *Irupā Irupaḵtu*. In it Aruṇanti equates Meykaṇṭār to Śiva himself, in that he is capable of ridding his devotees of the affliction of *āṇava* mala. It is keeping this hagiographical literature in mind that we must look at Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's talk, which begins with Meykaṇṭār's divine credentials, where the latter receives instruction from Nandi, Śiva's divine bull, and through that instruction composes the *Civañāṉapōtam*.[45] He then quotes *the Irupā Irupaḵtu*'s initial laudatory verses to reinforce Meykaṇṭār's status as a guru and his basic teaching that the entire embodied world is ultimately false and that its falsity must be realized through true knowledge. He cites familiar hagiographical tropes in talking about how the infant named as Cuvētavaṉap Perumāḷ at birth, while visiting Tiruveṇṇainallūr, is given divine knowledge by Parañcōti Muṉivar (= Ciruttoṇṭar, a Śaiva saint of the 7th century) and renamed Meykaṇṭār. He explains that the work composed by Meykaṇṭār is one which teaches us about the experiential knowledge (*anupūti ñāṉam*), which comes from divine grace, the non-Supreme knowledge (*apara ñāṉam*), which is acquired through an investigation of texts and is the source of knowledge of the Supreme (*para ñāṉam*). He quotes a verse from the *Tirumantiram* to show that the *Civañāṉapōtam* teaches the final or ultimate teaching of the Vedānta, which is the Siddhānta. There follows a long section on the structure of the *Civañāṉapōtam*, which emerges from its basic division into the general or natural (*potu*) and that which is specific and real (*uṇmai*).[46] He goes on to explain that the Śaiva *āgama*s tend to appear to be contradictory, giving us seemingly different information about the ontological realities of the tradition. The *Civañāṉapōtam* was composed, he affirms, to resolve all these contradictions and to present a

unified system of the tradition. The final section of the talk dwells on the Vedāntic position that the Śaivasiddhānta adopts regarding the relationship of God and the souls. He explains that this is technically called "Pure Non-Dualism" *Cuttāttuvitam* (*Śuddhādvaita*) and that it is the one correct approach to describing the divine–human relationship.[47] Then in simple and elegant language, with the use of traditional analogies and through explaining the Sanskrit terminology he uses as he goes along, he gives a definition of *Cuttāttuvitam*:

> Like this, when there is the union of the two different things that are God and the Soul, they achieve the status of not becoming one and not remaining two. This is the non-dualism that Meykaṇṭār speaks about.[48]

The Ethical Talks

The first talk I reference to is one that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ gave on 1st October 1934 in Madras, though the audience or the occasion is not clear to us. He begins, uncompromisingly, by stating that each of us should endeavour to not be born again and be rid of birth and rebirth. Birth is nothing but a source of sorrow (*tukkam/duḥkha*). The sorrow, in turn, is the product of ignorance (*aññāṉam/ajñāna*). Once ignorance is destroyed, then rebirth is also severed. The true feeling (*mey uṇarvu*) comes about through seeing that Excellent Thing (*cemporuḷ*) that is the cause of salvation (*vīṭu*). He then speaks about the three things that exist – the world (*ulakam*), life/living being (*uyir*), and God (*kaṭavuḷ*). He describes the essential characteristics of each of these and points out that severing birth is not something that living beings can achieve on their own but which God has to accomplish for them.[49] In this world, he says, we inhabit two homes. One is the home of the body composed of the substances (*tātu/dhātu*). The other is the physical house we live in. In both of these we experience many difficulties and discomfort. The house that is worth living in is the one which is beyond birth. "Home is that given to us by God, through that true feeling that knows God".[50] Knowing and obtaining God, the talk continues, is difficult. There are some who are able to have a vision of him, but this is entirely because he has, through his graciousness, made this possible. There are, of course, many paths to him. One sure path is the association with good people who are further along on such a path. They will point one the way and accompany one on the road towards obtaining God's graciousness. The path to God, in turn, moves through the four goals of life known as the *puruṣārtha*s, which are right conduct (*aṟam*), acquisition of prosperity (*poruḷ*), pleasure (*iṉpam*), and salvation (*vīṭu*). In speaking of how one is to conduct oneself while moving through the goals of life, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ speaks of the vows (*viratam/vrata*) that one must undertake. He notes that people think that vows are rituals of abstinence such as fasting that one undertakes on certain religious occasions but that this is the wrong understanding of vows.

He cites the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*'s Chapters 25–33 as teaching us what real vows are. Chapter 25 of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* is titled *Having Graciousness* (*aruḷ uṭaimai*) while Chapter 33 deals with Non-Killing (*kollāmai*). The passage that follows, that summarizes what he sees as the content of these eight chapters, lays out an ethical template for anyone who wishes to attain salvation.

> It is to become tender emotionally (*maṉaṅkoṇṭu iḷakal*), wishing to put an end to the suffering that befalls others. Only those who are gracious like this will not desire other's status. They will be of the view that they must protect (*ōmputal*) others; possess the austerity to endure all the afflictions that affect their life; completely negate all behaviour that comes in the way of their austerities; not, enviously, desire to have the possessions of others; completely get rid of lying; abandon the irritation (*vekuḷi*) that occurs when there is lying; not get angry even when there are causes for anger in others; cease from anger and put away the means of getting rid of anger as this will cause pain to others and undertake non-killing as the best of righteous behaviour. Only those people who take these vows have attained the purity of the instruments and are worthy of obtaining knowledge. Knowledge is obtained through the path of ridding oneself of ignorance. Obtaining it through the scriptures (*vētākamaṅkaḷ*) is one way; obtaining it through experience (*anupava*) is another way. Knowledge alone is the cause of salvation.[51]

In the second half of the talk Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ talks about how one must understand the real nature of the world and God in order to begin to cultivate the right knowledge for salvation and speaks of the different soteriological practices in the Śaivasiddhānta for souls at different stages of maturity. He points out that one immensely efficacious salvific device is the recitation of the five-syllabled mantra *Namaḥ Śivāya*. He adds that one cannot practice this mantra without initiation into it by a Śaivite guru and that those who are not yet initiated must, instead, read the Śaiva Purāṇas.[52] The talk then concludes, in the final section with how, when one has finally cultivated all these good qualities, there is the birth of the right knowledge. This, in turn, will lead Śiva to attract the soul to himself like a magnet attracts iron filings and will lead him to absorb the soul, out of his own love, into himself.

The last and broadest of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's talks that I deal with in this sub-section was delivered to an association of Tamil youth (*Tamil Iḷañar Maṉṟam*) at a place which is not specified but near Tiruvānaikkāval, in the Thiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu. He was invited to give this talk by one Mu. Naṭēca Mutaliyār.[53] The talk, like the discourses which I have referenced earlier, is peppered with a number of quotations from Śaivite texts as well as the one work which had come to be seen as the Tamil monument to a secular ethics in modernity, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*. But unlike in the case of the

talks aimed specifically at a Śaiva devotional audience, here Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's talk, even while it is still firmly rooted in a Śaivite universe, aims at elucidating the virtues necessary for any virtuous human life. Wishing to tailor his talk towards young people, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ cleverly links this desire with his own religious affiliation. Murukaṉ, the eternal divine youth, resides permanently in his heart, he says, making young people his, that is, Ñāṉiyār's, friends, and enabling him to talk to them about the path forward which we need in life, as shown by Murukaṉ. The talk is structured to move from the general to the particular, from one's place in the world as a human to one's place in society as a young person. Hence, it begins with a praise of human birth and of how embodiment on earth is even desired by the gods who come and dwell here, in sacred spaces. Human birth and a human body is a rare privilege, and one must value the body by cultivating fourfold qualities. These are devotion to God (*kaṭavuḷ pakti*), detachment with regard to the bounds [of transmigration] (*pācavairākkiyam/pāśavairāgya*), knowledge of God (*īcuvarañāṉam/īśvarajñāna*), and finally, compassion towards all living beings (*cīvakāruṇyam/jīvakāruṇya*).[54] From this general section on the virtues one needs in life, the talk moves to how one must conduct oneself as a being rooted in society. Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ begins with the family – there is a long section on love of the mother and then love for one's father. Here, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ foregrounds the *Rāmāyaṇa*, not the Vālmīki version but the Kampaṉ one, where the *Rāmāyaṇa* becomes the paradigm of reference for domestic life.[55] He references the episode where Rāma goes into exile because he is requested to do so by his father. But the person who conveys this news to him is Kaikeyī, and he makes it clear to her that he will obey not just because his father wishes it but because she does too. Rāma is the exemplary son because he recognizes the divinity within his parents. Parents are the divinites available to one's sense perception (*piratyaṭca teyvaṅkaḷ/pratyakṣa devatāḥ*) as opposed to God who is beyond the senses. God is available to only poet-saints such as Tiruñāṉacampantar who sees him with the eye of knowledge. But the mother – and the father by extension – are the divinities to be beheld in one's own household.[56] The other figure who is held up as the exemplary son is the Elephant God, known indeed in Tamil as "Honorable Son" (*piḷḷaiyār*). The discourse expands to speak of the love for one's sibling, holding up Lakṣmaṇa as the ideal brother who went into exile to take care of Rāma. Secure in these stabilizing and loving relationships Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ suggests we can turn towards cultivating those additional qualities which are indispensable for succeeding in life. These include the companionship of those who are older not just in age but in intelligence, to accept all others who are virtuous and to not rest in complacency with regard to one's own good qualities, to pay reverence regularly to one's guru, to continually learn and educate oneself, to be faithful and loving to one's wife, to exercise self-control over one's powers, to love God, and to avoid the company of bad people.

A major theme towards the end of the talk is education. There is the vital need to educate oneself by studying texts of excellence.

> Learning (*kalvi*) is a big tree. Questions are its branches, penance (*tavam*) its sprout. Love (*aṉpu*) its bud and dharma the flower. The pleasure enjoyed is its fruit. The fruit that is pleasure is brought forth from the flower of dharma. From the bud of love the flower of dharma blooms. From the questions that are the branches the love that is the bud comes forth. The question that is the branch begins from the great tree that is learning.[57]

This is followed by the significance of learning Tamil. Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ exhorts the youthful audience to prioritize learning Tamil before they learn other languages, though he concedes the necessity of also learning the other languages of the land. But, he says, it is Tamil, which is the mother tongue, which has a tradition of great literature, and which should be learnt first. Women's education is emphasized. Learning slowly, understanding what one has learnt before moving on to something new, he says, is the right way to learn. The next section of the talk picks up on the theme of dharma and right conduct. It is here that we see Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's most general statements about an ethical way of living. All action that is motivated by love is, by that very fact, dharmic. This includes complete abstinence of violence and enduring the violence others inflict on us. This is the real penance. The talk concludes with the theme of devotion towards one's guru as well as the need to be grounded in one's own religious tradition (*camayam*). He underscores that if one is a Śaivite, wearing the sacred ash as a sign of one's allegiance to one's tradition is indispensable as is a firm belief in the existence of God. We can read this last section as his response to the rise of the Dravidian Self-Respect Movement and the threat that it posed, through its critique of religion, to the ritual emblems of religion. Indeed, the entire talk might be seen as a response to this general threat in its skilful braiding together of the relationship between Śaivite devotionalism, Tamil patriotism, and the ethical life into one seamless whole.

Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's Śaivism

The biographies of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ repeatedly talk of his elocutionary skills and the effect his talks had on his listeners. Moreover, they suggest that the simplicity of diction and the clarity of his presentation were pedagogically so effective that even the insentient, as my initial quote shows, could be taught by him. That this hagiographical hyperbole had a kernel of truth in it is independently corroborated by another great Tamil orator who was a contemporary of his – Tiru.Vi. Kalyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār, or Tiru.Vi.Ka as he was most commonly known. Speaking of the impressions that flitted

through his mind as he heard Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ speak Tiru.Vi.Ka in his memoir, "Life Notes" (*Vāḻkkai kuṟippukaḷ*) wrote:

> When Ñāṉiyār Cuvāmikaḷ taught his students or gave public discourses there are many who became *pulavar*s through merely hearing, again and again, his explication of the intricate subtleties of literature, grammar and the *śāstra*s, through his regular transformation by turns into Tolkāppiyaṉār, Nakkīrar, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ, Kacciyappar, Kampar, Cēkkiḻār, Viyāsar, Nīlakaṇṭar, Civañāṉa Muṉivar and others.[58]

He came to the conclusion that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ possessed a rare, natural erudition (*iyaṟkaip pulamai*) that was above and beyond his great scholarship in both Tamil and Sanskrit.[59] It is clear that Tiru.Vi.Ka must have heard Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ speak several times, for the list of scholars that he says Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ literally incarnated in his discourses coincides with the authorial citations one can locate from his discourses and compositions now available to us. Nevertheless, when we read the *Reflections* or his talk to the Tamil Youth Association, his eloquence and charisma is only dimly transmitted. We can merely conjecture as to the appeal the talks had for his listeners because of the timbre of his voice, the magnetism of his presence, or the persuasiveness of his demeanour.

The talks make evident that Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's religious authority does not rest on his own intuition but on his transmission of what he sees as this historical tradition, without disjuncture. In other words, citational practice here is not based on mere nostalgia for a lost past but, instead, a past that is anchored seamlessly in the present. At the same time, placing the citations synchronically also decontextualizes them and makes them part of a transhistorical present which is the present of Tamil Śaivism today, in the 1930s of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ.

Ultimately, we do get a clear sense of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's Śaivism and how he wished to convey its core four features. First, it is a Śaivism whose linguistic register comprises both Tamil and Sanskrit – a kind of translinguistic practice emerging out of several centuries of usage which cannot be understood as acts of "translation" between the two languages, if we are to understand an act of translation as presupposing the persistent usage of a hypothetical dictionary whose basic premise, like that of all dictionaries, is that languages are synonymous. Rather, in this Tamil Śaivism Tamil and Sanskrit – at the linguistic, textual, and doctrinal levels – are part of the same thesaurus, in complete co-equivalence, used, as needed, to express a particular idea or doctrine most fittingly. It is this almost naturalized relationship of Tamil and Sanskrit which comes to be questioned, ideologically challenged, and broken through Dravidian nationalism. Yet, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ continues to hold on to its core features, thereby showing the simultaneous and yet differentiated braiding of Tamil and Śaivism in the perspective of different stakeholders in modernity. Second, at the

core of this Śaivism is *bhakti* and a *bhakti* grounded in a purāṇic textual tradition. It encourages daily ritual and devotion to the high purāṇic Gods of Śiva and Murukaṉ and their spouses, highlighting their iconographical features and divine deeds to illustrate why such devotion is appropriate and necessary and why it might enable one to cultivate the right qualities for the good life. The tales of the gods are drawn from the beloved vernacular Purāṇas such as *Kanta Purāṇam* or the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* and through familiar language and motifs they instantiate the gods within the local landscape, celebrate the "localization of the divine presence"[60] that is brought into being by the Tamil purāṇas and the working of this presence within one's everyday life. It is significant that, by the early 20th century, someone like Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ felt confident about reaffirming that it is the purāṇic tales that constitute the main pillars of Tamil devotion, in the light of their systematic denigration as false mythology depicting the licentious behaviour of the gods, in sustained Christian missionary critique in the colonial context.[61] Rather, in its reliance on the Tamil purāṇas his Śaivism ascribes a central role to narrative literature to elucidate and configure moral life. Emanating from this purāṇic layer, the daily rituals of a Śaivite devotee are to centre around the recitation of the five-syllabled mantra, *Namaḥ Śivāya* if he or she is initiated or, if not, through the recitation of various Śaivite devotional poetic compositions from those as early as the *Tirumuṟai* to those as late as those of the Vīraśaiva ascetic Taṇṭapāṇi Cuvāmikaḷ from the 19th century.

Third, there is a consistent thread of didacticism, stressing ethical behaviour, which runs through all the talks. The concept which features most prominently in elucidating ethics is *aṟam*, which is the Tamil equivalent of *dharma*, a word which Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ also uses. We see a hierarchization of ethics – the cultivation of virtue is differentiated, depending both on social status and one's stage in life. The gods embody certain virtues applicable to everyone – Vināyaka thus shows us how to be both virtuous and valorous but, most importantly, how to be a loving and obedient child. For the person who is a social being, embedded within a household the guidelines are clear: to cultivate learning (*kalvi*), which undergirds intelligence (*aṟivu*) and is the tree from which the flower of right conduct blooms; to keep good company; to follow, in the order given, the fourfold goals of life which are good conduct (*aṟam*), creating wealth (*poruḷ*), pleasure (*iṉpam*), and salvation (*vīṭu*); and to obey and love, in that ascending order, mother, father, the guru, and God – where guru approximates the most to God. Even within this framework those with a higher social status would be able to represent their virtue on a larger scale in the theatre of Tamil Śaiva life. Thus, as Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's biography shows, Śaiva virtue here translates into munificent acts of giving for the restoration of temples, maintenance of *maṭha* buildings, and supporting the *ātīṉam*'s annual festivals. As the historian Rāj Kautamaṉ has eloquently pointed out this is an ethical framework for the Tamil person which, in its broadest features, has a long textual

genealogy from the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* to the *bhakti* literature to the late didactic texts (*nītinūlkaḷ*).[62] But, there is a second level of hierarchy that applies to the householder, on the one hand, and the ascetic, or the householder, who aspires to ascetic status, on the other, when it comes to salvation. It is clear that in setting up this distinction Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ is explicitly relying on the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, which had emerged as the fundamental ethical handbook of Tamil religion prior to but even more so within colonial discourse.[63] One of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's ethical talks relies on the understanding of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*'s structure as laid down in the traditional commentaries on it, particularly that of Parimēlaḻakar. In Parimēlaḻakar's framing of the first section of the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, the *Aṟattuppāl*, a caesura is created between the first 24 chapters, which are understood to be concerned with the conduct for the householder, *Illaṟa iyal*, and the next 13 chapters, which are considered to refer to the proper conduct for the ascetic, *Tuṟavaṟa iyal*. The virtues highlighted in this latter section are referred to by Parimēlaḻakar explicitly as religious vows or *viratañkaḷ* (*vrata*s) undertaken by those who desire salvation (*vīṭu*) and have decided to follow the path of asceticism (*tuṟavaṟam*).[64] Following these virtues, which are vows, Parimēlaḻakar says, will lead to salvific knowledge (*ñāṉam*). In Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's talk from 1st October 1934, we see this identical understanding of the relevant chapters on asceticism with the additional caveat that the knowledge which arises from keeping these vows is placed within the Śaiva devotional framework – the birth of such knowledge is a precondition for Śiva's spontaneous grace, which comes not from human wish but from divine love, which will then absorb the soul into salvation. What we see in Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ is not so much the universalization of dharma, which we saw in Ramalingar's *The Conduct* but rather a context- and situation-specific ethics made eligible now to a larger public, allowing for a certain ambiguity of reception. Finally, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's reliance on the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* places him firmly within the Tamil Vīraśaiva ethical framework, already familiar to us from the Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ's commentary on the *Vairākkiyatīpam*, which was discussed in Chapter 3.

In Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's vision, the practice of virtue in everyday life, though held to high standards, still takes place within the hierarchical caste order. Nowhere is this more clear than in the account we have of Nācciyappa Ceṭṭiyār's feeding activities. The description of Ceṭṭiyār's feeding of pilgrims in the annual festivals associated with the *ātuṉam* approvingly speaks of how this feeding was done "in accordance with the differences in religion and caste", as I have cited earlier. We can assume that different food arrangements were made for different castes of Śaivas and that the places of eating were also separate. This was a world view which clearly remained a part of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's Śaivism. Further, the talks make a careful distinction between the general virtues available to anyone and the higher virtues that can be pursued only by those serious about salvation, as the distinction between the virtues necessary for the householder and those for the ascetic shows. Nevertheless, there is also a move towards a more universal ethics,

and this sits side by side with the older notions of *aṟam*. This becomes apparent in his discussion of that key concept of *cīvakāruṇyam*.

> Just as butter that nears fire, without thinking that it is melting melts, so one's heart should melt on seeing the suffering of others. Without compassion towards all living beings there is no value in things such as contemplation (*tiyāṉam/dhyāna*), devotion (*pakti/bhakti*) or intelligence (*aṟivu*).[65]

It is undoubtedly the case that the emphasis on *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ is the direct result of several factors: the significance of this term within Tamil Vīraśaiva works like the commentary of Tiruppōrūr Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ (17th–18th century) on the *Vairākkiyatīpam* of Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ (ca. 17th century), whose works form part of the canon of Tamil Vīraśaivism; Ramalingar's own electrifying writings on the subject; Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's undoubted familiarity with him due to the Tamil Vīraśaiva disciples of both men like Kantacāmippiḷḷai; and the gradual apotheosis of Ramalingar within Śaivite, nationalist circles in the first half of the 20th century. His oscillation in his talks between a relative and a universal Śaiva ethics reflects the real challenges faced by religious figures such as himself when confronted by the demands of the Self-Respect Movement and Tamil modernity.

Further, and finally, this Śaivism is the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. Linguistically and in terms of doctrinal import, this Śaivism makes no demarcation between the Sanskrit scripture of the Śaivasiddhānta, the Upaniṣads considered as authoritative, and the *Śaivāgama*s, on the one hand, and the Tamil canonical texts on the other. They form a seamless whole for, at a doctrinal level, the Śaivasiddhānta, he explicitly reminds us, is nothing but an elucidation of the Upaniṣads or the Vedānta, they are both one and it is in this sense that the Śaivasiddhānta is Vaidika Śaivism.[66] This Tamil Śaivism is, furthermore, trans-sectarian inasmuch as it ignores or renders irrelevant Vedāntic boundaries in favour of a unified field of Tamil Śaiva bhakti. This becomes particularly clear when we consider the genealogy of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's doctrinal position as a Vīraśaiva himself towards a purportedly doctrinally opposed school, that of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta.

The Trans-Sectarian Śaiva Consensus

By the 18th century, two different perspectives had emerged within the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta on the relationship of Brahman, defined as Śiva, to the world. Both perspectives took as their point of reference a certain understanding of Śivādvaita Vedānta in order to inflect their own Vedāntic positions in relation to it. Here, we must keep in mind the genealogy of Śivādvaita Vedānta as it emerged from the *Śrīkaṇṭhabhāṣya* and then comes to be further reworked through a strong monistic bent in the Vīraśaiva Vedāntic works,[67] on the one hand, and in the writings of Appaya Dīkṣita,

on the other, as Duquette (2015), McCrea (2014), and Fisher (2017) have recently demonstrated.[68] The older perspective, which adhered to a strict Tamil Saiddhāntika position, is exemplified in Umāpati Civācāriyār's *Civappirakācam*, which is his interpretation of Meykaṇṭār's *Civañāṉapōtam*. In this, Umāpati remains non-committal on Śrīkaṇṭha's view that Śiva is both the material (*upādāna*) and efficient (*nimitta*) cause of the universe, even though it would appear to contradict the hitherto Saiddhāntika position, exemplified in his own reading in the *Civañāṉapōtam* that Śiva is only the efficient cause of the universe. Instead, Umāpati interestingly indicates that Śivādvaita is very close to the Siddhānta – so much so that "the distinction between the two is only terminological not conceptual".[69] In contrast to this guarded rapprochement with Śivādvaita we have the unqualified endorsement of it in *Śivāgrayogī*'s commentary on the Sanskrit *Śivajñānabodham*, the *Bṛhadbhāṣya/Śivāgrabhāṣya*, where he is in complete agreement with the view that Śiva is both the efficient and material cause of the world. Indeed, in his other writings as well, as Fisher has also pointed out,[70] he might be said to adhere to Śivādvaita in all its fundamental tenets. Strong though this influence of Śivādvaita was, within the Śaivasiddhānta it did not by any means triumph as the Vedāntic position to be adhered to, from a longue durée perspective. If one were to talk about the text which emerged as the *locus classicus* of mainstream Tamil Śaivasiddhānta by the 18th century, and accepted as the final word on the subject, it was the monumental commentary, the *Māpāṭiyam* (*Mahābhāṣya*) on the *Civañāṉacittiyār* written by Civañāṉamuṉivar/Civañāṉayokikaḷ (18th century).[71] In it Civañāṉamuṉivar faithfully adheres to Umāpati's elaboration on the categorization of different schools of thought into those which are alien (*puṟaccamayam*) and those which are kindred (*akaccamayam*), and the gradations of those within them. Nearest in kinship are those Śaivite schools of thought categorized as two: those which are proximate distant (*akappuṟaccamayam*) and those which are most proximate to the *Śaivasiddhānta* (*akaccamayam*). Among those listed within these last two categories are the following: the "*Caivam* that argues a doctrine of identity" (*Aikyavātacaivam*) is listed as part of the proximate distant group (*akappuṟaccamayam*) and the "*Caivam* that argues for a Śivādvaita" (*Civāttuvitacaivam*) is listed as the most proximate (*akaccamayam*).[72] Civañāṉamuṉivar goes on to clarify why the *aikyavāda* Śaivas stay outside the inner boundary of those who are most proximate:

> The *aikyavāda* Śaivas regard, in a special way, both the Vedas and the Śivāgamas as authoritative sources of knowledge. They also disregard [those doctrines] within them which have been put aside and follow the prescribed path. Nevertheless since they do not accept the reality of *āṇava mala* that is the root cause of all great evil, and since they disparage those sentences from the Śaivāgamas that establish its existence, those six schools have been kept separate as the proximate distant ones (*akappuṟaccamayam*).[73]

He then goes on to point out the difference between Śivādvaita and the Siddhānta (which he equates with the concept of *Cuttacaivam*):

> Among the six proximate schools, the *Civāttuvitam* attributes change (*pariṇāmam*) to the efficient cause (*nimitta-kāraṇam*). Hence it can also be defined as the [school] that argues for this. Those who are not aware of these views of *Civāttuvitacaivar* enquiring about it . . . they swoon thinking that what is taught ultimately is similar to *Cuttacaivam.* It is only when one holds on to those ignorant of the subtle nature of *Cuttacaivam* that one separates it [from the *Siddhānta*]. Inasmuch as it [*Cuttacaivam*] is not different one must understand that it is included within *Cittāntacaivam.*[74]

Stating this, and clearly differentiating Śivādvaita from the Siddhānta, Civañāṉa- muṉivar points out that Umāpati Civācāriyar, even while he keeps other forms of Śaivism in a separate category from the Śaivasiddhānta does not do this with Śuddhādvaita. Thus, Śuddhādvaita is included within the Śaivasiddhānta and penultimate to this is the Śivādvaita. The *Māpāṭiyam*, in effect, as also its author Civañāṉamuṉivar, becomes the single authoritative and final word on the Śaivasiddhānta after its composition in the 18th century. Indeed, Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's frequent and approving references to the former's works in his own discourses are evidence of his unquestioned authority within the tradition. The *Māpāṭiyam* draws a clear line between Śivādvaita, on the one hand, and Śuddhādvaita/ Siddhānta, on the other.

The Saiddhāntika doctrinal position on Tamil Vīraśaivism is further complicated by the difference between them on *āṇava mala.* The *Māpāṭiyam*, basing itself on the *Civappirakācam* of Umāpati, clearly decries a certain group called the *aikyavāda* Śaivas because they do not believe in the existence of *āṇava mala.* This in fact puts them into the slightly outer group of proximate others. Interestingly, and indubitably, the issue of the ultimate ontological existence of *āṇava mala* in the state of liberation was the main bone of contention with regard to the Vīraśaivas, who denied that they refuted its existence but conceded that they differed from the Saiddhāntika view that it still remained in the state of liberation.[75] What this in turn implied was not insignificant. In the highest level of liberation in the Vīraśaiva view, as we might speak of it post 17th century, there is the "oneness of the soul/accessory (*aṅga*) with Śiva in his form as the *liṅga*" – a doctrine called *aṅga-liṅga-aikyavāda*, which veers towards an even stronger experiential non-dualism which stands in contrast to the Siddhānta's weakly dualist position that, in the state of final release when the liberated soul enjoys the bliss of Śiva (*śivabhoga*), a distinction still remains between the two, due to the continued existence of *āṇava-mala*, between Śiva and the self.[76] Indeed, at least by the time of the *Māpāṭiyam* the "*aikyavāda* Śaivas" could well be considered to refer to those who hold to the unity, for all intents and purposes, of Śiva and the liberated soul as characterized in the

Vīraśaiva doctrine of liberation. For this reason, and also inasmuch as it draws an implacable line between Śivādvaita and the Siddhānta we might assume that the *Māpāṭiyam* in its orthodoxy and its author Civañāṉamuṉivar would be deeply problematic and an anathema for the Tamil Vīraśaivas. Thus, at first sight, it appears paradoxical that a Vīraśaiva religious figure like Civañāṉamuṉivar is repeatedly and approvingly quoted by Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ in his own discourses. Not only that but Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ also repeatedly gave talks on both the Śaivasiddhānta and on its canonical figures such as Meykaṇṭār where he affirmed the validity of Meykaṇṭār's doctrinal position and the universal validity of the Śaivasiddhānta as the religion that encompasses other religions. This seeming paradox, of a Vīraśaivite affirming the Saiddhāntika doctrine in its entirety, dissolves when we take into account several factors – the very late official canonization of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and yet its hegemonic place by the 17th century in the landscape of Tamil Śaivism, the common textual canon of the Tamil *bhakti* corpus between the Siddhānta and the Tamil Vīraśaiva traditions and, finally, the historical intertwining of the guru–disciple relationships of the Tamil Siddhānta–Vīraśaiva *maṭha*s.

In a recent article on the canonization of the 14 texts considered the core corpus of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, which by the mid-20th century are self-evidently accepted as the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ*, Rafael Klöber (2017) has convincingly shown the link between the emergence of a widespread public knowledge of the corpus and the history of print in the Madras Presidency. This leads him to conclude that,

> In the light of the hitherto analysis, it appears extremely likely that the present-day and sedimented understanding of the fourteen *Saiva Siddhanta Sastra*s was not widely known as a fixed textual canon of an explicit philosophy named Saiva Siddhanta before the late nineteenth century – especially not in the sense of a general and even public opinion.[77]

Klöber is right but as he himself qualifies only partially right on the issue of knowledge and canonicity. Knowledge of what constituted the textual canon of any pre-modern religious tradition in South India, as indeed in much of the subcontinent, prior to the emergence of print, circulated almost exclusively in learned and primarily masculine theological circles. Also, we have no knowledge of how the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta canon came to be anthologized in manuscript culture prior to print. In this context it would be correct to say that, within intramural learned circles, the school of philosophy called Śaivasiddhānta has a long genealogy, moving from an early efflorescence as early as the 5th century CE in Kashmir to become rooted and develop as a distinctive tradition of its own within South India, particularly the Tamil country, from as early as the 7th century, as far as the inscriptional evidence goes, though the textual evidence for it only stems from the 11th century CE.[78] It has also been convincingly shown that while the earlier Śaivasiddhānta of

South India espoused an uncompromisingly dualist doctrine, the later Tamil Śaivasiddhānta found greater elective affinities with Vedāntic non-dualism due to the hegemonic pressure of the Smārta Śaiva non-dualism, becoming increasingly both Vedāntic[79] and only nominally dualist, exalting even the non-Tantric version of the Śiva *pañcākṣara* mantra.[80] In a similarly emulative mode Vīraśaivism had already between the 15th and 17th centuries adapted itself to and borrowed heavily from Saiddhāntika doctrine.[81] In the Tamil context the textual transmission of the Vīraśaiva tradition has been scarce studied. In some pioneering work on the tradition Steinschneider (2016) has shown that we can, with the exception of a few works in the 16th century, only speak of the tradition as a major player in the Tamil literary landscape from around the 17th century when several figures emerge to compose the key works of the tradition, including the founding head of the Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam*, whose fifth successor is the subject matter of this chapter. It is also evident that at least some of these 17th–18th century works (as Steinschneider's analysis of the *Avirōtavuntiyār* of the late 17th century Vīraśaiva Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, as well as the commentary on it demonstrates clearly) sought to stake the higher religious ground of a kind of trans-sectarianism which was also a direct appeal for the constitution of a pan-Tamil Śaiva landscape. Thus, by the time of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, through doctrinal and hermeneutical moves which precede him by at least a century or two, Tamil Vīraśaivism had demonstrated its elective affinities with the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and established common grounds with it textually, which made it doctrinally rather than ritually, virtually indistinguishable from the former. At the level of popular religion this meant staking and occupying the same grounds of Tamil Śaiva devotionalism that the Śaivasiddhānta occupied. Thus, a close look at the citations from Civañāṉamuṉivar in the Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's writings showed us that, rather than the doctrinally rigorous *Māpāṭiyam*, the works of Civañāṉamuṉivar that feature prominently, again and again, are his devotional poetic compositions. These include the *Amutāmpikaippiḷḷaittamiḻ*, *Kalacaicceṅkaḷunīr vināyakar piḷḷaittamiḻ*, *Ceppaṟaippati iracai akilāṇṭēcuvari patikam*, and, above all, his magnum opus the *Kāñcipurāṇam* (later completed by his disciple Kacciyappamuṉivar). In other words, the common, and historically extended, popular and, until modernity, relatively open-ended canon of Tamil Śaiva devotional works, in a very real sense, were considered, within specific contexts, to override Vedāntic doctrinal differences. Finally, there was the close teacher–disciple relationship when it came to the study of specific texts between important figures of Tamil Vīraśaivism in the 16th–17th centuries and their peers in the world of Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. Three examples should suffice: perhaps the most creative and significant Tamil Vīraśaiva author, Turaimaṅkaḷam Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ (17th century), was known to have studied under Veḷḷaiyampala Tampirāṉ of the Śaivasiddhānta Tarumapura *ātīṉam* and even composed a work defending his guru.[82] Pērūr Cātaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ, the Vīraśaiva author of the *Avirotavuntiyār*, was supposed to have been the disciple of Tuṟaiyūr Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, who was said

to have converted from Śaivasiddhānta to Vīraśaivism.[83] The third example, is from the opening verses of what is considered the most important work composed by the first founding guru of the Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam* Ārumuka Cuvāmikaḷ – "*The Experience of Constant Concentration*" (*niṭṭānupūti /niṣṭhānubhūti*). In the initial verses that deal with the divine origins of the work we have ten verses which delineate the teacher–disciple relationship of Ārumuka Cuvāmikaḷ. This vertically descendant hierarchical lineage begins with Śiva as Vīraṭṭēcuvarar (v.2) – his consort Periyanāyaki (v.3) – Gaṇapathi (v.4) – Murukaṉ (v.5) – Nantitēvar (v.6) – the four *samayācāryas* of the Siddhānta, that is, Tiruñāṉacampantar, Appar, Cuntarar, and Māṇikkavācakar (v.7). It is after this guru lineage which is common to all Tamil Śaiva *maṭhas* that the Vīraśaiva lineage is explicitly evoked with the eighth verse paying homage to Vasavatēvar and Ceṉṉavasavatēvar followed by Kukai Namaccivāyar (v.9) and, finally, the latter's disciple Kuru Namaccivāyar in verse 10. The authority of the text, reinforced by the lineage of its transmission given in the teacher–disciple lineage, establishes the common basis of both Tamil Vīraśaivism and the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. *In other words, it can be reasonably stated that, by the 18th century at the very latest, there had been put into place already a trans-sectarian Tamil Śaivism,* with *the Śaivasiddhānta as foundational doctrine, which overrode mutually irreconcilable doctrinal Vedāntic affiliation between different strands of Tamil Śaivism (with the exception of the Smārta tradition) in favour of a common Tamil bhakti foundation undergirded by the fluid exchange of guru–disciple lineages.* It is this common pre-modern Śaiva consensus whose genealogy needs to be more extensively mapped out for the pre-18th century, for us to come to an in-depth understanding of the nature of Tamil Śaivism on the eve of the colonial period. This section of the chapter is a brief excursus into that subject matter in order to provide us with a template to understand the contours of Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ's religious perspective, which a priori assumes its existence.

In conclusion, we can say that even while this form of Śaivism, effecting careful and strategic compromises between Tamil and Sanskrit, between ritual and meaning, between relative and universal ethics, continued to inhabit its local spaces and held its own within the lives of devotees linked to the *ātīṉam* and the temple associated with it even up to today it came to be marginalized in Dravidian nationalist historiography, repeatedly challenged and rendered anachronistic even within its own time by Dravidian nationalism's rejection of Sanskrit and the Self-Respect Movement's rejection of caste, purāṇas, and traditional ritual. Thus, it came to occupy a peripheral space, as Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ eventually did, in public memory which looked, as we will see, far more favourably on what was identified as the caste rejecting and universalistic ethics of Ramalinga Swamigal. Nevertheless, the emergence of the innumerable Śaiva lay institutions which we saw in the previous chapter, as well as the participation of traditional Śaiva religious heads like Ñāṉiyār Āṭikaḷ which we saw in this chapter, were both important features of the transformed landscape of Tamil Śaivism and Tamil religion in the early

decades of the 20th century. It is against the background of these momentous changes that we must contextualize and understand the reinterpretations of Ramalinga Swamigal that became popular in print culture. These reinterpretations are the subject matter of the next two chapters.

Notes

1 On Cōmacuntara Nāyakar, see Steinschneider (2016), Chapter 3. For a highly nuanced reading of J.M. Nallaswami Pillai as a precursor rather than an adherent to what emerged as decisively Neo-Śaivite, see Bergunder (2010). On Maraimalai Adigal, see Vaithees (2015).

2 See Koppedrayer (1990:11–13):

> The term adhinam (Tamil: atinam) . . . is applied only to non-Brahman Saiva centres in South India, and even then not to all non-Brahmin centres. Though related, the two terms matam and atinam, are not interchangeable. In Tamil usage, matam carries a connotation of place, though, as indicated above, the term matam is often used as an umbrella term for a wide range of religious centres and rest houses. In contrast, the term atinam designates an independent institution that has its own internal structure of authority. . . . In a rare attempt to define the term atinam, F. R. Hemmingway, the British District officer in the Thanjavur District, believed the term to designate "central mutts (matas) exercising control and supervision over subordinate mutts and other institutions such as temples". The term atinam suggests "property" and is possibly derived from a centre's association with property through its administration of temple endowments. The term appears in conjunction with centres in the Thanjavur District only in the eighteenth century, nearly a century and a half after they were founded, and after the Mahrattas had control of the area. By the mid-eighteenth century the term atinam replaces matam in copperplate grants to several of these centres.

3 For a comprehensive bibliography of the works that deal with this and a lucid, brief summary, see Bate (2009:3–5).

4 This hagiography was faithfully rendered into English and published, with some interesting omissions, by Koaval Jayaraman in 2009. This section of the chapter is indebted to Vēlmurukaṉ (1973:30–46).

5 See Thurston and Rangachari (1909c:207–213).

6 Tepstra (2014).

7 On this biography as well as the founding legends and historical data associated with the Kovalūr/Tiruppātirippuliyūr *ātīṉam*, see my unpublished paper, "A Guru, an *Ātīṉam* and a Book: Some Reflections on the Establishment of the Tamil Vīraśaiva Kōvalūr Ātīṉam in the 17th century". Paper presented at the *Annual South Asia Conference* at Madison, WI, 2018.

8 Vēlmurukaṉ (1973:25–26).

9 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:5).

10 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:56).

11 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:57–10).

12 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:512–513).

13 "Tartan waist cloth, in chequered designs, worn by Muhammadans in the Straits and in Ceylon (MTL, vol. 2, 727).

14 "A kind of coloured cloth" (MTL, Vol.2, 844).

15 Printed sarees.

16 "Tartan used by Muhammadans" (MTL, Vol.2, 1120).

17 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:36).

18 Rudner (1994:53–54).
19 Rudner (1994:54).
20 For further reflections on Nakarattār religious self-fashioning from the late 19th century onwards, with reference to the texts of the Kōvilūr *ātīṉam*, see Steinschneider (2020).
21 Ibid:55.
22 Ibid:57–58.
23 Ibid:59.
24 Ibid:57.
25 Here Rudner is critiquing Milton Singer's neo-Weberian analysis of the Hindu business houses of the 1960s Madras.
26 Ibid:144.
27 Nārāyaṇacāmi Piḷḷai (1925:61).
28 Cutler (2003:284). This idea has been more comprehensively extended and explored in Ebeling's 2010 book, in his fleshing out of the "economy of praise" within which the poet was anchored.
29 Green (2014).
30 Jayaraman (2009:76).
31 I am using the 2006 third edition of this volume.
32 Murukavēl (2006:iv).
33 On the hagiography of this figure and his most significant work, the *Niṭṭānupūti* (*Niṣṭhānubhūti*), see Raman (unpublished talk, *Madison South Asia Conference*, 2018).
34 Within the Tamil Śaiva religious tradition this kind of devotional poetry, with the guru as its focus, goes back to Aruḷnanti Civācāriyār's (ca. 13th century) *Irupā irupaḵtu* in praise of his teacher Meykaṇṭār and Umāpati Civācāriyār's (ca. 14th century) *Neñcuviṭutūtu* in praise of his teacher Maṟaiñāṉacampantar. This is echoed by identical developments somewhat earlier on the Vaiṣṇava side, beginning with the *Irāmānujanūṟṟantāti* of Tiruvaraṅkattamutaṉār (ca. 12th century). For an examination of this literature, see Raman (2020).
35 Murukavēl (2006:1–8). The talk was noted down, in an abridged form, by Pālacuppiramaṇia Mutaliyār.
36 The *Niṭṭāṉupūti* a poetic composition on *Śivayoga* of the first guru, categorically declares, within itself (lines 6–8) that this is not a composition of the human author but the words of Śiva himself and contained in the *Uttaravātūlāgama* which Ārumuka Cuvāmikaḷ has, through his meagre intellectual efforts rendered into Tamil. Regarding the provenance of the text within the 28th *paṭala* of the *Uttaravātūlāgama* my current state of research has been able to unearth only two printed versions of the latter. There is the *Vātulotara* agama available in the Muktabodha website which seems to begin only with the 40th *paṭala* in the edition and is, therefore, not very useful for my purposes. The general tenor of the text, from my brief survey of it, seems to pertain to ritual activity rather than containing a yoga section. The other version, which might be more promising in yielding a yoga section, is the *Vātulaśuddha* the colophones of some manuscripts of which even use the word *uttara* to describe it. The edition made available to me, unfortunately, contains only ten *paṭala*s, thereby also negating the possibility of our finding a Sanskrit version of the *NC* within it. In this context it might be useful to reflect on some astute and knowledgeable observations of Dominic Goodall on a long quotation attributed to the *Kāraṇāgama* which is later cited in a 16th-century text, the *Āśaucadīpikā*, but which he was unable to locate in any of the available printed editions of the *Kāraṇāgama*. He (2018:134) points out that:

> One might therefore assume that the quotation is pseudoepigraphal and dismiss the passage as "spurious". But it may be that the 16th-century author

of the *Āśaucadīpikā* had access to another *Kāraṇāgama* – since lost or mouldering in unidentified manuscripts – that was as old as any of the *Kāraṇāgama*s printed. Furthermore, it is perhaps it is worth observing that the notion of pseudoepigraphy in the context of such scriptures is in any case moot: while some Śaiva tantras show little evidence of layers of composition and may well have been produced at a single go (the *Mṛgendrāgama* and *Kiraṇatantra* might be examples of such unitary works), many others . . . circulate primarily in variously ordered fragments of varying size. It is therefore possible that that the various larger manuscript-versions that have come down to us are the end-results of streams not only of transmission but also of processes of accretion and editorial reorganisation. . . . for some South Indian temple Āgamas, however, such as the *Śūkṣmaśāstra* and, in differing degrees, also the *Kāmikā* and the *Kāraṇa*, some manuscripts of the transmission may reflect different moments in a stop-start editorial process that never actually reached a smooth finish.

37 I have preferred to leave the dating of the texts prior to the 15th century unspecified inasmuch as to profess a date for Tamil literature for earlier periods is often a matter of speculation rather than based on firm evidence.

38 Klöber (2017:200).

39 On Maṟaimalai Adigal's contribution towards the formation of this organization, see Vaithees (2015:101–103). The English author of Ñāṉiyār's biography, Jayaraman (2009:31), who faithfully follows the Tamil biography of Vēlmurukaṉ which was first brought out in 1973, has the following to say about this event:

> Our Adigal was also worried at the deterioration of the consciousness of religion among the Tamil population. . . . The greatest Tamil School of Thought called the Shaiva Siddhanta Philosophy was very well venerated and patronized by the Mutts in the South but there was no association in Chennai to patronize the Philosophy. Adigal wanted a Sabha based in Chennai that could impart to the world the final truth of the three eternal verities. . . . At the Mutt in Tirupadiripuliyur, on 07.07.1905, our Adigal, presiding over the function, inaugurated the Saiva Siddhantha Mahasamajam. Sadasivam Pillai of Chidambaram Navalar Patasalai was nominated as the President, and Maraimalai Adigal, the Secretary of the Mahasamaj.

40 Murukavēl (2006:123).

41 Murukavēl (2006:125): *aṟivumayamāṉa, āṉanta vaṭivamāṉa oṉṟai aṟiyavēṇṭum. atuvē civam. . . . civattiṉ campantamē caivam. aṉātiyāka ellām aṟinta, ellām ceyyavalla, eṉṟum uḷḷa vastu civaperumāṉ. eṉṟaikkum caivacittāntam uṇṭu. cilarāl veḷippaṭuttiya poḻututāṉ ārampittatu eṉṟu koḷḷavēṇṭām.*

42 Murukavēl (2006:126).

43 Murukavēl (2006:126): *vētāntat teḷivē cittāntam eṉpatu. vētāntam, cittāntam iraṇṭum oṉṟutāṉ; vēṟalla.*

44 Murukavēl (2006:127).

45 Murukavēl (2006:59).

46 Murukavēl (2006:64–66).

47 Murukavēl (2006:68): *kaṭavuḷukkum uyirukkum uḷḷa atvaita campantattai meykaṇṭār viḷakkum muṟaiyē ciṟanta toṉṟākum.*

48 Murukavēl (2006:69): *itaippōl kaṭavuḷ uyir ākiya iraṇṭu vēṟupaṭṭa poruḷkaḷ oṉṟu kūṭumpōtu oṉṟākātatum iraṇṭallāmaiyumākiya nilaiyai eytukiṉṟaṉa. ituvē meykaṇṭār kūṟum attuvitamākum.*

49 Murukavēl (2006:129): *piṟappai aṟuttal uyir tammāl muṭiyā. iṟaivaṉāl taravēṇṭiyatē.*

50 Murukavēl (2006:130): *iṟaivaṉai aṟiyum mey uṇarviṉāl iṟaivaṉ koṭukkap peṟuvatu vīṭu.*

51 Murukavēl (2006:131–132).

52 Murukavēl (2006:135–136).

53 This was brought out as a separate pamphlet in 1987, titled, "What we need" (*Namakku vēṇṭuvaṉa)* by the *maṭha.*

54 Let us recollect that this is the identical list that we saw mentioned in the *Vaḷḷalār Cāttiram*, in Chapter 3.

55 It is important to remember that the Śaivite perspective was that Śiva is the real protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa* who sets into motion the entire plot of it. This has been shown by Bronner (2011), when it comes to the work of the Śaivite polymath Appaya Dīkṣita. But we need not assume that this perspective was new to Appaya Dīkṣita in the 16th century. Rather, as Sutton (2000:183) has pointed out with regard to studies of the *Mahābhārata*, summing upon other informed studies, and concluded, "Viṣṇu and Śiva are not alternate Deities in the epic, glorified in sectarian interpolations, but should be taken as complementary features of one, Supreme Deity manifest alternately depending on which divine feature was appropriate". That both a nuanced or more narrowly sectarian understanding of the theistic aspects of the two epics might have long existed in the South of India is not unlikely. One tantalizing reference to Śiva being the one who defeated Rāvaṇa is already to be found in the eighth verse of Tiruñāṉacampantar's first decade of the *Tēvāram* on Tirupiramapuram. But, thus far, we have virtually no comprehensive work on the Śaivite textual reception of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Mahābhārata* in the Tamil region prior to the 16th century, though we do have hints that, from the perspective of the orthodox Śaivasiddhānta, the former was not even considered a religious, let alone canonical text! On this, see the remarks of Vanmikanathan (1976:449): "I remembered at once my Caiva-Siddhaantic grandfather who considered the Raamayana a secular book and would not give it a place along with the Thevaaram and the Thiruvaacakam on the shelf in his prayer-room".

56 Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (1987:5).

57 Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (1987:14).

58 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:132).

59 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:131).

60 Shulman (1980:353).

61 On the early Christian Protestant critique of the Tamil purāṇic literature, see Young and Jebanesan (1995) and Dharampal-Frick (1999).

62 Rāj Kautamaṉ (2008).

63 On this, see Blackburn (2000).

64 *Tirukkuṟaḷ, Parimēlaḻakar urai,* p. 76: *iṉi muṟaiyāṉē* ***tuṟavaṟam*** *kūṟiya toṭaṅkiṉār. tuṟavaṟam āvatu mēṟkūṟiya illaṟattiṉ vaḻuvātu oḻuki aṟivuṭaiyarāy piṟappiṉai añci, vīṭupōṟṟin poṟuṭṭu tuṟantārkku uṟitāya aṟam. atutāṉ viṉai mācu tīrntu antakkaraṇaṅkaḷ tūya ātaṟporuṭṭu avarāṟ kākkappaṭum* ***viratanaṅkaḷum****, avaṟṟāṉ avai tūya āyavaḻi utippatāya ñāṉamum eṉa iruvakaippaṭum.*

As far as I can gauge, Parimēlaḻakar is the first commentator to make this crucial division in the *Aṟattuppāl* between the chapters, listing some as referring to *Illaṟam* and, subsequently, those that follow as pertaining to *Tuṟavaṟam.* We do not see this division in the commentaries before him though they are listed in a verse of *Caṅkam* poetry, attributed anachronistically to Ericcalūr Malāṭaṉār.

65 Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ (1987:3).

66 On the polemical debates that ranged in the 19th to early 20th centuries on how to define the Śaivasiddhānta, the terminology of Vedic Śaivism and the disputes with the Advaitins, see Steinschneider (2016).

67 Thus, as Fisher (2017:322) has mentioned the Vīraśaiva Śivādvaita textual tradition is "inspired in its earliest stages by a reading of Srīkaṇṭha's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*" and then the following works: "*Siddhāntaśikhāmaṇi*" of a certain Śivayogi Śivācārya, Śrīpathi's *Śrīkarabhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtra*s, the *Kriyāsāra* of "Nilakaṇṭha Śivācārya", 14th century. And (*iv*) the efflorescence of Śivādvaita literature in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada, 15th–16th

centuries. Kumāratēvar (17th century), whose writings and particularly the *Cuttacātakam*, which has been central to our understanding of Ramalingar's doctrines throughout the book, speaks of his own system as Śivādvaita in the last line of verse 94 of the *Cuttacātakam*: *innilai cāmattacippatam uraikkum* ***itu civāttuvitam eṉṟuṇarvāy.***

68 Fisher (2017).

69 Sivaraman (1973:38).

70 Fisher (2017).

71 Sivaraman (1973:38): "*Drāviḍa Māpāḍiam* (Skt. *mahābhāṣyam*) as this work is called, bears evident influence from three quarters – (i) *Pauṣkara-Bhāṣya* of Umāpati, (ii) *Śivāgra – Bhāṣya*, and (iii) *Śivārkamaṇi-Dīpikā* of Appaya".

72 Civañāṉamuṉivar (1936:42–43): *akappuṟac camayam pācupatam, māviratam, kāpālam, vāmam, vairavam,* ***aikyavātacaivam*** *eṉa aṟuvakaippaṭum. akaccamayam pāṭāṇavāta caivamutaṟ* ***civāttuvitacaivam****ṟāka āṟuvakaippaṭum.*

[Here we have a footnote which adds the following: *pāṭāṇavāta caivam, pētavāta caivam, civacaṅkirāntavāta caivam, īcuvaravikāravāta caivam, civāttuvitavāta caivam eṉpaṉa.]*

73 Civañāṉamuṉivar (1936:44): *44:* . . . ***aikkiyavātacaivar*** *vētañ civākamam iraṇṭaṟkum ciṟappuvakaiyāṟ piramāṇaṅ koṇṭu, avaṟṟil vilakkiyaṉa oḻittu vititta vaḻi oḻukuvārāyiṉum ellāp peruṅkēṭṭiṟkum mūlakāraṇamākiya āṇavamalattuṇmai koḷḷāmaiyāṉum, ataṉ uṇmai cātikkuñ civākamavākkiyaṅkaḷai ikaḷtalāṉum avvaṟuvakaic camayamum akappuṟac camayam eṉa vēṟuvait teṇṇappaṭṭaṉa.*

74 Ibid: *akaccamayamāṟaṉuṭ* ***civāttuvita caivamāvatu nimittakāraṇattukkup pariṇāmaṅ kūṟuvātaliṉ, atu nimittakāraṇapariṇāmavātam eṉavuṅ kūṟappaṭum****. aṅṅaṉaṅkoṇṭa civāttuvitacaivar karuttuṇarātār civāttuvitacaivamāvatu yātōveṉavum . . . iṟutikkaṇ eṭuttōtuppaṭun cuttacaivampōlum eṉavum mayaṅkuvar. cuttacaivam nuṭpapporuḷ uṇarāmaimāttiriyē paṟṟi vēṟuvaikkappaṭṭataṉṟik karuttuvakaiyāṟ cittānta caivattiṉ vēraṉmaiyiṟ* ***cuttacaivañ cittāntacaivattuḷ aṭaṅkum eṉṟuṇarka****.*

75 On this doctrinal difference, see Irattiṉacapāpati (1977:287, 370).

76 re. Sivaraman (2001:414):

> Certain distinctions are, however, to be kept in mind in this account of *śivabhoga*. Experience of self, and Śiva's "experience" inseparably coincident and even coalescent as they are, must still be distinguished in so far as self in not identical with Śiva though always "one" with it.

77 Klöber (2017:209). Indeed, Klöber's research on this issue is reinforced by the entry on the publishing history of the 14 texts in the *Caiva Camayak Kalaikkaḷañciyam* (*CCK*) where we are given the following crucial pieces of information:

> The first person to publish the 14 scriptures (only mūla form) was Maturai Nāyakam Piḷḷai. He was the first to state that the scriptures (cāttiraṅkaḷ) are 14. The year of publication was 1866. He brought it out in four sections. The person who aided this publication was Āraṇi Jākir Kāci Nārāyaṇacāmi Mutaliyār. From 1871 Koṉṟai Mānakaram Caṇmuka Cuntara Mutaliyār published the scriptures individually together with an old commentary. In 1897 Kāñci Nākaliṅka Mutaliyār (1865–1950) published the Cittānta Cāttiras as one work together with commentary. He was a disciple of Pūvai Kalyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār. The person who gave the money for this publication was Irāmanātapuram Pāskara Cētupati. He was the person who first gave the name *meykaṇṭa cāttiraṅkaḷ* to the *cittānta* scriptures.
>
> (*CCK*.8.301)

One further issue which shows that the canon remained by no means decided even in the 19th century and beyond comes to the fore on the vexing issue of the corpus of Umāpati Civācāriyār's works, which constituted the most of works

of a single author within the consolidated canon. This particularly revolved around the issue of whether he was the author of the *Uṇmaineṟiviḷakkam* at all, a short text that the first time explicates solely on the *daśakārya* of the Siddhānta. Mu. Aruṇācalam (2005:153–156) is firmly of the opinion that it was composed by Cīkāḻi Tattuvanātar (whom he dates between 1350 and 1375). He bases his opinion on the views of Aṉavarata Vināyakam Piḷḷai (1877–1940) and also points out that both in some manuscripts and the early print editions it is Cīkāḻi Ciṟṟampalanāṭikaḷ's *Tukaḷaṟupōtam*, and not the *Uṇmaineṟiviḷakkam*, which is included within the 14-fold canon.

78 On the earliest Saiddhāntika author of South India, Rāmanātha, and his compendium of Saiddhāntika doctrines titled *Siddhāntadīpikā*, see Goodall (2014) and his comment to the effect that,

> No pre-twelfth century works in Tamil appear to have been considered to be in any sense Saiddhāntika until after the twelfth century . . . This is of course not to say that the Śaivasiddhānta had not long reached the Tamil-speaking South, for we know if its presence there as early as the seventh century from Pallava inscriptions . . . but no surviving Sanskrit or Tamil literature belonging to this current of thought is known to us that proclaims a Southern origin. (page 180, footnote 39)

It is indisputable that the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta saw itself as existing in the tradition of a philosophical tradition of this name at least by the 14th century. Our evidence for this is Umāpati Civācāriyar's *Civappirakācam* where, in the early verses about the text he has composed the author explains that he is dealing with the Śaivasiddhānta, which is a clarification of Vedānta in his work: *piṟivarum attuvitamākuñ ciṟappiṉatāy* ***vētāntat teḷivāñ caivacittāntat*** *tiṟaṉ iṅku terikkal uṟṟām.*

79 Sanderson (2014:87, footnote 357):

> There is another respect in which the neo-Siddhānta [Sanderson's term for the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta] comes closer to Smārta doctrine. For it has redefined liberation not as the manifestation (*abhivyaktiḥ*) of the soul's equality with Śiva (*śivasāmyam)*, the doctrine of the Kashmirian Saiddhāntikas and their South Indian followers, but as the direct experience of the bliss of Śiva through oneness with him.

80 Sanderson (2014:88):

> It sought to draw itself closer to the dominant Smārta Śaiva tradition of the region. It also reached out to the uninitiated majority by shifting the emphasis from the Siddhānta's Tantric Mantras, accessible only to initiates, to the universal Śaiva Mantra advocated for lay devotees in the Śivadharma corpus and the Śaiva Purāṇas, namely the Pañcākṣara (five-syllable) NAMAḤ ŚIVĀYA, a feature that the neo-Siddhānta shares with the Vīraśaiva movement.

81 Sanderson (2014:85): "This latter [Vīraśaiva] literature is heavily dependent on the doctrinal sources of the Saiddhāntikas, both their scriptures and such exegetical or secondary works as the *Tattvaprakāśa*, the *Siddhāntaśekhara*, and the *Siddhāntasārāvalī*".

82 Zvelebil (1995:177).

83 Steinschneider (2016:301).

8 Tiru.Vi.Ka

Ramalingar's *Camaracam* as Radical Equality

Autobiography and Religion

In 1944, Tiruvārūr Vi. Kaliyāṇacuntara Mutaliyār (1883–1953) known as Tiru.Vi.Ka – Tamil and Śaivite scholar, Congress politician, and Trade Union leader and activist – published an account of his life titled, *Vāḻkaikkuṟippukaḷ* (*Life Notes*). He made it very clear in the *Tōṟṟuvāy* (*Introduction*) that he had long been averse to writing about himself or his own life. But, eventually he concluded that inasmuch as his life carried the impress of the social and political movements of his time a record of it would be necessary.[1] Thus, as has been observed in the study of the autobiography in South Asia, the emergence of life histories such as his in this particular period was closely connected to larger social and historical forces at work. It has been pointed out that as "a sustained narrative account of one's own life, autobiographical writings began to appear in Indian languages only in the second half of the nineteenth century".[2]

Simultaneously, even while these life histories, as Arnold and Blackburn call them, are about the narration of the self they are very often also not about the reveries of a subject who reflects on her/his interior life but more that of the self-in-society where, "they define themselves in relation to larger frames of reference, especially those of family, kin, caste, religion, and gender".[3] In this context, Kaviraj's analysis of one of the earliest autobiographies in Bengali, the *Ātmacarit* of Sibnath Sastri, is important for understanding why men like Sastri or Tiru.Vi.Ka, as we will see, felt the need to put down in writing their life histories. Kaviraj points out that Sastri narrated his life perhaps for the following reasons:

> because it was his sense that his life showed the transformation of some of the most fundamental definitions of social conduct, the meanings of religion, leading a religious life, and the everyday activities of living in a marriage, raising children and passing one's life with friends. All these changed historically, and he thought, correctly, that his life was an excellent example of how it had changed, and what people had to go through to make that change happen.[4]

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In the Tamil context, as Venkatachalapathy points out, the earliest autobiographers, starting from Ananda Ranga Pillai in the 18th century must properly be called diarists – in that their memoirs were records of things they did, people they met, and books they read. Thus, the unpublished diaries of prominent people like V.T. Subramania Pillai (1846–1909) and Maraimalai Adigal (1872–1950) which they might have intended to publish someday, none of which have seen the light of day, belong to this category.[5] Venkatachalapathy also traces the serious emergence of autobiographical writing in the Tamil context to around the 1930s – a period which saw the confluence of factors like the confirmed status of print culture, the emergence of popular periodicals, and the by now established familiarity with the novel form. Among the noteworthy autobiographies to come out of this period were those of U.Vē Cāminātaiyar and Tiru.Vi.Ka, not the least because they were both animated by the impulse to record "as history" their own times.

Tiru.Vi.Ka's *Vāḻkaikkuṟippukaḷ* is divided into 16 chapters which follow a certain biographical and ideological arc – moving on from the *Tōṟṟuvāy* (*Introduction*) which justifies this project, followed by four further chapters titled *Piṟappu* (*Birth*), *Kuḷantaimai* (*Childhood*), *Jōtiṭam* (*Astrology*), *Paḷḷippaṭippu* (*School Studies*), and *Piḷḷaimai* (*Boyhood*). We might identify these chapters as forming a coherent unit for one important reason. These chapters deal with the past of the autobiographical narrator who sees it as belonging to a biographical time already ruptured into "those days" (*anta nāḷ*) and "these days" (*inta nāḷ*). The narrating of one's life history, therefore, becomes a means of negotiating the modernity of the latter.[6] But we have to be particularly careful in this context to conflate the impressions and the nostalgia attached to "those days" with a scrupulous recording of "tradition". Rather, as Udaya Kumar rightly reminds us, the negotiation between "tradition" and "modernity" is less about the old and the new and rather that, "the empirical and mythographic discourses both appear to have emerged from an encounter with colonial governance and scholarship".[7] From the seventh chapter onwards till the tenth of the *Vāḻkaikkuṟippukaḷ* we have adulthood and the expansion of horizons – *Kalvi* (*Studies*), *Ūḻiyam* (*Service*), *Araciyal* (*Politics*), *Toḻilāḷar Iyakkam* (*Labour Movement*). After this the narrative shifts to what one might call a reflections section, where the narrator deals with the themes which have engaged him throughout his life as well as contributed to making him a public persona in Tamil history. These are Chapters 11–14 which then conclude with two chapters on an encroaching mortality and a stock taking of what most matters to him, with which the narrative ends. Of particular significance here, though the theme is there throughout the *Vāḻkaikkuṟippukaḷ*, is chapter 11 *Camayamum caṉmārkkamum* (Religion and the *caṉmārkkam*), where Tiru.Vi.Ka summarizes his thoughts on religion. His musings in this chapter are faithfully reflected in his two other works, which deal directly or indirectly with Ramalingar. Both these works – *Caivattiṉ camaracam* and *Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ tiruvuḷḷam* (*The Sacred Heart of Ramalinga Swamigal*, henceforth, *The Scared Heart*) deal with the idea

of *camaracam*, which he sees as central to Ramaligar's thought, to Śaiva religion in particular and to all religions in general. The life history and these two books are intimately intertwined with each illuminating the other. Thus, this chapter begins by looking at the two works to understand Tiru.Vi.Ka's reading of Ramalingar and then returns to the life history to examine how Tiru.Vi.Ka arrived at his mature views on Ramalingar by coming to a certain understanding of his own religious life and the turns it took, thus transforming both Ramalingar and himself in the process.

The first work *Caivattiṉ camaracam* was written in 1925, followed by a book that engaged specifically with Ramalingar's thoughts in 1929. This latter book was *The Sacred Heart,* which had its beginnings in 1927. The incentive for writing it was the 1927 *Caṉmārkka Mānāṭu* in Māyavaram, where Tiru. Vi.Ka was asked to give a keynote address. His talk was called *Camaraca Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* and was later serialized in his journal *Navacakti.* This essay was subsequently expanded and published as this extended rumination on Ramalingar in 1929.

In his *Preface* (*muṉṉurai)* to *The Sacred Heart* Tiru.Vi.Ka speaks of an ancient path of right conduct, *aṟaneṟi*, that has existed in the Tamil region since time immemorial. It is a conduct sanctioned by God himself, Śiva in his form as the guru, Dakṣiṇāmūrti and comes via him to the singers of the Tamil devotional poetry, the *Tirumuṟai* and then to the composers of the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ* and then to Tāyumāṉavar.[8] The book is structured into five chapters: *tōṟṟuvāy* (*Introduction*), *aṟivuṟuttal* (*Instruction*), *muṟai* (*Right Conduct*), *pēṟu* (*Reward*), and *iḷamai muyaṟci* (*Youthful Efforts*) which has one sub-section, *iṟuvāy* (*Culmination*). Here we will look at how, through each of these chapters, Tiru.Vi.Ka constructs an analytic framework for understanding Ramalingar's religion as a universal Śaivism which is commensurate with a modern understanding of the laws of the natural world.

Before we look at Tiru.Vi.Ka's closely reasoned account of Ramalingar's religion we need to look at his source materials and his practices of citation in this work and his justification for this in the *Introduction.* Tiru.Vi.Ka explains that in seeking to understand and explicate Ramalingar he will concentrate solely on his own writings and not on hagiographies/biographies about him. The latter he says capture only, like a photograph, a physical description. It is only the writings that capture the heart of a person.[9] Thus, through entirely avoiding the hagiographies and biographies, Tiru. Vi.Ka also avoids a contextualization of Ramalingar the person within his own times or later. This also enables him to ignore the more controversial aspects of the life story, the stories of the miracles, the traditional and enigmatic mystery of his disappearance, etc., – to mention some of the greater difficulties of integrating Ramalingar into a narrative of Modern Shaivism. Rather, the focus on the works makes this an account of the history of Ramalingar's ideas which is nevertheless structured as a traditional work of edification, leading the reader through the stages of a path to the highest ends. *The Sacred Heart* is copious in its citations of Ramalingar's works and takes

recourse to very few other citations – we have 275 single verses quoted from the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and only eight verses (5 from Appar's *Tēvāram* and 5 from *Aruṇakirinātar's Kantaralaṅkāram* and *Kantaranupūti*) from other Śaivite works. Tiru.Vi.Ka, thus, demonstrates his intention of reading Ramalingar, he says, on his own terms in order to glean what he stands for. At the same time the citations from the *Tiruvaruṭpā* are chosen with a definite purpose. Thus, in the chapter *Aṟivuṟuttal* Tiru.Vi.Ka explains:

> Swami's instruction runs like waters at high tide, multifaceted, in the *tirumuṟai*s he gave. There is one place where that flood looks like waters that have stilled and become a full lake and that is the 6th *tirumuṟai*. That which shines like the face of that *tirumuṟai* is the *Aruṭperuñcōti akaval*.[10]

This emphasis on the final published volume of Ramalingar's poetic corpus and, within it, on the *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval* is confirmed in the poetic selections within *The Sacred Heart*. A detailed look at the verses cited shows that they are not only overwhelmingly from the sixth book but, further, the citations show a close reading over the entire length of this final volume consisting of 144 long and short poems. The *Aruṭperuñcōti Akaval* is Poem 81 of this corpus in the Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ edition. In making this deliberate choice of restricting Ramalingar's religious views to the final book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* Tiru.Vi.Ka concluded that it was the summit of Ramalingar's religious vision. This, as we saw in Chapter 2, had become the accepted paradigm for thinking about the poetic corpus already in the hagiographies. Nevertheless, even while taking over this paradigm Tiru.Vi.Ka draws some interesting new implications from it, absent in the hagiographies. The best place to look for this reinterpretation of the poetic corpus is in the fourth chapter of *The Sacred Heart*. Here, Tiru.Vi.Ka establishes that if we examine what Ramalingar did to attain the religious experience he eventually had, then we would need to look at certain practices and decisions of his from his youth and emulate them. These related to his guru, his sacred book, and his deity.

Guru

> If we investigate the life and words of Aṭikaḷ it will become very clear that he had one guru, one book and one deity for worship. Who was the guru he took hold of? Which was the book? Who as the deity of worship? The guru was Tiruñāṉacampantar; the book the *Tiruvācakam*; the deity was Murukapperumāṉ. These three purified his life and conferred on him the greatness that he was to get.[11]

Tiru.Vi.Ka refers specifically to the Vaḷḷal lineage saying that they had taken Tiruñāṉacampantar as their guru like Ramalingar.[12] But, he does not draw out the implications of this relationship between Ramalingar and the Vaḷḷal lineage for the textual genealogy of the former's doctrines. Rather, he takes

the affinity in an entirely new direction of the identical nature of subjective religious formations. He begins by saying that Tiruñāṉacampantar, as his name reveals, is anyone who comes coupled with wisdom. Those, therefore, who seek any guru who confers wisdom take Tiruñāṉacampantar as their teacher and obtain the deathless state and experience divine happiness. He adds that even those from other countries and other faith, truth be told, resort to Tiruñāṉacampantar though he is named differently in those countries. He is the person who is gracing people with wisdom, holding different names as he is in different countries.[13] Further, for those who seek to obtain him, and look inwards, Tiruñāṉacampantar manifests himself in all reality. "This introspection (*akanōkku*)", Tiru.Vi.Ka says, "is called either yogic vision or *māṉatakkāṭci* (Clairvoyance)".[14] He then goes into a personal confession:

> I read the life story of Tiruñāṉacampantar; I recited the *Tēvāram* he imparted; I worshipped his form. Whenever the thought of Tiruñāṉacampantar arose, unwittingly, it was customary for a certain kind of tenderness (*nekiḻvu*) to arise in me. In my life there is no limit to the research on Tiruñāṉacampantar.[15]

A little further in this section on guru Tiru.Vi.Ka speaks of some persons who obtain the grace of God and are themselves divine. These persons have a leader, and one should obtain God's grace only through him. He then adds:

That great person will take on a physical body sometimes and protect the earth.

> When once hindrances arose to the true path that he taught through some seers, he appeared as Iraṭapatēvar [< Ṛṣabhadeva, the first of the Jaina *Tīrthaṅkaras*] and imparted the path of grace (*aruḷneṟi*). Later once that path decayed he entered into the Buddha and caused right conduct (*aṟam*) to grow. Then he was born as Christ and taught love. . . . It is he who appeared as Tiruñāṉacampantar in the Tamil country and showed one God.[16]

Saying this, Tiru.Vi.Ka addresses the vexed issue of the hagiographical anecdote about Tiruñāṉacampantar which becomes a well-known trope from its narration in the classic Śaivite hagiography of the 12th century, the *Periyapurāṇam* of Cēkkiḻār. This relates to his literary and verbal contests with the Jains of Madurai leading to their defeat. Once this happens the king of Madurai, who had been healed of a fever by Tiruñāṉacampantar and converted from Jainism to Śaivism as a result, decides to punish the Jains:

> The king then addressed Kulacciṟaiyār [his minister]: "These Jains consented to this contest, and they have been beaten", he said, "Now in just retribution for the crime which they committed against the holy child, let them be impaled on sharp stakes". Campantar bore no personal

> animosity against towards the Jains, but made no objection to the king's just sentence. "Since these unworthy Jains perpetrated an outrage at the monastery where the Śaivite devotees were staying", he declared, "Their sentence is appropriate". In full public view, Kulacciṟaiyār had the stakes prepared and set up in rows. When all was ready, for their part in the attempted arson at Campantar's monastery eight thousand Jains from the eight hills around the city impaled themselves upon the stakes.[17]

As Peterson (1998) has pointed out not only do we have no historical evidence that affirms this large-scale violence perpetuated against the Jains in Madurai in the second half of the first millennium CE but even Cēkkiḻār seems anxious to show that Tiruñāṉacampantar did not instigate the impalement though he approved of it.[18] Nevertheless, here we have Tiru.Vi.Ka feeling the compulsion to absolve Tiruñāṉacampantar of this cruelty in the 1920s:

> Some may ask how one could call a person who destroyed Jains and Buddhists Iṭapatēvar and the Buddha. I have explained clearly in my *Preface* to *Buddhism in Tamil Works* that Tiruñāṉacampantar was not the kind of person to destroy the righteous ways of Jainism and Buddhism . . . In the Tamil region in those days there prevailed the darkness of unrighteousness in the name of Jainism and Buddhism. Ñāṉacampantar ventured to destroy only those.[19]

Tiru.Vi.Ka's defense of Tiruñāṉacampantar in the 1920s must also be seen within the context of a polemical discourse which centred around the defense of him generally and particularly with reference to his mythical impalement of the Jains. This defense arose in the context of Christian–Śaivite polemics, where perceived Christian slights against Tiruñāṉacampantar particularly and interestingly focusing on his supposed lack of *cīvakāruṇyam* were being strongly refuted by Śaivite religious standard bearers in the first decades of the 20th century. An important text in this regard was the polemical tract written and published by Kācivāci Centiṉātaiyar (1848–1924), a Sri Lankan Śaivite scholar who had been a student of Arumuga Navalar and had relocated himself in the latter phase of his life to Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam (Madurai district), opened a school there in 1902 called the *Vaitika Cuttāttuvita Caivacittānta Vittiyācālai* and taught Śaiva scriptures.[20] Centiṉātaiyar's polemical tract titled *Cīkāḻipperuvāḻviṉ cīvakāruṇṇiyamāṭci* (*The Magnificence of the Compassion towards all Beings of the One of High Birth from Cīkāḻi*), and published in 1904, was a savage response to a purported article which had appeared in a monthly journal from Kerala called *Aṟivu Viḷakkam* comparing Jesus and Tiruñāṉacampantar and condemning the latter as heartless for his treatment of the Jains.[21] In his polemical broadside Centiṉātaiyar begins with a general defense of Śaivism as a timeless revelation given directly by Śiva before coming to the specific events of Tiruñāṉacampantar at Madurai. His argument is that the poet-saint's adversity against the Jains must be seen as the equivalent of hacking and throwing away branches which prevent

the growth of healthy plants and not as a sin but a healthy act of preserving the good.[22] It is further pointed out that it was the Jains who volunteered themselves for impalement if defeated and not Tiruñāṉacampantar who sought to actively harm them.[23] Centiṉātaiyar concludes his arguments by showing the poet-saint's compassion was twofold: first, he purified the Jains by having them impaled since after death they would ascend to heaven and be reborn in the right religious path after that, and second, he made sure that families of the Pandya kingdom beginning with the king were on the right path, by converting them to Śaivism.[24]

I cite this discourse not only to show that just like for Centiṉātaiyar but also for Tiru.Vi.Ka speaking decades later and from a very different vantage point on Śaivism, there were certain Śaiva verities – like the greatness of Tiruñāṉacampantar – which could not be questioned. But there is a further detail to be noted here and this is the well-grounded conjecture that Tiru. Vi.Ka would have been familiar with Centiṉātaiyar's tract as he was with the writings of the small circle of Sri Lankan Śaivite scholars, fierce polemicists all, who had a profound influence on the remaking of Śaivism in the Tamil country between the mid-19th and early 20th century. At the head of the roll call of names was Arumuga Navalar himself, followed by his disciples such as Katirvēṟpiḷḷai (1844–1907), Centiṉātaiyar, and Capāpati Nāvalar (1844–1903) – all battle-scarred veterans of an anti-Christian polemical feud that Navalar had perfected in Jaffna against Christian attacks on Śaivism. They carried forward this polemical war further in their own activities and writings, supplemented by their stance on what they considered to be the right understanding of Śaivism once they moved to the Tamil mainland. Their impact for a few decades was decisive in the making of Modern Śaivism, and we need to take this into consideration when we look at Tiru.Vi.Ka's views because he saw Katirvēṟpiḷḷai as his first true teacher of Śaivism. I will return to the unexpected impact of Katirvēṟpiḷḷai on Tiru.Vi.Ka's own religious views later in this chapter.

Returning to *The Sacred Heart* we see that, citing verses of praise on Tiruñāṉacampantar in Ramalingar's *Tiruvaruṭpā*, Tiru.Vi.Ka concludes by saying that it was an ancient Śaiva practice to take the poet-saint as the guru when one wanted to get a vision of Śiva. This section on the guru is followed by the reflections on the sacred book which Ramalingar embraced, which is the collection of poems called the *Tiruvācakam* (*The Divine Utterances*), of another Śaivite poet-saint, said to be later than Tiruñāṉacampantar, who is Māṇikkavācakar.

Book

Tiru.Vi.Ka locates Ramalingar's attachment to the *Tiruvācakam* not in the latter's careful study of it but in a deeply intimate and subjective immersion into its contents that both formed and transformed him:

> Cuvāmikaḷ would repeatedly recite it and melt; melting he would lie around inactive; when his ears would hear the sound of the *Tiruvācakam*,

> when walking or wherever he was, he would become inactive and stand; tears of joy would flow from his eyes. There was no limit to the love Cuvāmikaḷ had for the *Tiruvācakam*.[25]

This was not a mere recitation of the book but an experiential immersion:

> Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ did not recite the *Tiruvācakam* thinking of its letters. He mingled with the *Tiruvācakam*. One might say he became *Tiruvācakam*.[26]

This immersive experience, *The Sacred Heart* says, arose for a particular reason. This reason can be found, it suggests, in the third song of the *Tiruvācakam* called *Tiruvaṇṭappakuti* (*The Section on the Cosmos*). Citing the last 20 lines of this song in which Māṇiṅkkavācakar sings ecstatically about how Śiva entered within him, filling him with a sweet bliss. Tiru.Vi.Ka cites this passage in support of his view that such an experience confers deathlessness and an end to rebirth. It is this state of liberation, he adds, that Ramalingar found in the *Tiruvācakam*, making this his sacred book. Citing extensively from the *Āḷuṭaiya aṭikaḷ aruḷmālai* (*The Garland on Tiruñāṉacampantar*), the last poem in the fifth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* in which Ramalingar speaks of the *Tiruvaṇṭappakuti* and its significance for him, Tiru.Vi.Ka laments that there used to be a time when the *Tiruvācakam* was sung in every street, unlike now.

Deity

The section on the deity contains the most copious citations of Ramalingar's poetry, all of it from the fifth book. Tiru.Vi.Ka begins with general statements about how all gods, from different religions, are identical and that when one worships a deity one is paying homage to the same divinity in all cases.[27] Ramalingar, he says, took Murukaṉ as his deity of worship. Murukaṉ he says is simply a word for "God" in Tamil.[28] He tells his audience to go to his book *Murukaṉ allatu aḻaku* (*Murukaṉ or beauty*) for further details.[29] He makes three important points about Ramalingar, the poetry he composed and his Murukaṉ worship. First, he establishes Ramalingar's emotional attachment to Murukaṉ as similar to his love for Tiruñāṉacampantar and his works:

> Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ started to worship the god Murukaṉ already in his youth. Aṭikaḷ adhered closely to the worship of Murukaṉ. He went to the Taṇikai mountain,[30] saw God and beseeching regarding his sorrows, prayed and prayed and having wept repeatedly, saw the path to salvation. The tears of Aṭikaḷ, placing Taṇikai in his heart, cleansed him and also gave him the higher stage.[31]

Second, Tiru.Vi.Ka shows that the path referred to here is the seeking out only of the company of the good and avoiding the company of the bad.

It is this decision of Ramalingar, expressed in very early poems from the first book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, like *Iranta viṇappam* (*The Petition of Entreaty*) and *Poṟukkāppattu* (*The Ten Verses on Unbearability*) which cleanse him by the time the poetry of the fifth book is composed and prepares him for his exalted religious state in the sixth and final book of the corpus. Thus, finally, *The Sacred Heart* also adheres to a familiar trope of charting a poet-saint's religious journey, and hence his biography, through an emplotment based on the poetry, matching the themes in the latter with the historical moments of the former.

There are some fairly transparent hermeneutical moves that Tiru.Vi.Ka makes in these sections of *The Scared Heart* that merit scrutiny. Interpreting Ramalingar through the prism of one guru, one book, and one god shows his interest in providing the framework of a historicized religion to the former's doctrines, one which could place it in a position of equivalency with "world religions", particularly within the well-defined features of a dominant paradigm of monotheism. As Dalmia (1996) has carefully shown, even within monotheism one must be aware of the heuristic differences between different kinds of monotheism, and Tiru.Vi.Ka seems to implicitly endorse the Christian model of a "historical ethical monotheism" that professes the absolute authority of scriptures, a single god, and prophets as articulated for Christianity, as his other contemporaries did in the age of socio-religious reform under colonialism.[32] The paradigm which *The Sacred Heart* seems to draw is, again implicitly, between Tiruñāṉacampantar and Jesus, Murukaṉ with the Christian God, and the *Tiruvācakam* with the Bible. In singling out Tiruñāṉacampantar as the guru of Ramalingar, and by extension the universal prophet who comes to the world at various moments, Tiru.Vi.Ka remains faithful to the Tamil Śaivasiddhāntic theology centred on Tiruñāṉacampantar as the guru of wisdom who shows one divine reality, which I have dealt with at some length in Chapters 2 and 5. Thus, as Tiru. Vi.Ka saw it while Tiruñāṉacampantar was someone who embodied divinity, like Jesus, or the Buddha, or one of the Jinas, Ramalingar was a seer who had received the direct vision of such a divine person in the form of Tiruñāṉacampantar and was able to transmit this to the world in this age.[33]

His declaration of the *Tiruvācakam* of Māṇikkavācakar as the sacred book not only mirrors the long-standing Tamil Śaivasiddhāntic veneration of the text[34] but also coalesces with the faithful transmission of this veneration in Orientalist scholarship on Tamil Śaivism that reached its definitive account in a work of translation which was undoubtedly available to Tiru. Vi.Ka by the time he wrote *The Sacred Heart*, encouraging him in his own reflections. This was G.U. Pope's translation of the *Tiruvācakam*, which was published in 1900. In the introductory section, where Pope discusses the rationale for his translation and the place of the *Tiruvācakam* within Tamil Śaivism, he first begins by acknowledging Māṇikkavācakar: "He is not however regarded in the Tamil lands as the greatest of the Çaiva saints, that honour being reserved for *Tiru Ñāna Sambandhar*, some of whose legends

I have elsewhere given".[35] After giving a detailed account of the life story of Māṇikkavācakar as it is reflected in the 16th-century *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* of Parañcōti Muṉivar, Pope writes:

> These poems, of which the translation is here printed, are daily sung throughout the whole Tamil country with tears of rapture, and committed to memory in every Çaiva temple by the people, amongst whom it is a traditional saying that "he whose heart is not melted by the Tiruvāçagam must have a stone for a heart".[36]

He concludes with two further significant remarks at the end of this introduction:

> Once for all, it is necessary to state that the influence of the Bhagavad-Gīta is to be traced in every part of Māṇikka-Vāçagar's poems. . . . The effect therefore of these songs – full of a living faith and devotion – was great and instantaneous. South India needed a personal God, an assurance of immortality, and a call to prayer. These it found in Māṇikka-Vāçagar's compositions.[37]

The parallels established between the emergence of the *Bhagavadgītā* as the "Bible of the Hindus"[38] and the need to find a similar Bible for the Tamils which would contain the same sentiments and ideology as it but rather attuned to a Tamil Śaivism are too obvious to be overlooked here. The overarching framework here for both the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Tiruvācakam* is what comes to be seen as India's *bhakti*-religion where *bhakti* comes to be narrativized in the service of nation building and the *bhakti* poets themselves come to be seen as the poet-saint integrators of the nation state.[39] Perceptions of a Tamil Śaivism refracted through its own bhakti-Bible the *Tiruvācakam* contributed to this general narrative and profoundly influenced Tiru.Vi.Ka's understanding not just of the role of the book within the "religion" but also of how to compare and place religions in relation to each other. In this endeavour, in Tiru.Vi.Ka, the concept of *camaracam* came to play an increasingly central role.

Camaracam in Tāyumāṉavar

Tiru.Vi.Ka begins the preface to another of his works which deals with the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, *Caivattiṉ camaracam*, with a quotation from Tāyumāṉavar, referencing the poem "*kallāliṉ*" that is numbered as poem number 606 in the Na. Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai edition.[40] The reference is to verse 25 of the poem:

> When entering and seeing different faiths,
> O Great Illuminating Being!
> then, there are no differing views,

Other than your play.
In the end, they are contained –
Like compounded river waters,
In one, endless, silent waterway.[41]

It is no mere coincidence that Tiru.Vi.Ka would begin with a quote from Tāyumāṉavar in light of the fact that the concept of *camaracam* in Tāyumāṉavar's poetry acquired great resonance in Ramalingar and beyond. Thus, this is a good moment to return, briefly, to the long genealogy of the concept of *camaracam* in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and the transformations it underwent along the way, until we come to Tiru.Vi.Ka's reworking of it via Ramalingar.

We saw briefly in Chapter 3 that some of the Śaivāgamas speak of *samarasa/ sāmarasya* or use the term *samarasībhāva*, a compound that means literally "of the same essence/taste/ flavour" to speak of the union of the soul at the highest level with Śiva. In commenting on the *Cittiyār*, Maṟaiñāṉacampantatēcikar had used *camaracīyapāvam* to speak of the state of mind of equivalence that the *Śivayogī* finds himself in when he reaches the higher levels of the *caṉmārkkam*.

Another fundamental doctrinal position in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta is the identity of the Vedas and the Siddhānta, placing them on par with each other, thereby conferring upon the Siddhānta the epithet of *Vaidika Caivam*. This doctrinal edifice is first put in place in the *Cittiyār* and subsequently elaborated both in Umāpati Śivācārya's writings and in the commentaries on the *Cittiyār*.

The significant sections of the *Cittiyār* for our purposes are Sutras 7–9 on the means to salvation (*cātaṉa iyal*) and Sutras 10–12 on the fruit of salvation (*payaṉ iyal*).

Thus, Sutra 8.2.15 essentially lays out the template for the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta's doctrinal position on the relationship of the Vedas/ Vedānta to the Śaivasiddhānta. The verse first tells us that the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas (*caivanūl*) are the originary works (*ātinūl*) given by Śiva himself. Other works which comment or elaborate on these are expository texts (*virinta nūlkaḷ*). Between the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas the former gives general instruction (*potu*) while the latter are works that impart the rare, excellent [teaching] (*aruñciṟappu nūl*). The latter comment by taking up the faultless contents of the Vedānta whose meaning is the end of the Vedas. All other works exist as prior (*pūrvam*, meaning they are the prima facie view which is eventually rebutted). The Śaivāgamas are the Conclusion (*siddhanta*).[42] This basic template of the *Cittiyār* comes to be elaborated in the six main commentaries on it in order to explicate doctrinally the coeval nature of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta as well as their doctrinal equivalence. By and large, this doctrinal foundation for the relationship between the Vedānta and the Siddhānta comes to be consolidated by the 16th century with the first commentary of Nirampalavaḻakiyar, mirroring

the conceptualization of the idea of the *Ubhayavedānta* on the part of the rival Śrīvaiṣṇavas.

The commentators begin with the assumption of the co-origin of the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas. Hence, it becomes necessary to validate why, if they have a common origin, they still form two separate revelations. Maṟaiñāṉacampantar says that the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas both emerged from the five faces of Śiva at the time of creation.[43] He then glosses the word *potu,* (used of the *Vedas* with *cāmānyam/sāmānya*) or general and adds that the 28 *Āgama*s such as the *Kāmika,* etc., are texts that contain rare excellences (*ari ciṟappiṉai uṭaiya nūl*). He further explains that this division into the Vedas and the Śaivāgamas shows that the difference between the two sets of revelation lies in the distinction between those qualified for each of them (*adhikāribheda*). The Veda*s* are for those who follow the rules of caste and station in life (*vaṃāśramadharma*). The Śaivāgama*s* are for those who undergo the fourfold Śaiva initiations. The latter are superior in that they speak of only that which has been ascertained as the flawless content of the Vedānta.[44] Maṟaiñāṉacampantar quotes *Tirumantiram,* verse 2397 which echoes the terminology of the *Cittiyār* verse to substantiate these points. Śivāgrayogin reiterates these views and says that the knowledge given by the Vedas and the Agamas culminates in *śivajñāna* which is perfect knowledge. Because *Śaivam* is supported by the Vedas, it is called *Vaidika Śaivam.* Because it deals with *sāyujya* it is called *Uttara Śaivam.* Because there is no other faith to object to this, it is called *Siddhānta Śaivam.*[45]

As late as in the commentary of Civañāṉamuṉivar in the 18th century on this crucial verse we do not see any use of the word *camaracam* in speaking of the relationship between the Vedānta and the Siddhānta. Thus, Civañāṉamuṉivar simply reiterates what has been said about the Śaivāgamas as explications of the contents of the Upaniṣads, making them on par with the latter.[46]

Significantly, it is important to see that neither the Cittiyār nor any of the commentators use the word camaracam to speak of this relationship of co-equivalence between the Vedānta and the Siddhānta. Rather, the word is used sparingly and exclusively to speak of the state of union of the soul and Śiva and, hence, is used in the context of the experience of Śiva in the caṉmārkkam, also called śivānubhūti.

It is not the intention of this book, or of this particular chapter within it, to trace the entire textual history of *camaracam* in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta nor even an extensive enquiry into its many textual contexts as has been done for *cīvakāruṇyam.* Thus, it is more than plausible that we have the use of the idea of the *camaracam* of Vedānta and Siddhānta before the 17th century, before the emergence of Tāyumāṉavar's poetry. But we do not see the doctrinal evidence for it within the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ* or its commentaries, in that crucial textual passage where, if anywhere, we might expect this to be explicated. With Tāyumāṉavar we come to definitive textual evidence of this hermeneutical move, but here, again, we must exercise an abundance of caution and examine closely what he is saying when he uses this phrase.

As has been noted earlier, Tāyumāṉavar uses the word *camaracam* 16 times in his entire poetic corpus and, within this, ten times in the refrain of a single poem,[47] a fairly meagre usage disproportionate to how it came to be seen as central to his religious vision. The first place we come across it is in Poem 2, titled *Paripūṇāṉantam* (*Complete Bliss*). The poem has two motifs: the imperfect nature of the poet is one and this is contrasted with the perfection of bliss that is described in various ways in the verses ending with the refrain at the end of each verse. This refrain goes, "Oh Complete Bliss that fills, without absence, everywhere one looks".[48] In verse 5, the following use of *camaracam* occurs:

> Always my deeds are your deeds,
> since my I-ness is such that it is absent without you,
> I am not other.
> This itself is the *camaraca* nature of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta.[49]

In Poem 4 *Ciṉmayāṉanta kuru* (*The Guru of the Bliss that is full of Consciousness*), the guru is Śiva himself who confers on one the experience of one's essential nature (*cōrūpānupūtikkāṭṭi*) and who is also the primary source of salvation that comes from the Siddhānta (*cittānta mukti mutal*). In verse 4 of the poem the poet talks of Śiva creation:

> You created
> the five-fold first gross materials,
> within that the divisions of the moving and the still,
> sound intelligence,
> books of the sacred scriptures,
> and religions, beginning with Caivam as the boundary.
> Beyond that, higher than religion,
> you created the silent *camaracam*.[50]

In Poem 5, *Maunakuru vaṇakkam* (*Homage to the Silent Guru*), he salutes the lineage of Aruṇanti Civācāriyār of the *Cittiyār* (*vāḻa aruḷiyananti marapu vāḻka*), as the lineage to which his guru belongs (*vīru civañāṉacittineṟi mauna upatēcakuruvē*). Then, in verse 3 he speaks of what the guru accomplishes for him:

> Oh Ñāṉakuru who comes and gives,
> so that one may know the expanse of the cosmos with the great directions,
> the laying down of the six religions
> and the state of steadiness of the *camaraca* of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta[51]

And in the very next verse he praises the guru for keeping him away from materialist doctrines and giving him the experience of Śiva (*śivānubhūti*)

that is described as the *camaracam* of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta.[52] But perhaps the most visible usage of this phrase occurs in the decade which is Poem 10 called *Cittar kaṇam* (*Assembly of Siddhas*), in which each verse ends with the same refrain: Oh assembly of wondrous *Cittar*s who have obtained that good state of *camaracam* of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta (*vētānta cittānta camaraca naṉṉilaip peṟṟa vitakkac cittarkaṇamē*).

When all these instances of the use of this phrase are taken together they overwhelmingly place Tāyumāṉavar's doctrinal vision as one which falls within the mainstream soteriology of the *caṉmārkkam* and what it confers in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. Repeatedly, he equates the highest salvational experience with a non-dual experience of Śiva, in almost each of the instances we have examined. In Poem 10 this experience is attributed to the Siddhas, but this in itself should not come as a surprise when we recollect the close doctrinal relationship between the *Uraiyāṭal* texts and the *Cittar* poetry which I have discussed in Chapter 3, showing that they converged in their understanding of the fruits of the *caṉmārkkam* and ultimate religious experience. In his fine study of Tāyumāṉavar, Manninezath concludes, "Having considered the different renderings of the word *samarasam* I am inclined to say that it is Tāyumāṉavar who used the word Vedānta Siddhānta *samarasam* in a unique way".[53] I would suggest that he is both right and wrong. Tāyumāṉavar is describing a soteriological experience for which the word *samarasībhāva* had already been used in the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, and his poetry complements this doctrinal edifice. *Nevertheless, it is uniquely in Tāyumāṉavar that we find the equivalence of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta, long established, now being described through the use of the word camaraca and this could well be his original contribution to the doctrinal edifice.* Further, by using the word *camaracam* of these two paths to revelation and referring, enigmatically, to a state of silent *camaracam* which is beyond all religious paths, including Śaivism in a single verse of Poem 4, Tāyumāṉavar allows for a new genealogy of the word to be constructed after him, which brings it into relationship with the word *camayam*, used to mean the different sectarian religious schools, which was not the case before. It remains for us to see how Ramalingar grappled with this legacy of Tāyumāṉavar in his own doctrines of *camaracam* before we return to Tiru.Vi.Ka.

Camaracam in Ramalingar

In this fourth volume of his magnificent edition of Ramalingar's poetic and prose corpus, Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai included an entire section called *Notes on the Sacred Utterances regarding the Activities of the Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* (*caṉmārkka caṅka vivakārattiruvārttaikkuṟippukaḷ*, henceforth, *The Notes*). It is in this section that we find the most details regarding what Ramalingar might have possibly meant by *camaracam* in his writings. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai warns us, in the first footnote to *The Notes* that they are not compiled from Ramalingar's own jottings. Rather, they are the notes of some of his closest circle

(the names are not given) who requested him to clarify his doctrinal views specifically on the nature of the *Ṣaṭanta Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam* and then took down his words.[54] Since they are random observations and comments made by Ramalingar at various times Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai also numbers them, presumably in the order they were noted down. As I had pointed out in Chapter 2, the name of Ramalingar's organization evolved with time, perhaps on the basis of his own evolving views on what it was meant to doctrinally stand for. In the first intimation about it in Note 12 of *The Notes*, it is still called the *Camaraca Vēta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*:

> The meaning of *Camaraca Vēta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* is this: take this to mean the group which practices the fourth path, which is the culmination of the book of knowledge that is common to all sectarian religions. The paths are four-fold: *tācamārkkam, catputtiramārkam, mittiramārkkam, caṉmārkkam.*[55]

So, in this first version Ramalingar speaks of the fourfold path of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta but now extends this path as the soteriological culmination given in the sacred book *common to all religions*. This establishes the universality of his *caṉmārkkam* and places it above all other religions, though it retains the terminology and doctrinal contours of the Siddhāntic *caṉmārkkam*.

In Note 83 of *The Notes* we have a discussion of *camaracam*:

> What *is camaracam*? Since it made the ends of all ends prior to itself and appears as posterior it became *camaracam*. The logic of this is – like becoming the pure *vindu/bindu* after negating these two, *vindu* and *paravindu/parabindu*; like becoming pure *Civam* after negating these two, *Civam* and *Paracivam/Paraśiva*; *Caṉmārkkam* and *Civacaṉmārkkam, that which rejected these two is Cuttacaṉmārkkam*. Thus it appears as *Ṣaṭanta Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam*.[56]

Here, Ramalingar appears to be using the term *camaracam* as synonymous in some sense with the word Siddhānta – that is the final or conclusive theological position that includes, subsumes, and goes beyond other doctrinal positions. The use of the phrase "the end of all ends" (*ellā antaṅkaḷiṉatu antam*) reminds us immediately of the phrase used as a self-description of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta. What is unusual here is Ramalingar expanding the meaning of the word *camaracam* beyond even Tāyumāṉavar implying "that which contains all other theological positions". In explicating this further in this passage he states that this *camaracam* refers to a *Caṉmārkkam* which is beyond the *bindu* and *parabindu*, the *Śiva* and *Paraśiva*, and the *Caṉmārkkam* and *Śivacaṉmārkkam*.[57] In speaking of the first two of these sets of binaries, Ramalingar is evidently referring to the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Śivādvaita/Vīraśaiva doctrines, to the ontological categories (*tattva*s) in the systems. In the case of Śiva we are speaking of the highest *tattva* of

the 36 enumerated in the Śaivasiddhānta while with Paraśiva we have the highest principle of Śivādvaita/Vīraśaivism who stands beyond the 36 *tattvas*.[58] Thus, effectively, Ramalingar is speaking of his religious doctrines as incorporating and superseding both doctrinal systems. The most enigmatic part relates to the final set of binaries, where the implication seems to be that his *caṉmārkkam* rejects all other soteriological paths as well as that of the Śaivasiddhānta, forging an entirely new one, as a result.

The final comments we have of relevance for our understanding of *camaracam* in *The Notes* is in Note 89:

> There is *camaracam* also in different *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* religions.[59] There is the *camaracam* of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta, of *Yokānta/Yogānta* and *Kālānta*, *Pōtānta/Bodhānta* and *Nātānta/Nādānta*. Higher than this is the *ṣaṭānta camaracam*. Higher than this is the *caṉmārkka camaracam*. Higher than this is the *cuttacamaracam*. Hence, if one incorporates *camaracam* into the *cuttacaṉmārkkam* there is *Cutta Camaraca Caṉmārkkam*. These, on the basis of the axiom of preceding and succeeding, like the locks on the outer gate, unite in the *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam*. The means to this in one way is the *ṣaṭanta camaracam*.[60]

Here, Ramalingar is proposing a hierarchy of sorts – the *camaracam* of his particular *Caṉmārkkam* lies beyond the *camaracam* that is the ultimate aim of six other "ends" (*antam*), which are hierarchically ordered stages of practice within the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta – the order being *kalānta*, *nādānta*, *yogānta*, *bodhānta*, *vedānta*, and *siddhānta* – culminating in the Siddhānta as the highest.[61] In his doxographic remarks here Ramalingar places his practice in two stages –the *camaracam* that lies beyond the six ends, and hence beyond the Siddhānta entirely, and the pure *camaracam* (*cuttacamaracam*), which is the highest stage of all.[62] The former is the means to the latter, he says.

I speak of a doxographic approach here because understanding how it works illuminates much about Ramalingar's religion. In his penetrating yet brief comments on traditional Indian doxographies Halbfass points out that the doxographic approach must be appreciated not so much for the accuracy with which it gives us information about other religious systems but for what it can tell us about a certain self-awareness on the part of the doxographer and his/her understanding of their own system.

He further shows us that doxographic approaches to religion is very deep-rooted in classical Indian ways of organizing different and competing systems of thought:

> [T]hey are more than merely incidental, for they provide symptomatic testimony of a contextuality that is essential to Indian thought, a deeply rooted tendency to articulate one's own position by referring to, and trying to dispose of, other points of view, as well as by integrating one's own views into the entire framework of the tradition.[63]

We have irrefutable evidence in his many writings that Ramalingar positions his system within a Tamil Śaiva landscape, with the two dominant systems he took into account being that of the Siddhānta and the Vīraśaiva. Indeed, it can be clearly seen that one cannot understand Ramalingar's *caṉmārkkam*, or the concepts intrinsic to it like *cīvakāruṇyam* (as we saw earlier) or *camaracam*, without seeing it contextually within the doxography he enfolded it within. At the same time, through the concept of *camaracam* he incorporates and supersedes their doctrines in what Halbfass, relying in Paul Hacker, would call, "a hierarchically subsuming inclusivism".[64] There must, of course, also be cogent reasons provided for why his particular *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* could be placed at the peak of all systems and is superior to them. The answer to this question lies again in a brief section of *The Notes*. In Note 33 of *The Notes* Ramalingar says:

> The culmination of the *caṉmārkkam* is nothing other than to reveal the teachings of non-dying. The person who dies is someone who has not obtained the condition of *caṉmārkkam*. Only the person who does not die is a *caṉmārkki*.[65]

Lest there be some lack of clarity by what is meant by non-dying Ramalingar makes it clear in Note 105 of *The Notes* that it is about obtaining omnipotence and about being rid of death, even if one is dead, by being awakened to life in the same body which one had inhabited before death. *It is about obtaining a permanent and immortal physical body*. Thus, it is not about obtaining a permanent afterlife but a permanent and immortal body in this life, or if one is already dead, to awaken to a new and permanent immortality when the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* becomes a reality on earth. Thus, he speaks of Tāyumāṉavar and others who had not been *caṉmārkki*s in their time but can now be, retrospectively, incorporated into Ramalingar's religion:

> Tāyumāṉavar and others were not *Cutta Caṉmārkki*s. One can say that they were, in a way, *Mata Caṉmārkkis*.[66] ***In this there is no permanent body.***[67] This is only a path to the means, not to the end. Next, when the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* flourishes all of them will obtain life and return again. They will come with special wisdom even greater than before as those fit for the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam*. They will mingle as those who have accomplished [the goal] and without duality.[68]

This final accomplishment of the *caṉmārkki*s, of obtaining a permanent deathless body, is what makes it the highest religion, which supersedes all others. In an important poem in the final book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* we find this unequivocally stated again. The poem is called *Maraṇamilāpperuvāḻvu* (*Deathless Great Life*), in which Śiva as Naṭarāja is evoked, the reference to the coming of the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* is made and that, with its coming, one will also obtain the permanent and immortal physical body.[69]

Thus, in the final analysis, Ramalingar's *camaracam* means the incorporation and transcendence of both the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and the Vīraśaiva Śivādvaita to stand alone in a new Śaiva summit of its own, promising a supreme goal which is not attainable in the other two systems – of a permanent and immortal physical body on earth, at the moment of liberation. This is when Ramalingar's God, the Aruṭperuñcōti Āṉtavar, will come down to the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai* in Vadalur and take in Ramalingar's followers into his fold.

When we turn to Tiru.Vi.Ka we see that he takes both these claims seriously – that of *camaracam* as the ordering principle for all religious doctrines and the idea of physical immortality – and transforms them to construct a modern and cosmopolitan Śaiva religion, of which Ramalingar, among others, is a world teacher.

Tiru.Vi.Ka's *Camaracam*

In order to understand how Tiru.Vi.Ka reconceptualizes the *camaracam* of Ramalingar we first need to go into his understanding of the *caṉmārkkam*. For Tiru.Vi.Ka, the path that Ramalingar teaches is seen not so much as a separate religion but as the content, and hence the real basis, of all religions:

> That which is *caṉmārkkam* is referred to by the names of many religions (*camayaṅkaḷ*) in the world. In each of those religions they focus on *caṉmārkkam* alone.[70]

And later:

> It is the truth that all the religions of the world have as their focus only *caṉmārkkam*. Without understanding their subtleties, people take into account only the names of the religions, abandon the path of the religions, and as religious fanatics have staged many wars in the world; laid down many laws. Henceforth, instead of the names of those religions it is appropriate that they speak of the *caṉmārkkam* which abides within them.[71]

This idea of the *caṉmārkkam* as the religion that undergirds all religion is explored more fully in another work of his, *Caivattiṉ camaracam*, which had come out in 1925, a few years before *The Sacred Heart*. The occasion for the former's publication was another keynote address he gave – this time for the *Tūttukkuṭi Caiva Cittānta Capai* in 1924. This address was expanded into *Caivattiṉ camaracam* and published in 1925. In it Tiru.Vi.Ka begins with a definition of *camayam* which he equates with religion:

> Religion (*camayam*) is one path of right conduct (*aṟavaḻi*) to obtain God that souls take up and follow.[72]

Further down he adds the following statements:

> It is religion (*camayam*) alone that is capable of uniting all those nationalists and those from different sections of society who reek of differentiation (*vēṟṟumai nāṟṟam*).

And additionally:

> Religion (*camayam*) alone is capable of establishing permanently friendship between humans (*āṉma nēyam*) and the privilege of intimacy of brotherhood (*cakōtara urimai*).[73]

Further:

> In many religions the thread of life exists within, which is *Camaraca Caṉmārkkam*. That *Camaraca Caṉmārkkam* alone is the religion of God.[74]

Saying this Tiru.Vi.Ka equates the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta with the *Camaraca Caṉmārkkam* and traces its history as well as the history of *camaracam* through this narrative. He adheres to what had become the traditional historiography of the textual tradition by the 17th century at the latest, with the core of the canon comprising the *Tirumuṟai* and the *Meykaṇṭacāttiraṅkaḷ*.

When we return to *The Sacred Heart* we find a comprehensive account of his definition of *camaracam* and its relation to religion/*camayam*. He begins by telling us that to speak of *camaracam* has become fashionable in these times. It is something that everyone pays lip service to, but none follows it. There are certain reasons why it is not followed, and these reasons might be listed as having a bad disposition (*aḻukkāṟu*), desires (*avā*), or naiveté (*vekuḷi*). But one can still attain *camaracam* if one adheres to a certain code of conduct and thinks in a certain way. Saying this Tiru.Vi.Ka lists four important issues to consider relating to one's land, language, religion, and caste. He points to the importance of patriotism without jingoism. One's love for one's country must not lead to inflicting pain on other countries. Nowadays, he says we see how the people of one country covet the wealth of another. This is unjust. The feeling of *camaracam* (*camaraca uṇarvu*) is about the cultivation of the brotherhood of nations. The second issue is that of language nationalism and how this is wrong when we regard as the enemy someone who speaks another language. All languages, he says, come from the same source. The third problem is religious fanaticism (*camaya veṟi*). The idea of a plurality of religions together with the love for one's own destroys *camaracam*. Finally, there is a problem unique to India, and this is that of caste. People, he says, treat caste as their religion and worship it. If one were to listen to Ramalingar, take him seriously see how he even built a temple in Vadalur, which was not restricted to a particular caste but open to all, a *camaraca* temple, then one would learn.[75] Passages from his other work, *Caivattiṉ camaracam*,

corroborate Tiru.Vi.Ka's revulsion with certain contemporary discourses relating to language and caste, which he saw as detrimental to *camaracam*. He had pointed out that to take the view that both Aryans and Dravidians gave the Tamil country both the northern and the southern languages of Sanskrit and Tamil and the Vedas and the Vedānta would be a healthy attitude in the religious world. But the demon of prejudice (*apimāṉap pēy*), he mockingly comments, will not allow us to worship the deity of research! Thus, there is the reduction of the poet-saints of Śaivism to their caste status, he concludes in *Caivattiṉ Camaracam*, doing a disservice to those who had gone beyond all caste differences to be united with Śiva.[76]

Finally, in *The Sacred Heart*, Tiru.Vi.Ka culminates his discussion of *camaracam* by dovetailing with the idea of the *caṉmārkkam* saying, "Religion (*camayam*) is a single thing. That itself is *camaracam*", and concludes:

> *Camaracam* is to not be caught up in and to stand beyond country, language, religious fanaticism, caste etc. The knowledge of *camaracam* is to enter into all peoples, all languages, persons of all religions, all castes. . . . Only that *camaracam* will approach the sight of God.[77]

Camaracam in Tiru.Vi.Ka's concept of religion takes it in a different hermeneutical direction than Ramalingar. In Ramalingar it is central to a new religion that strongly gestures towards a certain universal and utopian movement. Simultaneously, it is still anchored to a broadly Śaivite soteriology that remains embedded in a doxographical framework that owes its structuring to a pre-modern way of relating to other religious traditions. With Tiru.Vi.Ka, at first glance, the doxographic approach aligns itself with the approach of other figures of Modern Hinduism such as Vivekananda and Gandhi. Even while following an inclusivistic model as it does, we are more usefully served by the exploration of such a comparative and unifying approach to religions under the rubric of "eclecticism", explored by Hatcher (1999). A comment like that of Swami Prabhavananda (1893–1976) on religion would have found Tiru.Vi.Ka in full agreement with it:

> I am not a Christian, I am not a theologian. I have not read the Bible interpretations of great Christian scholars. I have studied the New Testament as I have studied the scriptures of my own religion, Vedanta. Vedanta, which evolved from the Vedas, the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, teaches that all religions are true inasmuch as they lead to one and the same goal – God-realization. My religion therefore accepts and revers all their great prophets, spiritual teachers, and aspects of the Godhead worshipped in different faiths, considering them to be manifestations of one underlying truth.[78]

As Hatcher shows, this Modern Hindu approach in Gandhi and in Vivekananda is undergirded, from their perspective, by the idea of free choice

and mutual respect – that one can and, indeed, was obliged to choose and make one's own the features of any other religion that would enrich one's own religion. At the same time, Hatcher referring to Pannikar suggests, one can also speak about at least two different typologies of eclecticism. The one which Pannikar calls a "democratic eclecticism" aims at arriving at the lowest common denominator of agreement between what all religions might arrive at a consensus on. The other is an "aristocratic eclecticism" which, "picks up the best of each system so as to offer the cream, so to speak, of the different human experiences".[79] From this analytical perspective and considering his hermeneutic and doxographical moves, Tiru.Vi.Ka's idea of the *camaracam* of all religions seems a classic aristocratic eclecticism – where *camaracam* is the very distilled essence at the heart of all religions that leads to the highest goals as well as religious harmony. From a more critical perspective, of the sort Halbfass employs, this very "tolerance" and "openness" can be regarded as "a form of self-assertion" behind which lurk hegemonic inclinations particularly when it comes to establishing the superior status of India as a nation state in the "spiritual" versus the "material" domains. In this context it is particularly interesting to see how Tiru.Vi.Ka frames his arrival at *camaracam* in the autobiographical context. In Chapter 11 of his *Vāḻkkaikkuṟippukaḷ* he begins with Śaivism as his birthright to continuing to adhere to Śaivism as an exciting, polemically dynamic religion that he came to know intimately through Katiṟvēṟpiḷḷai's ceaseless disputations and the many court cases he was embroiled in. The memoir then moves on to narrate his long involvement from a very young age in Śaiva associational activity. Then, having established his Śaivite credentials, the chapter deals with Vaiṣṇavism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, his Christian friends, a short note on Pentecostalism, to come to the final section of his own beliefs, which echo those in the two books we examined. Thus, the memoir attempts to show the journey of a religious seeker who dares to be open to all religions and arrives at an eclectic position after the search. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to conflate Tiru.Vi.Ka's eclecticism with say, that of Swami Vivekananda. We have to understand that each of these final positions despite their supposed similarity is arrived at through subjective experiences and convictions that might differ markedly from each other. In Tiru.Vi.Ka *camaracam* as the basis and essence of all religions has, for all intents and purposes, been stretched far beyond its primarily soteriological context to become the foundation of both political and social self-fashioning. In Tiru.Vi.Ka's call for how it can engender mutual respect and an end to the covetousness of nations we see the critique of colonialism which must have been particularly relevant to him in the immediate aftermath of that extraordinary phase of passionate political mobilization that constituted the Swadeshi movement in the Madras Presidency between 1905 and 1911. Indeed, Tiru.Vi.Ka himself stood at the centre of the Swadeshi campaign as the new kind of vernacular politician that the first decades

of the 20th century threw up.[80] The instantiation of such political action must have seemed to him to be a concrete example of *camaracam* not just in political but also in social action, inasmuch as the Swadeshi movement saw the emergence and the creation of a mass public, traversing caste and social differentiation. Appealing for *camaracam* therefore, in Tiru.Vi.Ka, is also an appeal to nurture and strengthen that ability to forge alliances through a common humanity. Similarly, his insistence on finding common grounds between what he saw as the polarizing discourses of Aryan and Dravidian, between Sanskrit and Tamil and his distaste for a deconstruction of the discourse of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta to understand the caste structures which underpinned it must be seen from this perspective of the belief in *camaracam* as not just as an equalizing but a uniting principle. The appeal to *camaracam* as an antidote to what he saw as divisive identity politics must also be understood within an additional framework – the deep love and inspiration he found in Gandhi and his commitment to Marxism simultaneously.[81] This turned him in his maturity into a Gandhian-Marxist, believing in a common humanity and the brotherhood of both men and nations and led him to believe for the rest of his life in what he saw as the significance of Gandhi's infusion of religion into politics, which was to give politics an ethical turn, making it a form of right behaviour, rather than just a political striving for equality (as Marxism without Gandhianism would be for him) or a form of power that some tended to worship.[82] It cannot be the objective of this chapter to enter into the fascinating history of Tiru.Vi.Ka's political fashioning and his seminal role in the emergence of the labour movement in 1918 in the Madras Presidency.[83] But, it is evident that when examined together all of his ideological commitments pushed him in the direction of an eclecticism which cannot be easily labelled as either solely "democratic" or "aristocratic" but one which postulated a universal essence of all religions on the basis of the hard-won experience of working with others to forge consensus and on the basis of an ideological commitment to his own idiosyncratic yet deeply felt Gandhian-Marxism. Also, it should be made clear that when we see here how Tiru.Vi.Ka transformed Ramalingar's *camaracam* into a basis and instrument for political and social self-fashioning it is we who understand this to be a transformation of the latter's conceptual world – from Tiru.Vi.Ka's perspective there was no difference between what Ramalingar said and thought and what he himself had come to understand when it comes to a universal religious essence. But, Tiru.Vi.Ka's religious leaning towards universals common to all religions does not stop at his understanding of *camaracam* alone. There was another important strand of his thinking which underpinned such a belief in universals. This related to his views on nature which, in turn, enabled him to take Ramalingar's views on immortality seriously while also transforming the latter into a doctrine that reconciled the laws of nature, (understood as a science) and religion.

Nature, Spiritualism, and Clairvoyance

In his early work *Caivattiṉ camaracam* posits nature as the original religion of the ancient Tamils, embodied in the God Murukaṉ:

> The ancient Tamils must have been aware of that imperishable beauty that is united with and inseparable from nature, as long as they had an abode in nature, eating natural foods, wearing natural clothes, studying the book of nature known as the world, uniting with nature, singing of it, and leading a life of happiness . . . The Tamil people had praised that great beauty as Murukaṉ and as the complete, and foremost Being.[84]

When we turn to how he linked his views on nature with Ramalingar's religion, we must look at the very first chapter of *The Sacred Heart* where he discusses the word *caṉmārkkam*. He begins by parsing the compound: *caṉ* is the word *sat* – meaning truth (*uṇmai*) and *mārkkam* which means path (*vaḻi*). Then he elaborates:

> What is the path of truth? Many will speak of this in various ways. When we browse and investigate those we obtain one thing. That is nature (*iyaṟkai*). Nature is that path which invokes that excellent thing called truth. That precious thing called *Sat*, for its part, lies beyond the mind. By means of what can we grasp the truth of something like that? We understand it through nature. Nature is the body of that excellent thing called *Sat*. It is only through that body that we can know the soul that is the excellent thing.[85]

The soul is ultimately nothing other than a part of this divinity which is nature. It is this truth, he tells us, that Ramalingar also imparted. Here he quotes from Ramalingar's poetry and prose to substantiate this view. One quote is from *Maraṇamilāp peruvāḻvu* (*The Great Deathless Life*), verse 3, where Ramalingar uses the phrase "*caṉmārkkac cattiyamē iyaṟkkaiyuṇmait taṉippatiyē*" equating *caṉmārkkam* with truth and nature. Another is from his petition titled *Camaraca cutta caṉmārkka cattiya ñāṉa viṇṇappam* (*The Petition of Truth and Wisdom concerning the Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam*), where Ramalingar addresses the Gracious, Great Light with manifold epithets linked to the word *iyaṟkai*, such as that object which is made up of the truth of nature (*iyaṟkkaiy uṇmai*) and as the sole, great abode (*taṉipperumpatam*) that illumines nature. Also, Tiru.Vi.Ka tells us that in teaching this Ramalingar stands in the line of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta for sections of the *Cittiyār*, the *Tēvāram*, and the *Tiruvācakam* teach the same.

Tiru.Vi.Ka's professed love of nature and his view of the ultimate and quintessentially Tamil deity as the embodiment of it, as well as his identification of the divinity behind Ramalingar's *caṉmārkkam* also as nature, was no mere rhetoric or hyperbole. Ample evidence of a sensibility, nurtured

from a very young age, that was keenly attuned to the pleasures and solace that nature offers are to be found in the *Vāḻkkaikkuṟippukaḷ*. In it the young boy Tiru.Vi.Ka spends his entire boyhood playing outdoors with friends in a verdant, grove-filled city that was once Madras, the loss of whose many green spaces he laments in his old age. Most importantly, nature, or *iyaṟkai*, is educative. It is no mere coincidence that Tiru.Vi.Ka's reflections on nature, or what one might call his philosophy of it, is to be found in the seventh chapter of the *Vāḻkkaikkuṟippukaḷ*, titled *Kalvi* (*Education*). In this chapter he talks about his communing with nature, his love of the seashore and the mountains, the birds flitting across the sky, and the philosophical musings the sight of nature engendered in him. After speaking of this, he says:

> In this way the education from nature increases. As that education increases what do we see? That all aspects of nature are the expansion of one thing. Through that the universal saying, "All places are the hometown, all people are kindred"[86] becomes clear. Goodness (*potumai*), right conduct (*aṟam*), graciousness (*antaṇmai*) – these are all one. Goodness is the way of nature. This way of nature indeed is the Tamil way. . . . I do not take this Tamil way as belonging to the Tamils or belonging to the Tamil region. I take it as a universal way (*potu neṟi*), as right conduct and as graciousness alone.[87]

In Tiru.Vi.Ka's views on nature it would not be too far-fetched to see some implicit influence, via his exposure to Subramania Bharatiyar's thoughts and writings, of the English Romantic poets such as Shelley and Wordsworth.[88] Like in Wordsworth, where the rural approximates to the primeval, in Tiru.Vi.Ka's case, the ancient Tamils are closer to nature and still retain modes of relating to nature and a close connection with it that has been lost to modernity. Like in Romantic thought the landscape itself offers us insights into a deeper and truer reality as well as reminds us of the true enchantments of the world. The connection between nature and theology is established, as Charles Taylor points out in discussing the Romantics, by equating the turn towards the nature within us or the impulse of nature within us as a transformation of the will – which is not dissimilar to the idea of opening oneself up to the grace of God from a religious perspective.[89] In Tiru.Vi.Ka this explicit equation between nature, our recognition of it as the ultimate divinity within us and the *caṉmārkkam*, and his conviction that this was as much Ramalingar's theology as his own, makes Ramalingar now the prophet of a religion that asks of us a commitment to nature and to live in sympathy with it. Also, this, in turn, meant that one had to be particularly open to ways of thinking about the world that would reconcile nature, the laws of science or modernization, and religion. More specifically, Tiru.Vi.Ka sought for the evidence that reconciled mind and matter as part of one continuum to substantiate "the art of non-dying" (*cākākkalai*) or immortality

in Ramalingar with modern and scientific foundations. In this quest to do so, Tiru.Vi.Ka believed he found right answers in Victorian spiritualism and more specifically in the writings of Oliver Lodge (1851–1940), a renowned Victorian-era physicist at the forefront of theories of electromagnetism and, eventually, also a leading spiritualist who propounded a theory of ether that might also be considered an "ether theology".

Tiru.Vi.Ka references Oliver Lodge in *The Sacred Heart* in the following passage:

> One of the truths that became clear in my investigations is that there is a state called the skill of non-dying. I have no doubt, no divergence of opinion, no confusion regarding that. I have firm conviction about that state. That great state emphasized, collectively, by the ancients of our land in now being determined by many experts from the western lands. The many truths investigated and seen by great thinkers such as Sir Oliver Lodge removed my doubts, divergences of opinion and confusion. Now I have no doubt about this state of non-dying. It is my duty to make an effort to obtain that state.[90]

In the *Vāḻkkaikkuṟippukaḷ*, in his eleventh chapter on religion Tiru.Vi.Ka further clarifies what he sees as Oliver Lodge's contribution to religious thought:

> In former times in the West too a few people who belonged to the *caṉmārkkam*, like Socrates, were born. In later times others such as Swedenborg, Tolstoy, Oliver Lodge, Romain Rolland, Inston etc., appeared. Oliver Lodge explained that inert matter (*caṭam/jaḍa*) does not stand separated and solitary from sentience (*cit)* and that the world is the result of the union of the two, and departed. Due to his teachings the scientific world also is following the vision of the *caṉmārkkam*.[91]

In her brilliant study of the writings of Oliver Lodge, Raia (2007) shows us that the Victorian preoccupation with reconciling science and religion was not just actively pursued by a few eccentrics outside the mainstream of dominant discourses. Rather, "such metaphysical or fantastic speculation flourished in the midst (and not just in the margins) of mainstream Victorian scientific thinking throughout the nineteenth century".[92] Lodge's own scientific–religious views evolved in this context. Having directly witnessed and seen the seemingly irrefutable validity of paranormal phenomena such as levitation and mediumship, Lodge had subjected them to what he considered rigorous scientific testing and had come to believe in their validity. "To Lodge's thinking, the only unacceptable hypothesis (i.e., one that smacked of the supernatural), was to explain these phenomena as mind 'acting at a distance' on matter". To a man of science, as Lodge conceived of himself, such a view must be rejected in favour of a scientific explanation.

Thus, he arrived at a theory of ether. This was seen as the exuding of ether by a medium in a séance:

> mediating ether [was that] through which the medium's psychic force operated on her physical surroundings. The existence of ether had been a central tenet of scientific orthodoxy since 1802, when light was determined to be a wave and ether the universal medium in which it propagated. This ether was at once an ontological mystery and an operational fact, dominating and revolutionizing the physics of the nineteenth century. Its conceptual plasticity allowed Lodge the latitude to propose that the strange phenomena he avowedly witnessed . . . might ultimately be traced to an etheric substratum interacting with and conforming to the shape of the medium's thoughts.[93]

For Lodge, ether is where consciousness also floats, unrestricted to the mere physical brain, and arising from the interaction between matter and the field surrounding it. And, further, as Raia points out, like Newton's theory of gravity a theory of ether still made room for theology.

> It offered a degree of order and transparency to the operations of the universe while yet preserving its innermost ontological mystery. If for Newton gravity was the active presence of God's will working everywhere in the world at once (a primary cause in a physical world of secondary causes and effects), then for spiritualists and other believers, the ether might prove some rarified form of His corporeal essence, the medium by which ghostly spectres haunted séance circles and apparitions appeared to soothe the bereaved.[94]

The summation of Lodge's ether theology is as follows:

> Human beings, structured by the confluence of these ultimate energies of mind and motion, were simultaneously embodied and conscious, empirical and spiritual, created and creative, evolving freely in a morally determined universe and living on after death in the permanence of divine memory.[95]

By the time he came to write *The Sacred Heart* in the first decades of the 1920s, Tiru.Vi.Ka must have read and absorbed some of Oliver Lodge's works such *as Ether and Space* (1909) and *Raymond, or life and death* (1910), in which he had had started to explore his ether theory. For an autodidact like Tiru.Vi.Ka, a spiritual seeker from a very young age and guided by a strong sense of moral purpose, Lodge's writings would open the way to reconcile "those days" and "these days" and bridge what he saw as an artificial chasm between the two, between religion and science, where in reality none existed. He would also have been affirmed in these predilections by

the friendly acquaintanceship he had forged with *The Theosophical Society* under Annie Besant, (which he would have seen as espousing similar aims), further strengthened by his work together with B.P. Wadia, an ardent Theosophist, in the founding of the labour movement in the Madras Presidency in 1918.[96] In the diversity of his cosmopolitan interests and his desire to animate and confirm his religious concerns through the latest scientific discoveries, Tiru.Vi.Ka typifies what Manjapra (2010), following Sartori (2008), has called the "parochial cosmopolitan", a figure he suggests is found all over Asia in the early 20th century. These are figures who transcend an assumed postcolonial dichotomy of the "authentic local and the heteronomous global" seeking both the autonomy of forging independent beliefs as part of bourgeois selfhood while, at the same time, trying to establish social solidarities on the basis of being simply human, in the context of an anticolonial struggle. Their ideologies and life histories, indeed, it has been suggested accounted for the "anticipatory quality of colonial cosmopolitanism".[97] In his reading, or re-reading of Ramalingar, Tiru.Vi. Ka infuses the latter with the same colonial cosmopolitanism, bringing him into an implicit dialogue with an anticipated Tamil nationhood and part of a larger Indian nation.

From Tiru.Vi.Ka's perspective, what Ramalingar wrote and Oliver Lodge wrote converge in the same theology – only expressed in a different language. Both of them harken to an understanding of immortality that converges in the same beliefs. It is evident that when Tiru.Vi.Ka refers to the long religious tradition of the teaching of immortality in India, he is also placing Ramalingar within the lineage of those who taught it. Returning to his discussion of this teaching in Ramalingar, he says:

> Ramalinga Swamigal led his life focused on the state of non-dying as the ultimate goal. Through pure, good thoughts he refined the subtle body (*nuṇ uṭal*) . . . . Swamigal obtained a heart which God takes as his temple by thinking and thinking of him, weeping and weeping and melting and melting. Through that great wealth Swamigal was soaked in bliss, filled with bliss, and became the form of bliss. Can a form of bliss attract a state of dying? It will never do so. Swamigal rejoiced in bliss and obtained the state of non-dying.[98]

Thus, in Tiru.Vi.Ka, Ramalingar's theological position on the immortality of the physical body is avoided and elided into an affirmation of the immortality of a non-physical kind and a state of ultimate bliss which gestures to its more Siddhāntic roots. Nevertheless, this is not the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta in its orthodox form but a soteriology that emerges out of "a new cultural synthesis striving to thoroughly modernize the boundaries of belief".[99] Ramalingar himself stands at a crossroads which looks back to an ancient religion, Śaivite in its contours but really the essence of all religions and, hence, a universal religion. Simultaneously, he looks forward to a new world where

the shibboleths of sectarian boundaries and caste are rendered irrelevant and anticipates the discoveries of the world of science which lends a new perspective, authority, and vocabulary to the eternal verities of all religion. In this historiography he becomes a figure both timeless and yet prescient, the ancient prophet of a new scientific and humanistic age.

Notes

1 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:5–6).
2 Arnold and Blackburn (2004:8). The exception in the Tamil context to this general trend was the early 18th-century set of diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai an 18th-century *dubashi,* a word Shulman translates as translator and commercial factotum, of the French governor of Pondicherry, who both kept a dairy and also commissioned a Sanskrit biography. On this, see Shulman (2004).
3 Arnold and Blackburn (2004:19).
4 Kaviraj (2004:97).
5 Venkatachalapathy (2009:33).
6 Venkatachalapathy (2009:36–43).
7 Udaya Kumar (2016:10).
8 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:3).
9 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:13–14).
10 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:15).
11 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:130).
12 On this, see Chapter 3.
13 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:131–132).
14 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:132).
15 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:133).
16 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:135–136).
17 Translated by McGlashan (2006:236).
18 Peterson (1998:181):

> The legend of the impalement of the Jain monks at Madurai has had a lasting impact on popular Tamil Saiva constructions of Jains from the Cola period onward. As Paul Dundas (1992:109–110) points out, while there is no record of an actual massacre having taken place, the legend (at some point in the tradition the number of Jains who were impaled got fixed at eight thousand) might well be a representation of the triumph of Agamic Saivism's triumph over Jain asceticism, with the stakes of impalement perhaps representing the Vedic yupa sacrifical post. Alternatively, the narrative may be read as a construction of an actual exodus of Jains from the Madurai area on account of persecution or economic hardship, as indicated by a gap of about six hundred years in the inscriptions at the Jain monastic site in Madurai (ibid.). The legend itself is reiterated with embellishments in post-Nampi hagiographical narratives, and reinterpreted by major medieval Tamil poets (e.g., Ottakkuttar, in the *Takkayakapparani*). Later interpreters vary in their opinions as to Campantar's role in the impalement. Nampi does not say whether Campantar actively participated in the impalement decree, but celebrates it as a glorious (and gory) climax to Campantar's career as vindicator of Saivism. Similar views emerge in the accounts in the local Puranas of Madurai (e.g., *Tiruvilaiyatal Puranam*), following which the event is reenacted as part of the annual festival at the Minaksi-Siva temple in Madurai.

19 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:136).
20 For a short biography of Centiṉātaiyar, see Kaṇēcaiyar (1939:164–176).

21 Centiṉātaiyar (1904:8).
22 Centiṉātaiyar (1904:21): *neṟpayirkaḷai vaḷaravoṭṭātu taṭuttu iṭaiyūṟu viḷaikkum kaḷaikaḷaip paṟittal pāpamākātal pōlavum. . .*
23 Centiṉātaiyar (1904:25).
24 Centiṉātaiyar (1904:27): *ākalāl, eṇṇāyiram kṣamaṇaraiyum kaḷuvil ēṟṟi avarkaḷaic cuttarkaḷākki aṭutta caṉmattilē cenneṟiyil oḷukac ceytu pāṇṭināṭaracaṉ mutaṟ kuṭakaḷiṟāyuḷḷa ellōraiyun tirunīṟiṭac ceytu pōnta iru puṟac cīvakāruṇṇiyamum matakṣamaiyiṉar puṟakkaṇṇukkuc cīvakāruṇyam ilātu muṭintatō?*

It must be added that Centiṉātaiyar's first argument in defense of the killing of the Jains echoes the classical *Mīmāṃsā* apologetics for Vedic animal sacrifice, the killing of the animal justified as a virtuous act because it goes to heaven.

25 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:142).
26 Ibid.
27 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:146–147).
28 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:147).
29 This work of Tiru.Vi.Ka, published in 1925, has remained in print ever since. It might be considered the most influential and popular of his works confirming and transforming a long-standing pre-modern conceptualization of Murukaṉ, both in terms of his eternal youth and his beauty, as the Tamil God *par excellence.*
30 The reference is to Tiruttaṇi, in the Tiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu, one of the six sacred sites of Murukaṉ and made famous in the poetry of Aruṇakirinātar in the 16th century.
31 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:148).
32 Dalmia (1996:344–345).
33 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:135).
34 A strong indication of the growing importance of a devotional work like this is the date of construction of the hagiographical edifice around its author. Inasmuch as the legends regarding the life of Māṇikkavācakar seem to have for the first time been elaborated in the lesser known *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* of Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi, from the 13th century, in the earliest extent Tamil *sthalapurāṇa* composition that we currently have, we might conjecture that the high status of the *Tiruvācakam* might well have sedimented and continued to grow from this period.
35 Pope (2002:xvii).
36 Pope (2002:xxxii–xxxiii).
37 Pope (2002:xxxvi).
38 On this, see Richard Davis (2014).
39 For a lucid and definitive overview of how this happens, see Hawley (2015).
40 Printed editions of Tāyumāṉavar's poems dated back to the last decades of the 19th century, with the 1891 edition of Sambandha Mutaliyār. (On this, see Manninezhath 1993:12, footnote 12). Most standard editions of the poetic corpus of Tāyumāṉavar list between 1,451 and 1,452 individual stanzas of poetry which are further divided into 56 sections, with much variation between the individual sections in the different editions of the work. The edition used mainly in this book, with the exception of the aforementioned which is from the Na. Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai edition first published in 1937, is the Civañāṉam edition from 2016. The translations are mine.
41 Katiraivēṟpiḷḷai (2010:529).

vēripaṭuñ camayamellāṃ pukuntu pārkkiṉ
viḷaṅku paramporuḷē niṉ viḷaiyāṭṭellāṉ
māṟipaṭuṅ karuttillai muṭiviṉ mōṉa
vāritiyi ṉatitiraḷ pōl vayaṅkiṟammā

42 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:912).
43 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:913): *makācatācivanāyaṉār ataṉait tarittu . . . pañcavataṉat- tiṉiṉṟum ciruṭṭi kālattilē vētākamaṅkaḷai uṇṭākkiṉatu.*

44 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1958:915): *vētāntattiṉ niccayampaṇṇappaṭṭa kuṟramaṟṟa poruḷai aṟutiyiṭṭuk kūṟum ciṟappuṭaiyatu ākamam.*
45 Devesenapathi (1974:247).
46 Aruṇanti Civācāriyār (1954:446).
47 For a detailed study of this, see Manninezhath (1993).
48 Civañāṉam (2016:28): *pārkkum iṭam ellām nīkkam aṟa niṟaikiṉṟa paripūṇānantamē.*
49 Ibid.: *cantatamum eṉatu ceyal niṉatu ceyal, yāṉ eṉum*
taṉmai niṉai aṉṟi illāt taṉmaiyāl vēṟu alēṉ; ***vētānta cittānta camaraca cuṗāvam*** *ituvē*
50 Civañāṉam (2016:52):
aivakai eṉum ātiyai vakuttu, atuṇuḷ
acaracara pētamāṉa yāvaiyum vakuttu,
nalaṟivaiyum vakuttu, maṟai ātinūlaiyum vakuttuc
caivamutalām aḷavil camayamum vakuttu, mēl
camayam kaṭanta mōṉa camaracam *vakutta nī*
51 Civañāṉam (2016:67):
ṣaṇmata stāpaṉamum, ***vētānta cittānta camaraca nirvākanilaiyum***
mātikoṭu aṇṭap parappu elām aṟiyavē vantu aruḷum ñāṉakuruvē.
52 Civañāṉam (2016:68): *taraṇimicai lōkāyataṉ camayanaṭai cārāmal,* ***vētānta cittānta camaraca civānupūti maṉṉa***
53 Manninezhath (1993:156).
54 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:15).
55 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:63): *camaraca vēta caṉmārkkam eṉpataṟkkup poruḷ: ellāc camayaṅkaḷukkum potuvākiya aṟivunūliṉ muṭivāṉa nāṉkāvatu mārkkattai anuṣṭikkiṉṟa kūṭṭam eṉṟu koḷka. mārkkam nāṉkāvaṉa: tācamārkkam, catputtiramārkkam, mittiramārkkam, caṉmārkkam.*
56 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:82): *camaracam eṉpatu yātu?ellā antaṅkaḷiṉatu antamum taṉakkup pūrvamākkit tāṉ uttarattil niṉṟu maruviyatāl camaracam āyiṟṟu. itaṟku niyāyam – vintu paravintu – ivviraṇṭaiyum maṟukkac cuttavinduvāṉatu pōlum; civam paracivam – ivviraṇṭaiyum maṟukkac cuttacivamāṉatu pōlum; caṉmārkkam civacaṉmārkkam ivviraṇṭaiyum maṟuttatu cuttacaṉmārkkam. ākavē ṣaṭanta camaraca cutta caṉmārkkam eṉṟu maruvuvatu.*
57 A distinction must be made between the doctrinal views that Ramalingar expressed about his religious movement in the last phase of his life – which he called the *Ṣaṭanta Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam* and the name of the organization he founded in 1865, which was first called the *Camaraca Vēta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* and then renamed as the *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkka Cattiya Caṅkam.* In Chapter 6 I discuss this name change as well as the vexed issue of to what extent this organization was active at all within his own lifetime, in any meaningful way. By the time we come to the second half of the 20th century, after 1951, and the revival of Ramalingar's organization by Ōmantūrār, it comes to usually be known as *Camaraca Caṉmārkka Caṅkam.*
58 For a systematic account of the classical Vīraśaiva doctrines in relation to the Kashmirian Pratyabhijñā school and the Śaivasiddhānta, see Chandrashekhar Shivacharya (2019). For details of Ramalingar's extremely complex and idiosyncratic take on the *tattva*s and his cosmology, see his prose work *Ulakelām eṉṉum meymoḻipporuḷ viḷakkam* (Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, 1997:247–357).
59 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:46): In Note 47 of *The Notes* Ramalingar explains his typology of religions. He uses the term *camayam* to refer to traditions of worship of gods with attributes, that is, to *saguṇa* worship – and by this he means gods lesser than his Gracious, Great Light (*aruṭperuñcōti*). He uses the term *matam* to refer to higher religions where God is worshipped in a *nirguṇa* form, without attributes.

60 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:85): *camayamataṅkaḷiṉum camaracam uṇṭu. vētānta cittānta camaracam, yōkānta kālānta camaracam, pōtānta nātānta camaracam. itaṟku atītam ṣaṭānta camaracam. itaṟku atītam cutta camaracam. ātalāl cutta camaracattil caṉmārkkattaic cērkkac cutta camaraca caṉmārkkamām. ivai pūrvōttara ñāyappaṭi, kaṭalaip pūṭṭāka, camaraca cutta caṉmārkkam eṉa maruviṉa. itaṟkuc cātaṉam oruvāṟu ṣaṭānta camaracam.*

61 For an exposition of each of these practices, see Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:262–268).

62 Here, again, the influence of the Vīraśaiva thinker Kumāratēvar, which we have explored in other chapters, is unmistakable. In Kumāratēvar's work, the *Cuttacātakam*, *cutta* or pure refers to that final pure state, *cuttāvasttai/śuddhāvasthā*, where the soul unites with Śiva as an accessory of him, which Kumāratēvar doctrinally places above both the Vedāntic and Siddhāntic paths of liberation. For further details, see the expository section of Murugesa Mudaliar's 1992 annotated translation of the text.

63 Halbfass (1990:356).

64 Halbfass (1990:356).

65 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:68): *caṉmārkkatiṉ muṭipu cākāta kalviyait terivippatēyaṉṟi vērillai. cākiṟavaṉ caṉmārkkanilaiyaiyp peṟṟavaṉ allaṉ. Cākātavaṉē caṉmārkki.*

66 In other words, they followed a path in which God was worshipped in a *nirguṇa* way, without attributes.

67 My emphasis.

68 Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai (1959c:91): *tāyumāṉavar mutalāṉavarkaḷ cuttacaṉmārkkikaḷ allar; matacaṉmātkkikaḷ eṉṟu oruvāṟu collalām. itil nittiyatēkam kiṭaiyātu. itu cātakamārkkamēyaṉṟic cāttiyam alla. nāḷac cuttacaṉmārkkam vaḷaṅkum pōtu ivarkaḷ yāvarum uyir peṟṟu mīḷa varuvārkaḷ. muṉṉirunta aḷavaikkāṭṭilum vicēśaṅāṉattōṭu cuttacaṉmārkkattukkuk uriyavarkaḷāy varuvārkaḷ; cāttiyarkaḷāy iraṇṭaṟak kalappārkaḷ.*

69 On this, see *Maraṇamilāpperuvāḻvu* verses 4,12,24,27, etc.

70 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:61).

71 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:63).

72 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1950:8).

73 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1950:9–10).

74 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1950:13–14).

75 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:40–45).

76 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1950:24–25).

77 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:45).

78 Quoted in Hatcher (1999:36).

79 Pannikar quoted in Hatcher (1999:96).

80 For the profound influential of the Swadeshi movement on Tamil political practice, the creation of the vernacular politician and the transformation of public oratory, see Bate (2021).

81 For an account of his first meeting with Gandhi in 1919, and the happiness he felt about it, resulting in an essay he wrote in his magazine *Navacakti*, see the *Vāḻkkaikkuṟippukaḷ*, pages 232–234.

82 These views he already expressed in his very first book from 1917 *Maṉitavāḻvum Kānti Aṭikaḷum* and summarized in an article on Gandhi's Religion (*Kānti camayam*) from 1923 reproduced in his collection of essays from 1959.

83 The definitive account of this is Veeraraghavan (2013).

84 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1950:14).

85 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:56).

86 The first line of *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 192: *yātum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir.* Attributed to the poet Kaṇiyaṉ Pūṅkuṉṟaṉār, which becomes particularly famous as an axiom under Dravidian nationalism to speak of the ancient Tamil virtues.

87 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:95).
88 The widespread influence, particularly of Percy Bysshe Shelley, on Indian thinkers such as Aurobindo and Bharatiyar and the revolutionary fervour he inspired has been explored only minimally. Bharatiyar's biographers have usually acknowledged his passion for Shelley, his signing of himself as "Shelleytācaṉ" in early essays, and his founding of a "Shellyiyiṉ Caṅkam" in his youthful days at Eṭṭayapuram. For the sole monograph that discusses some of this elective affinity, see Rekunātaṉ, 1964.
89 Taylor (1989:369–371).
90 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:117).
91 Tiru.Vi.Ka (2003:501).
92 Raia (2007:21).
93 Raia (2007:21).
94 Raia (2007:26).
95 Raia (2007:40).
96 For his account of his relationship with *The Theosophical Society* and the history of his work with B.P. Wadia on the labour movement, see Tiru.Vi.Ka (2013) and Veeraraghavan (2017).
97 Manjapra (2010:xxi).
98 Tiru.Vi.Ka (1994:120).
99 Raia (2007:22).

9 Ma.Po.Ci – Ramalinga Swamigal and Modern Dravidian Sainthood

Ma.Po. Civañāṉam's *The Unity Envisioned by Vaḷḷalār* (*Vaḷḷalār kaṇṭa orumaippāṭu* henceforth, *The Unity*) is easily the most popular, widely read book on Ramalingar to emerge in the second half of the 20th century. It was published in instalments in the journal *Ceṅkōl* throughout much of 1962, appearing as a book in November 1962. The book was received with acclaim and chosen within two years for the *Sahitya Academy Series* on Indian nationalist figures and translated for that purpose into English.[1] It has remained steadily in print in both languages since then and remains the most widely known and popular of Ramalingar's biographies in both Tamil and English. Civañāṉam (1906–1995), better known as Ma.Po.Ci, was a Tamil politician, orator, and nationalist, whose life, as Ramaswamy writes, "offers an illustration of how *tamiḻpaṟṟu* [devotion to Tamil] can bring fame and fortune".[2] Born into a poor family in 1906, he came from the Nadar (Nāṭār) caste, which has traditionally been linked to toddy-tapping but, starting from the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th, which rose economically and socially to positions of both political and economic power.[3] Thus, by the 1950s, two of the most prominent politicians of Nadar birth associated with the Congress Party in the Tamil region were Ma.Po.Ci and K. Kamaraj (1903–1975), with the latter becoming the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu between 1954 and 1963. Like hundreds of idealistic young men of his times, Ma.Po.Ci had joined the Congress Party in 1926 and was inspired by Gandhi to join the Quit India Movement. The story goes that, thrown into jail during the protests, he read the classical Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry for the first time and was converted into an ethnic Tamil patriot who, nevertheless, remained loyal to his Congress and nationalist leanings.[4] A prolific writer, he published several books on the lives of those he saw as other Tamil patriots,[5] and it is this ethnic Tamil pride finding political expression in a Dravidian nationalism combined with a pan-Indian patriotism that we see in his reading of Ramalinga Swamigal.

The biographical narrative of *The Unity* is strictly chronological, where the development of Ramalingar's life and vision are traced through the change of name, which culminates in the honorific he is best known by, Vaḷḷalār. The work tells the tale of a hero who would function as an inspiration for

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social reform, in what Ma.Po.Ci saw as his own degenerate times. The tangible evident aim is to integrate Ramalingar into a historiography of Indian nationalism which foregrounds national yet spiritual heroes. In such a master narrative, therefore, the emphasis is on the latter's credentials as a pan-Indian socio-religious reform figure. He comes to be seen as part of the lineage of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Dayananda Saraswati, and Rammohan Roy, but the elective affinities which dominate throughout the narrative are those between him, on the one hand, and Swami Vivekananda, Subramania Bharatiyar, and, above all, Gandhi, on the other. Ultimately, towards the conclusion of the text, Ramalingar comes to be identified as the forerunner of Gandhi or, rather astonishingly in terms of the fact that he disappeared only after Gandhi was born, he comes to be identified as an incarnation of Gandhi himself. Ma.Po.Ci's biography remains, perhaps, the most widely known and acceptable version of Ramalingar's biographies, which seals his image in Tamil modernity.

The Unity provides us with a historical canvas for understanding Ramalingar's life and his achievements which draws in an unstructured manner upon diverse ideologies. We can recognize certain "truisms" of Orientalist scholarship which found fertile ground, as part of Hindu nationalist thought, in diverse circles in the 19th century – among liberal social-reformists as well as the so-called *sanātanist*s. These ideas provide the master narrative, further inflected with a specifically Dravidian critique of caste and class, whose main trope is anti-Brahmanism. Yet, it is important to underscore that this anti-Brahmanism is not to be identified with the comprehensive critique and rejection of Brahmanism, "Aryanism" North India and Sanskrit which defines the non-Brahman movement in Tamil Nadu from the late 19th century. In *The Unity* and its author we have, instead, the articulation of a minoritarian Dravidian nationalism, which occupied the public arena for a brief period in that it aligned itself and made common cause with the pan-Indian nationalism of the Indian National Congress. In such a master narrative the emphasis is on Ramalingar's credentials as a pan-Indian socio-religious reform figure.

Nevertheless, all these historiographical aims remain, at another level, unimportant. For, poignantly, towards the end of the preface, another, more private reason emerges for the author's fascination with Ramalingar. The book is dedicated to his mother and it was from his mother that the child Ma.Po.Ci heard and learnt the songs of the subject of his biography. In the dedication he says:

> I dedicate this book to my mother Civakāmiyār who, after God, cared for me as a foetus, raised me once I was born, and taught me the songs of Vaḷḷalār already at the tender age, when I did not know how to tie my small garments.[6]

One may conjecture that the songs he heard as a child were likely to have been certain deeply popular songs of Tamil *bhakti*, on Murukaṉ, for

instance, composed by Ramalingar and included in the earlier books of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, rather than the compositions of the latter phase compiled in the sixth book.[7] Thus, certain strong evocatory emotions behind the writing of the book have little to do with the predominant language of social reform and patriotism. Rather, the emotions are linked to the non-rational sweet stirrings of childhood, the remembrance of the mother's piety, a piety expressed through Śaivite Tamil *bhakti*. The immediacy of this inner private world is not referenced to much but forms the subterranean and private undercurrent to the endorsement of Ramalingar and the linking of him to the public outer world of a rational and national patriotism.

The Text

The Unity presents us with a narrative time that aims at being chronological, where short narrative sections with dramatic titles form self-sufficient units. Direct quotations from Ramalingar are copious throughout the work, interspersed with commentary. The quotations, at the same time, also do not seek to establish any chronology in the development of Ramalingar's thinking, unlike in the traditional hagiographies or even in Tiru.Vi.Ka. The combination of such units together with frequent repetition, though, fractures the alleged chronological narrative and, ultimately, the arrangement defies any progression or any unfolding thematization and instead gives us a non-linear mytho-historical narrative that circles in upon itself. The ostensible aim is to tell the tale of a hero who would function as an inspiration for social reform in degenerate times.

The Framework

The historical canvas is laid out in dramatic terms. *The Unity* sees the 100 years between The Battle of Plassey (1757) and the so-called Sepoy Mutiny (1857) as a period of the decline of India and its religion, Hinduism. India, for a good 100 years prior to the coming of Ramalingar, had been the "hunting ground" of rapacious foreigners – Portuguese, French, and the English. In 1857, Britain incorporates India into its empire and "the silence of the graveyard" descends upon the country, only to be broken by the emergence of the Indian National Congress.

The destruction of existent monarchical structures within this period is linked not just to a political struggle but also a religious one. *The Unity*, referring frequently to Veer Savarkar's account of the Sepoy Mutiny in his book *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*, establishes how Indians had gradually come to feel themselves to be alienated from their rulers in terms of their religion. The British encouragement of the spread of Christianity was seen as an attempt to impose an alien religion on the populace through the active propaganda of the Christian missionaries. In other words, Christianity becomes the weapon of expansion of the empire in the hands of

the British. At the same time, the religious divide between the Indians and their rulers is also seen to have a long pre-history in the Islamic conquest of North India. The alienation begins with the invasions of Muhammed of Ghazni in the 11th century and the razing of the temple of Somnath. Thus, in this perspective, North Indians, in the period between 1100 and 1800 continuously fought to preserve not only their political independence but also their social/cultural independence. Waging war became their way of life. The Hindu–Muslim divide, which thus resulted, overlooked the positive virtues of both religions and what had originally been a conflict between an external power and an internal one came to be transformed, with the later generations, once the Muslims settled in India, into a purely internal war. It is this divided religious and political landscape which the British entered and proceeded to take advantage of, to consolidate their own power.

The realization now dawned upon some of the rich and educated elite that ordinary people did not care about the deterioration of religion or the injustice of British rule, since they were already oppressed by their fellow natives. This new feeling among the upper- and the middle classes engendered the circumstances for the emergence of leaders who would carry out a tremendous revolution in religion. The need of the hour was for revolutionary social reformers who would: 1) guard Indian culture; 2) create unity among Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; and 3) rid Hindus of superstitious beliefs and the entrenched habits of inequality. It is in these circumstances that four figures, all divine messengers, arose in India between 1774 and 1836. They were Raja Rammohan Roy, Ramalingar, Dayananda Sarasvati, and Ramakrishna. All of them condemned caste differences, stressed that God is one, fostered unity among those of the Hindu faith, worked for eradicating doctrinal differences between those of this faith, encouraged people to read the scriptures for themselves as opposed to blind faith in the religious leadership of the Brahmans, fought for equal rights for women, and for establishing the equality of all religions. Thus, the decline of Hinduism was to be reversed through their activities, through a self-critical introspection generated through this unwelcome yet stimulating encounter with colonial Western knowledge and with the Christian missionary critique of caste.[8]

The Unity's account of the Indian past and the reasons for the emergence of liberal reformism in colonial India are premised on the existence and then decay of a monolithic Hinduism.[9] Both the assumption of the eternal existence of such a Hinduism and the postulation of its degeneration in the colonial period have been central to Orientalist scholarship in the 19th century.[10] In this version Hindu decay is equated with Hindu weakness which is the result of "foreign rule". The marauding Muslims and then the British had contributed to dissension in Hindu society and sapped its moral fibre. The society can only be rejuvenated through religious reform.[11] Such was the influence of this paradigm as a self-evident truism that it was central to 19th-century debates about religion and formed an integral part of the justification for reform. Thus, here, by adopting these very premises as a

part of the master narrative *The Unity* speaks from within the metanarrative of reform to explain its historical emergence.

The explanation offered by *The Unity* amply buttressed by citations from the writings of Savarkar, further amalgamates socio-religious reform and chauvinistic Hindu nationalism. As Manisha Basu has convincingly shown, in a recent examination of Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence* (first written in Marathi in 1908 and then translated into English), the book discards the "secular" principles of European historiography to see history in mythical, religious terms and as the repetitive theatre of karma and rebirth.

> Despite calling itself a "history", *The Indian War of Independence, 1857* is stylistically orchestrated in the terms of a great ritual sacrifice . . . Each of the four parts of this unique history recalls in its naming the preparatory steps toward the ceremonial custom, and to be sure, the rhetorically charged headings – "Adding Fuel to the Fire", "Light up the Sacrificial Fire", "The Conflagaration", and "The Culminated Offering", – gradually build on one another in a surge of cadenced incantation.[12]

This mythic narrative established by Savarkar, therefore, finds ideological affiliation with Ma.Po.Ci's own mythical vision of a periodic decline and rejuvenation of the national religion of the Hindus, "Hinduism", through great figures – with its implicit echo of the *avatāra* concept of the *Bhagavadgītā* reflected most obviously in his conflation of Ramalingar and Gandhi.

These broad premises once established, *The Unity*, nevertheless, decisively parts company with Hindu nationalistic thought in certain important respects. The language of victimization by foreign powers – identified as Muslim and later Christian – is mainly confined to a specific geographical territory, North India. When the South is brought into historical view the approach shifts and we witness the emergence of a different, specifically Dravidian sensibility where oppression is linked to Brahmans rather than the foreigners. The historiographical approach adopted in *The Unity*, thus permits Hindu nationalist thinking to coexist, somewhat paradoxically, with a regional nationalism which undercuts a pan-Indian Hindu and majoritarian reformist agenda through a specific kind of class and caste critique which supports, in a limited way, a reform process led not by the elite but by the underprivileged.

The class critique is articulated in the view that social reform in this pre-1857 period in North India was initiated and led by an educated elite using the language of the colonizer, English. The main culprit identified here is Rammohan Roy. The second perspective highlights the difference in caste formation between North and South India.[13] In the first half of the book *The Unity* had stated that the activity of the Christian missionaries could not be viewed entirely in a negative light. One positive outcome of it was that "the Religion of the Priests" *(purōkitamatam/purohitamata)*, which had flourished unhindered for a thousand years faced resistance for the first time.[14] For, the missionaries not only preached but also were socially active: they had taken

up the cause of the downtrodden in society with the result that those Hindus who had been imprisoned in their own untouchable quarters of the village (*cēris*) and huts had converted to Christianity due to this kindness. Yet, when social reform commenced in North India, the initiators were members of the same caste which the missionaries were fiercely critical of, that also had the most to benefit from the caste system. *The Unity* explains this development as the result of the enfeebled state of Brahmanism in North India by the 19th century as opposed to the South. Historically, Brahmanism had been weakened in North India due to the repeated invasions, those of Muslims and other foreigners. Once the warrior-caste which had led the people in battle against the invaders was wiped out, the leadership was taken over by Brahmans. Yet, this also implied that they were forced out of their own self-isolation and sense of superiority. The climate also existed for the other three castes of North India to be open to anti-orthodox (non-Vaidika) movements. These circumstances aided the success of the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and the Ramakrishna Movement.[15] The situation in the Tamil country was otherwise. Here, the Brahmans, who enjoyed hegemony over the entire society, did not take up and reflect the new thinking of the Brahmans of the North. Neither did they possess war-like capacities! They, therefore, did not take over the duties of the warrior-caste which had been destroyed by the Muslims and the British. Instead, Brahmanism in the south pushed others away from itself and zealously guarded the gap between itself and the others. It regarded safeguarding caste differences which had appeared long ago, and had grown and strengthened since then, as its duty. Further, invasions of the kind which would shake the foundations of Tamil society and lead to real social change did not take place. Muslim and Christian incursions did not succeed as they had in the North.[16]

The Unity does not restrict itself only to anti-Brahmanical critique. High-caste non-Brahmans of South India are also blamed for their illiberality. It is briefly acknowledged that the Vēḷāḷas, who it says unlike the Brahmans had Śaivism as their personal legacy, also did not generate a radical reformer from among themselves.[17] Nevertheless, it is the inadequacy of Tamil Brahmanism to respond to changing times which is emphasized.

Even though the Brahmans in the south had, at certain historical moments, thrown up radical leaders such as Ādi Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja, they had, in this period, failed to provide such a leader.

> The Vedic Brahmins who are the gurus of the Hindus, nourished the frenzied war among the Hindus with respect to other religions. But they did not make any additional attempt to foster equality among them, or a sense of oneness or avert doctrinal disputes. In brief, religious heads and ācāryas did not respond with sensitivity to the changing times.[18]

The accentuation here is on the victimization of the Hindus as a people. Yet, *The Unity* does not stop at identifying the perpetrators of this situation

as the Muslims and the Christians. Rather, the enforcers of divisiveness and inequality in South India, in the Tamil country, are the Brahmans. Class critique of liberal reformism in North India is also articulated – it came from the educated upper- and middle classes. Yet, compared to the pungent criticism of caste this critique is muted. Thus, religious reform in South India must necessarily be different from that in the North, for it has to take into account the unique caste formations of southern society and the undue hegemonic power of a very small minority of Brahmans. It, thus, cannot come from the Brahmans. It is at the juncture of these historical imperatives that *The Unity* places Ramalingar.

It is in his interpretation of the caste, class, and "ethnic" situation in South India and particularly the Tamil country that we see how Ma.Po.Ci's fits in much more clearly into the binaries-inflected model of Modern Śaivism which we had briefly considered in Chapter 7. In this he departs markedly from the framework in which Tiru.Vi.Ka placed Ramalingar, eschewing all binaries determinedly for a universalistic and globalized model of Śaivism. For Ma.Po.Ci Dravidian historiography – now long an establishment historiography, debated and argued vigorously already some decades prior to this in the writings of the Self-Respect Movement – is a historical truth that must infuse and transform Tamil Śaivism. Thus, he highlights Ramalingar's less prestigious caste and class status to show that true reform can come from only within the ranks of the oppressed.

For Mā.Po.Ci, Ramalingar's life and works, seen not in isolation, but in this historical light from the perspective of class and caste, account both for his success and failure. He was not a Brahman, he was not even a high-ranking Vēḷāḷa caste but came from the lower Karuṇīkar caste. His courage or radicalism lay in the attempt to create a non-Brahmanical religion which moved away from the religious and scriptural dominance of the Brahmans. He alone, in contrast to the north Indian reformers, radically endorsed a path to the divine which went beyond or even transgressed the scriptural authority of the Vedas and the Āgamas, a path available to all citizens of the world.[19] This path would lead to a Tamil-oriented, non-Brahmanical Hindu yet universal religion. Such an endeavour was bound to fail. For, *The Unity* says, Ramalingar – unlike the other pan-Indian leaders just mentioned – was not born in the "Vaidika mansion" which exercises authority over society; he was born in the backward Karuṇīkar caste, which did not enjoy any special prosperity. Hence, though he started a social reform revolution, his life is not entwined with the record of any real achievement. Vaḷḷalār due to his birth lacked that authority as well as the opportunity. Therefore, he not only could not open the abodes of the heart of the orthodox, but he could not even touch them.[20] In the case of Rammohan and Ramakrishna, though they were men of wisdom who had transcended their linguistic and community identities, nevertheless, the sense of community identity among the Bengalis contributed greatly to their success. In brief, even when they did not desire it, in the case of Rammohan, Dayananda, and Ramakrishna, the power of

their caste and community identity was helpful in furthering their success. In Ramalinga Swamigal's case, his caste was powerless, his community (*iṉam*) without vitality. This very real deprivation and powerlessness have to be kept in mind when reading his life. Thus, it is in *The Unity* that we have a biography of Ramalingar that addresses the issue of his failure rather than success.

In Ma.Po.Ci's eyes the tragedy of history is the misunderstanding of Ramalingar. In the eyes of the Tamil populace he remains firmly located only within a simplistic paradigm of Tamil *bhakti* when he actually was a revolutionary who drew up a religion for all the citizens of the world. Ma.Po.Ci suggests that his life as a social reformer has remained hidden and uncovered for at least a hundred years. The Ramalinga Swamigal that people are familiar with is the one who composed the Tamil *bhakti* songs (which are part of an ancient lineage of such songs). These songs are widespread. His revolutionary songs, in contrast, remain unknown. Hence, says the author, the urgent need he felt to compare the revolutionary sentiments in the literature composed by Ramalingar with the biographical information available about him. The result of such an examination is *The Unity*.[21] This is a surprising moment in the book which seems to seek the paradox of writing the life history of a failed reformer and explain how subaltern rebellion, with the odds stacked against it, must end in failure. But the ultimate failure, *The Unity* seeks to remind us, is not that of Ramalingar but of contemporary society which, recognizing his path-breaking and revolutionary vision, has preferred to confine him within the parameters of a conventional Tamil devotionalism. Here, one might have anticipated that *The Unity*, in delivering caste critique as well as in its emphasis on Ramalingar's revolutionary credentials, might explore the subalternity of Ramlinga's life and works more consistently. Yet, this intimation of subalternity and the accentuation of his caste-critical poetry are eventually subsumed under the project of uniting Ramalingar with mainstream Indian nationalism.

The Unity alluded to in the title of the book is threefold. Ramalingar, the text says, took as his foundation national unity, built on it the structure of social unity, and then raised on this building the flag of *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkkam*, which is none other than the spiritual/philosophical unity of all living beings.[22]

The authorial intention expressly is to shift attention away from the religious figure of Tamil *bhakti*. For, of this religious figure nothing more can be said than that he belongs to an ancient and unbroken tradition. That which is new about Ramalinga Swamigal, instead, is to be uncovered, retrieved from the obscurity to which it has been confined. This is his universality. Furthermore, this universality, expressed in his commitment to social reform, is to be seen within the larger pattern of social reform, to be integrated into nationalist historiography, for Ramalingar also represents a regional variant of national patriotism. We are looking here at nothing less than the construction of a new Śaivite religion which can be both Dravidian and truly national at the same time.

The Unity is a text which tells us almost as much about Ma.Po.Ci as Ramalingar. It shows us that in the political climate of the 1960s, with Dravidian nationalism once again rekindled in the service of the anti-Hindi agitations, he felt the need to create an affective Dravidian cultural space which stood for and not against North Indian, which united South and North, Tamil and Sanskrit/Hindi in a pan-Indian nationalism. As such this space would have to be defined, in certain crucial ways, against the Self-Respect rationalism even while the Self-Respect critique of Brahmanism, irrationality, and religious orthodoxy would have to be acknowledged within the parameters of social reform discourse. Hence, the exercise of control over conflicting impulses – the retreat into a subjective, religious faith interwoven with the defense of rationality – is part of the design of the text. Nowhere is this more apparent than in those sections where all that which is difficult to rein in with reason – the prophetic, the messianic, the miraculous – has to be dealt with. The stratagems adopted and repeated will be seen through a focus on some of the themes of the text.

Fake Śaivites and Real Śaivites

The polarity between those who represent Tamil Śaivism to the public gaze and yet are not the authentic representatives of it as opposed to Ramalinga Swamigal who is authentic but is marginalized is dealt with through a set of oppositions which plays on the contrast between the outer and the inner. In the eyes of *The Unity*, the ascetic heads of the Śaiva *maṭha*s show, through their very attire, that they have not gained control over their worldly desires. They wear ochre robes because they still lack composure and have to battle with their senses.[23] Their ostentatious lifestyles also confirm this: some of them wear silk clothes and gold ornaments and travel, carried around in palanquins.[24] Having abandoned the ascetic lifestyle they had also abandoned their duties and turned insensitive, even blind to the hunger that had prevailed around them. Cloistered in their *maṭha*s, when confronted by widespread poverty they spouted philosophy to the people, telling them that all this was God's will.[25]

In contrast to them Ramalingar is seen in the lineage of those who made the virtue of the alleviation of hunger the focus of their writings. Here *The Unity* cites the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ – the author of the *Cilappatikāram*, Cāttaṉār – the author of the *Maṇimēkalai* and Kampaṉ – the author of the *Irāmāvatāram*.[26] The citations here are *Cilappatikāram 5:71–3*,[27] which praises the Chola reign for its prosperity and its freedom from hunger, disease, and hostilities and the *Irāmāvatāram,* which says the same about the land of Kosala. Also, *Maṇimēkalai 11:76–81*[28] and the famous lines about those who give food giving life[29] as well as *Maṇimēkalai 16.134* are cited. Auvaiyar praises the heart which is unable to endure seeing anyone in want of food.[30] It is in this lineage, and not that of the Śaivite religious heads and priests, that Ramalingar is placed. For he alone realized that so long as one

is hungry there is no room for the cultivation of virtuous behaviour, there is no room for devotion to one's land, to god, or loyalty to one's religion.[31] The religious heads, though ascetics did nothing, the learned Brahmanical priests would recommend that one circumambulate the nine planets to be rid of evils such as hunger while philosophers would argue that the self in reality does not experience hunger.[32] Ramalingar's uniqueness lay in the fact that as an ascetic he was still an activist: he took action born out of an enormous empathy for the hungry famously captured in his verse on pining when he saw withered crops. The fire he lit for cooking (at the *Cālai)* in 1867 has been permanently stoked and continues to burn even today.[33]

Above all, the ascetic heads are castist, protecting their caste privileges which, in turn, secures their religious leadership over the *maṭha*s. For this reason, *The Unity* says, they were the real instigators of the *Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* controversy:

> Vaḷḷalār, who detested upholding the four *vaṃ*as and caste differences censored this in song, through his speeches, and propagated [against it]. This was not to the liking of certain Śaiva heads of *maṭha*s and those Śaivāgama pandits who were part of their community. This is because all the Śaiva *maṭha*s are founded on the basis of caste, and with the *ātīṉakarta*s selected on that basis, they are administered along those lines, not just in Vaḷḷalār's time but even now. Even if the *ātīṉakarta* of any particular *maṭha* should whole-heartedly detest caste differences law, scripture and tradition would act as obstacles to his acting upon that feeling in the administration of the *maṭha* he is concerned with. In this situation, we can certainly understand that the heads of the *maṭha*s, and those of their breed, Śaiva Vēḷāḷas such as Arumuga Navalar and *Agama* pandits such as Capāpati Nāvalar were unable to tolerate Ramalingar, born in the Śaiva tradition, who had obtained success among those people who adhere to the Śaiva religion, should hate caste differences and sing about this.[34]

There are two hermeneutical moves that *The Unity* makes here that lead to a significant realignment of Ramalingar's relationship to Tamil Śaivism. The first is to relegate the institutional basis of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta – but, by association all of the literature of Tamil Śaivism till the 19th century – to irrelevance and bigotry and on the wrong side of history. Traditional religious establishments – such as the *maṭha*s – and their heads are shown to be caste-ridden, corrupt, and elitist. They are to be seen as out of touch with the devotionalism of the people and as actively hindering those who enjoy a real rapport with the Tamil people. *The Unity*, thus, becomes the first hagiographical work to systematically highlight the opposition of Śaiva orthodoxy to Ramalingar. In doing so, it deliberately created a view of Ramalingar as a religious radical.

A persistent feature of the text is to emphasize the difference between Ramalingar and orthodox Śaivites, as exemplified by the ascetic religious heads of

the Śaiva *maṭhas*. In highlighting the difference *The Unity* constructs polarities between establishment high-caste Śaivism and anti-establishment lower-caste Śaivism; between social indifference and social activism; between blind adherence to a traditional canon of scripture and an authentic search for religious meaning. These polarities would eventually culminate in the difference between sectarian, dualistic religion and a supra-sectarian, monistic religion.

The Unity, simultaneously, also employs motifs which show that Ramalingar is more authentically Śaivite than the orthodox and surpasses them as an exemplar for the community. Thus, unlike them he wears white robes instead of ochre robes because he has already won a victory over his senses and seen the equality of all mankind. The colour of victory is white, that of struggle is ochre.[35] The others have the external marker of Śaivite identity, which is initiation, *dīkṣa*. But such an initiation is not necessary for one who has directly experienced God.[36] Ramalinga Swamigal, *The Unity* proclaims, was uninitiated in this way yet he had obtained the real initiation, which is that of knowledge, from God himself.[37] Thus, *The Unity* takes seriously the hagiographical claims of Ramalingar's self-initiation but, paradoxically, to render irrelevant his connection to Śaivite orthodoxy. Instead, ample evidence is marshalled to show that Ramalingar was rooted to in the oldest and, hence, most authentic form of Tamil Śaiva devotionalism, linked to the *Nāyaṉmār*. Like them Ramalingar, too, sings the praises of certain sacred shrines and the deities to be found there. In its descriptions of Ramalingar's devotion, *The Unity* employs imagery which deliberately resonates with the signs of devotion exhibited by saints to be found in the *Periyapurāṇam*. Thus, for instance, speaking of how he worshipped at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr, it says:

> Standing in front of the idol of Murukaṉ which is within the inner courtyard of the Oṟṟiyūr Tiyākēcar temple, he would sing for a while, stand silently like a stone sculpture for a while, and worship, in tears, his hands folded.[38]

Ramalingar is compared with the *nāyaṉmār* who composed the kernel of the Śaiva sacred canon, the *Tirumuṟai*. These are Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṉacampantar, and Māṇikkavācakar. Like them, he created the sacredness of certain places which had not been considered sacred before, merely by invoking these places in songs. Thus he also contributed to the sacred topography of the Tamil region, as only they had previously done.[39] Like them he too expresses his devotion not just to Śiva himself but to the devotees of Śiva, by composing praise songs to the latter.[40] He had memorized the *Tirumuṟai* as a child and, as a result of this deep immersion in it, he had come to regard as his personal guru the *nāyaṉār* Māṇikkavācakar and said so in his poetry.[41] His love of Chidambaram/Tillai is equated with that of the untouchable *nāyaṉār* Nantaṉār.[42]

The hagiographical strategy is, hence, two-pronged: Ramalingar is not like other Śaiva religious heads, yet his status as the "outsider" does not

signify otherness so much as authenticity: the "outsider" is the real Śaivite, the others only appear to be so, for it is the "outsider" who approximates to the pantheon of saints, not those who belong to the establishment.

Religion

The transition from Śaiva *bhakti* to *Camaraca Caṉmārkkam* is seen in two different ways, one interpretation subscribing to a dynamic relationship between the two and the other to a static and perennialist one. The first view was initially expressed by Tiru.Vi. Ka. in *The Sacred Heart* and followed the traditional hagiographical perspective:

> Already in his youth Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ worshipped Murukaṉ. He was immersed in Murukaṉ worship. He went to the Taṇikai hill and prayed to God, narrating his woes again and again, weeping and weeping, till he saw the path to liberation. The tears wept by Aṭikaḷ, after he established Taṇikai in his heart, purified him and elevated him to a higher plane. [This can be seen in the fifth book of his corpus, the *Tiruvaruṭpā*] It should be understood that the fifth book emphasizes the failures of human beings and the path to the cessation of these. It is my view that the fifth book is the signpost to the greatness of the sixth book.[43]

In this interpretation adopted by both Tiru.Vi.Ka and Ma.Po.Ci, Ramalingar's *bhakti* phase is seen as a necessary and vital component of his religious and spiritual growth, albeit part of his early phase. In the second explanation, this Śaiva *bhakti* is interpreted as identical with his later religious views. This perspective becomes clear when we examine how *The Unity* looks at an episode in Ramalingar's youth which is considered of great spiritual significance in all the life stories. The episode relates to his seeing a form of God Murukaṉ in the mirror at the age of nine. This episode has come to be seen as the transformative experience of his life and the original inspiration for his poetry. It might and has been read, in other hagiographies, as a *bhakti* experience, a direct vision of the beloved deity along the lines of the visions which the *Nāyaṉmār* strive for and sing about. But *The Unity* emphasizes, instead, that Ramalingar's religious experience involved a mode of visualization which differed from the usual *bhakti* mode of visualization, where one worships the idol form and then, meditating constantly on it, internalizes it. Ramalingar, *The Unity* would have it, initiated a new form of worship, in which he succeeded in projecting an image from within himself, outward.[44] On the one hand, this new form of worship and the large collection of poems which emerged from the experience (which was to become the entire fifth book of the corpus *Tiruvaruṭpā*) is indicative of his rootedness in Tamil culture. On the other hand, both Swami Vivekananda and Subramania Bharatiyar are now cited to show that Ramalingar's experience was that of an ascetic who projected the inner space within him outwards, through ascetic practice. This inner space is nothing but the Supreme Self (*paramātman*) which is formless.[45]

In this narration, his ideological development is seen as seamless, what he was in the latter phase of his life as a religious leader was already there in the earliest phase. He experiences, without instruction, individually and indivisibly, the monistic unity of himself and the Supreme Self at a tender age.

It is this unity which forms the basis of his religious movement, the *Caṉmārkkam*, which is something other than a religion. Thus:

> Vaḷḷalār compiled and gave the different paths for obtaining the grace of that God in these doctrines of the one God. He gave that compilation the name *Cutta Caṉmārkkam*. One cannot consider this a religion like other religions. One should regard this as a movement for creating a human society which is without religion.[46]

Not only is this not a religion but it is also a movement which heralds a social revolution:

> Yes; it is Vaḷḷalār who made the word "*Caṉmārkkam*" the mantra of a great revolutionary movement.[47]

Unable to do battle with existent āgamic, purāṇic, and śāstric authority, Ramalingar had located the movement in an area of discourse beyond the reach of these. What this implies is not a rejection of the scriptures of Tamil Śaivasiddhānta but their reinterpretation. Such texts can no longer be taken as literal truth, in the light of the missionary judgement of them as implausible fiction. Yet, the dilemma remains: how is one to understand such sacred texts? Ma.Po.Ci suggests that one should read them as texts which encrypt deeper truths. His example for this is Gandhi's reading of the *Bhagavadgītā*, as relating not to a dilemma which arises in the context of real war but as an allegory about the spiritual struggle within the soul of Arjuna. This, he suggests, in the way in which Ramalinga Swamigal understood the *Periyapurāṇam*, for instance, of which he was reputed to have said that the 63 Śaivite saints, the *nāyaṉmār*, represent the 63 *tattva*s. On examining and undertaking each of these *tattva*s one would obtain a certain kind of cosmic power (*siddhi*). The Purāṇas, all of them, have as their core, the control of the *tattva*s.[48] This allegorical understanding of scripture, according to *The Unity*, is central to the belief system of the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam*.

Above all, the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* is a movement of worship and of service (*cēvā-caṅkam*).[49] The congregational place of worship of this Universal Religion was to be the *Hall of Wisdom*. Built deliberately on non-āgamic principles it could not be considered a Śaiva temple. It was, nevertheless, a universal temple where followers of all religions could come and worship.[50] The form of worship was also to be different – not an iconic but an aniconic form of God as light.[51] This God was not Śiva but, in Ramalingar's own words, *The Auspicious One, Civam*, and nothing other than Truth-Consciousness-Bliss, *Saccidānanda*.[52] Thus, in the final analysis, *The Unity* is able to say of Ramalingar's religion that it is not "Śaiva religion" (*Caivamatam*)

but "Śaivism" (*Caivam*) – a doctrine which sees the individual soul as the recipient for the grace of the Supreme Soul called *Civam*.[53]

The parameters of this new religion/movement once established, *The Unity* gives us a list of the main ten doctrines of the *Caṉmārkkam*: belief in one God; belief that superior worship consists of the worship of that God aniconically in the form of light; the complete rejection of all caste and religious differences and the creation of the unity of all mankind; to encourage a sense of brotherhood among the different linguistic groups of India and to wholeheartedly see their unity; to create a society of equality where there are no rich or poor and, instead, a society where all human beings have sufficient to eat and live on; to abolish differential treatment on the basis of gender and to educate women particularly in the path of wisdom; that the path of deathlessness should be taught to people in their mother tongue and, hence, to the Tamils in Tamil; to practise vegetarianism and refrain from animal sacrifice; to teach the doctrine of the Conduct of Compassion towards Living Beings to all and, finally, to usher in a politics where it is members of the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* who rule the country.[54]

The perennialist interpretation of the relationship between Ramalingar's Śaiva *bhakti* and the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam*, in contrast, suggests that Ramalingar had been a Vedantin from the age of nine. It is this second interpretation which comes to predominate in the text. It favours a static approach to Ramalingar's development as a religious thinker and, thus, deprives the life story of one frequent and important hagiographical motif: that of a spiritual transformation which leads to growth. Further, it reinforces the mythic dimension of narration, a dimension which is so crucial to hagiography. For, in such an understanding, Ramalingar is not so much a human being with a biographical profile which records fallibility and change as a saint whose life story is one of unfolding perfection. The allure of this interpretation and its necessity becomes obvious for other reasons: by showing that Ramalingar had been a Vedantin from his youth, *The Unity* can adopt an approach to Ramalingar's religious ideas and movement which places both of these firmly within a pan-Indian Modern Vedāntic discourse and, hence, within a nationalist discourse.

In speaking of a Modern Vedāntic discourse which underlies Ma.Po. Ci's interpretation of Ramalingar, one is referring to the sort of Modern Vedāntic hermeneutics popularized by those such as Swami Vivekananda and later Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.[55] This understanding of Vedānta had emerged initially in the dialogue between Christian missionaries, Western Orientalists, and philosophers in the colonial era, and these formulations were creatively appropriated and reworked within the context of socio-religious reform. Rammohan Roy's initial contribution was noteworthy:

> In the *Abridgement of the Vedant*, Rammohun argued that image worship as then practised in India was an aberration from the authentic monotheistic tradition, wherein worship of "the true and eternal God"

> left no room for idolatry. Whether or not Rammohun was influenced by his knowledge of Islam, the fact is already, in the manner of the Jones-Colebrooke Orientalists, he divided Indian history into a vedantic period that provided the authentic model for "the whole history of the Hindoo theology, law and literature" and "was highly revered by all the Hindoos" ' and a later period of "Hindu idolatry" with its innumerable gods, goddesses and temples which have been destroying "the texture of society".[56]

This approval of Vedānta coexisted with a negative critique of it, which stressed its quietism, its world-negating and "amoral" philosophy.[57] Yet, it was the positive elements which were seized upon by the social reformers of Ramalingar's time and after him. The key positive elements here are inclusivistic emphasis on the unity of Vedānta and all other religions, ritual critique, an emphasis on interiority and non-institutionalized forms of spirituality and, sometimes, an incipient monotheism.

Of this Modern Vedānta a young man who considered himself a patriot in the mid-20th century could say:

> It is that kind of humanistic, man-making religion that gave us courage in the days when we were young. When I was a student in one of the classes, in the matriculation class or so, the letters of Swami Vivekananda used to be circulated in manuscript form among us all. The kind of thrill which we enjoyed, the kind of mesmeric touch that those writings gave us, the kind of reliance on our own culture that was being criticized all around – it is that kind of transformation which his writings effected in the young men in the early years of this century.[58]

Green (2016) makes two important points about this Modern Vedānta. First, that in its articulation in the writings of Max Müller and Swami Vivekananda, it reconciles "inner piety and the outward expression of broadly rationalistic teachings". This is very much in line with the hermeutical moves of *The Unity*. Green argues that this is an adaptation of religion to a certain notion of the "secular", where the latter implies "allocating faith its place in the private conscience away from the state and other public institutions".[59] Second, he sees Vivekananda's unique contribution to the emergence of Modern Vedānta in his reconciliation of Advaita with other forms of Vedānta and in establishing the scaffolding by which all the others are part of the same perennial philosophy of an impersonal and highest Absolute.[60]

Succinctly put, Vedānta, understood in this sense, was ultimately Advaita Vedānta. It was higher than all forms of "sectarian" Hinduism because it subsumes all the sectarian worship of individual gods within its non-dualistic premises. It also subsumes all other religious traditions on the basis of an encompassing tolerance and the fact that it is the ultimate perennial truth

beyond and behind all religions. Thus, it can even be argued that it is not a religion at all but a philosophy or even a universal spirituality. Further, this spirituality and the concomitant agenda of service for the uplift of both religion and nation were embodied in the figure of the socially engaged as opposed to the detached ascetic, in figures such Ramalingar.

Laying this groundwork for our understanding of Ramalingar's new religion, *The Unity* provides a constitution of kinds for the *Caṉmārkkam* in explicating ten rules which are laid down and which are not to be found in Tiru. Vi.Ka's *The Sacred Heart*. In *The Unity* these rules are as follows:

1. Belief in one God
2. Worshipping that one God not through idol worship but as light
3. Rejection of caste, religious and other differences and cultivating the brotherhood of nations and humans
4. Cultivating the brotherhood of Indians
5. Creating a just society by abolishing the differences between rich and poor
6. Educating, without discrimination, both men and women
7. Teaching the path to the *Deathless Great Life* (*maraṇamilāpperuvāḻvu*) to people in their own language
8. Rejection of meat eating and the offering of animal sacrifices to gods
9. *Cīvakāruṇyam*
10. Working towards the destruction of cruel and bad politics and, instead, the emergence of those who follow the *Caṉmārkkam*.[61]

When we examine this list we see that much of it has little to do with religion in any conventional sense. This becomes apparent when we contrast this list of ten (and here the parallels with the Ten Commandments of Christianity are too obvious to be overlooked) with another list of ten provided in Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ's hagiography. The latter's list is as follows: 1) God is one, 2) He is the merciful, great light, 3) One should not worship lesser gods, 4) *Cīvakāruṇyam* is the soteriological goal, 5) Caste and religious differences must be rejected, 6) All life must be equated with one's own life, 7) The brotherhood of all humans must be aimed at, 8) Purāṇas and Śāstras do not reveal the ultimate truth, 9) One should bury the dead and not cremate them, and 10) One should avoid all senseless ritual.[62] This latter list incorporates much more of some of the religious doctrines which Ramalingar repeatedly emphasized in his writings. Nevertheless, both Ma.Po.Ci and Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ were systematizing and creating a constitution for Ramalingar's deeply diverse religious views where he had not explicitly formulated one himself. In *The Unity*, in particular, this constitution might be justifiably called one which veers towards a largely secularized set of rules pertaining to a humanitarian, rational, and socialist movement incorporating anti-caste critique, the abolition of poverty and gender and class differences. Ramalingar's religion, governed by these rules, is seen also as a new political dispensation and its link to nationalism is emphasized.

Caste

The most persistent argument that *The Unity* puts forward to show that the *Caṉmārkkam* is a revolutionary movement is Ramalinga Swamigal's views on caste. The move to Vadalur, sometime prior to 1867 – when he founded the *Cattiya Taruma Cālai* – is identified as a time when a great physical and inner transformation took place in Ramalingar.[63] This transformation creates the revolutionary:

> The sojourn at Vadalur was to bring about a tremendous transformation in Aṭikaḷār's life. He is going to have to battle with the dust-storm called castism. There will arise in Aṭikaḷār's heart the whirlwind of social reform, in order to vanquish that dust-storm.[64]

And further:

> Through the influence of his incendiary words against caste a new age would dawn in the Tamil country which would threaten Śaivite orthodoxy. It was for this reason that this orthodoxy felt compelled to take up arms against him.[65]

In other sections of the text, copious citations from Ramalingar's poetry affirm his criticism of caste and religious differences. In this poetry he dismisses the *vaṃāśrama* scheme and the code of conduct based upon it as child's play[66] and as lies.[67] He offers the *Cutta Caṉmārkkam* to mankind, embroiled in caste and religious divisiveness, as the real and righteous alternative.[68] In one solitary prose passage he talks, very briefly, about how these divisions came into existence and why they were to be destroyed:

> Religion has been created in relation to the conduct of the *tattva*s. The castes have been created in relation to the conduct of work. The different religious structures and caste structures, which are the restrictive codes of orthodox conduct, are obstacles to the expansion of grace. Therefore, if one gets rid of the above-mentioned codes of conduct and obtains the sense of equality arising from following the true, wise, conduct of the *Pure Civa Caṉmārkkam*, then compassion will increase, the grace of God attained and one will obtain eternal powers and liberations. If this is not done, one will not obtain these.[69]

In general, Ramalingar's caste critique, while copious especially in the sixth book of the *Tiruvaruṭpā* and in his discourses, is not systematically elaborated. Rather, the articulation of caste critique is in the context of the founding of his organization, where he is firm in its rejection of caste and in the vision of a future utopian society, where caste must not have any role to play. In *The Unity*, though, this critique is transformed into a doctrine about the caste system which does not reject it so much as, paradoxically, affirm it.

The premises of this affirmation are threefold. First, the caste system is not an Aryan, Brahmanical imposition on the Tamils but a part of their culture. The original Tamils, the Ādi-Tamils who had lived in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, in all likelihood, had the caste system.[70] Second, among them, as also among the Tamils of the *Caṅkam* period, caste was not divisive, was not about the superiority or inferiority of beings but originated due to the rational division of labour:

> The four-fold *vaṃa* system, which emerged for professional reasons, was a social structure which indicated the civilisational growth of the ancient Tamils. Nevertheless, in the beginning, there could not have been high and low, inferiority or superiority among the *vaṃa*s.[71]

It follows from these two premises that Ramalingar did not condemn the caste system but only the contemporary degraded version of it. Ma.Po.Ci's inspiration for this stance was Gandhi:

> Gandhi Adigal, too, respects the logic behind the original reasons for the four-fold *vaṃa* system; he praises its fruits. But because one cannot get rid of the injustice of high and low which in a later period intermingled with it, he desired only an India which was without the *vaṃa* system.[72]

The desired outcome from these premises is that rather than doing away with the caste system one should ideally restore it to its original state, like Hinduism itself. Caste-critique of this kind cannot be truly subversive of the *status quo*. Rather such relativized criticism in effect sanctions the *status quo* and can easily be appropriated to the maintenance of it. This too was a feature of much socio-reform critique of caste.

In an article on conceptions of caste in 19th-century India, Susan Bayly refers to three broad schools of thought which had emerged in this period: "Caste in all its forms as a divisive and pernicious force, and a negation of nationhood", "Caste as *vaṃa* – to be seen as an ideology of spiritual orders and moral affinities, and as a potential basis for national regeneration", and, finally "Caste as *jāti* – to be seen as a concrete ethnographic fact of Indian life, a source of historic national strengths and organised self-improvement or 'uplift' ".[73]

The second model was articulated, for instance, sometimes by Vivekananda who said of caste:

> It is in the nature of society to form itself into groups . . . Caste is a natural order; I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes?[74]

In this model, *vaṃa* is the organic, natural order by which a human society efficiently and morally constitutes itself and the ideal Hindu society of

the future would reconstitute itself, in this version, from the old *vaṃa* system through the creation of "purified *vaṃa*s or mega-castes". Ultimately, as Bayly says:

> This vision of an India reborn around *vaṃa*-like moral communities had a surprisingly wide appeal to Indian social theorists and religious revivalists. It was an ideal that was widely expressed by adherents of those universalising spiritual movements . . . These revivalist organisations familiarised large numbers of Indians with an ideal of transcendent pious community which was often far from hostile to caste as a bond of idealised moral affinities, even where they challenged the principle that certain forms of ultimate knowledge and ritual expertise were the hereditary preserve of a closed order or caste, that of the Brahmin.[75]

It is this social conservatism accompanied by anti-Brahman, anti-higher caste critique that we see also in *The Unity*.

Thus far, in examining how the text depicts Ramalingar and his doctrines, his views on religion and caste, *The Unity* structures Ramalingar's thoughts and ideas to fit the mould of a socio-religious reformist, nationalist discourse. Here, we see the depiction of a saintly figure and his writings which does not allow room for ambivalence or inconsistencies. The biographer, thus far, is in control of his materials. Nevertheless, there is an inherent dissonance in the biography, which is a manifestation of the impulses within the biographer, between an inner world of faith, love, and devotionalism and the outer world of a rational patriotism. This dissonance becomes more difficult to reconcile when he has to rationalize the non-rational in Ramalinga Swamigal.

Miracles and the Mahatma

In *The Unity*, the narration takes into account and replicates some of the miraculous motifs relating to Ramalingar's childhood and early youth. Yet, we find that the attention to miracles is scant and greatly qualified. From the beginning an apparently critical and dismissive attitude is adopted towards older hagiographical perspective on Ramalingar. Typical of the miraculous accounts is the version of the birth which *The Unity* cites from the *Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* publication of the *Tiruvaruṭpā*:

> Then a radiance which had never existed before in the world came forth; the gods rained flowers; well-wishers rejoiced, experiencing this day as an auspicious day; a great person is born today they said eagerly.[76]

Such traditional accounts of Ramalingar's birth, according to *The Unity*, are derived from a puraṇic imagination and generated by the conventions

which inform such an imagination. Initially, scepticism and even sarcasm are directed at these motifs which stress his suprahuman qualities and explanations are consistently, though not always successfully, sought which would demystify the life. This scepticism is part of an overall approach which mocks practices such as the casting of the horoscope, which was done when Ramalinga was born.

> The parents wished to know the future of this divine messenger Irāmaliṅkar. Yes, they cast the horoscope based on the time of birth of this great person. A certain learned brahmin looked at the horoscope and spoke of the deeds of that reformist revolutionary who was to sing, "Let all superstitious customs vanish into dust".[77]

The reading of the horoscope yields remarkable information about Ramalingar's eventual miracles, his compassion, his attainment of a golden body at the age of 50, etc., but, as far as *The Unity* is concerned, the horoscope yields none of the really relevant information. Thus, Ma.Po.Ci comments sarcastically that astrologers seem incapable of finding out the important truths such as that Ramalingar would become an enemy of caste and religion, that he would fight against lies and deceit, that he would destroy the discrimination of the four *vaṃ*as, that he would detest those wicked people who fan the flames of hatred by speaking of different gods, that he would tear down the scriptural prescriptions that enjoin different rights for different castes.[78]

Here, biographical motifs, which would be considered from the point of Dravidian rationalism to fall within the rubric of superstitious belief, are dismissed outright.

One strategy adopted in dealing with miracles is the emphasis to insist on an evidentiary basis for them: the miracles can be believed if there is unassailable "objective" evidence for them and such evidence is the corpus of Ramalingar's writings. In the light of this second strategy it will become particularly problematic when certain miracles are mentioned in Ramalingar's writings which clearly did not take place or are of such a fabulous nature that they once again stretch the self-imposed rational parameters of the text. One such miracle, which is frequently mentioned in Ramalingar's own later writings, is the ability to awaken the dead. In considering this miracle the author is faced with two difficulties. First, there appears to be no documented evidence, in any of the early hagiographical writings by the direct disciples of Ramalingar, that he really did bring someone dead back to life. In the light of the discrepancy between his own writings and the testimony of his disciples, how is one to interpret his claims? The ethical dimension of the problem becomes clear: if Ramalinga Swamigal did genuinely give people the impression that he could raise the dead but did not do so, then this would be a form of deception and cruelty which can only tarnish his image. The biographical representation of him would collapse under the weight of

such a contradiction. It is for this reason that *The Unity* strongly refutes any suggestion of charlatanism on Ramalingar's part:

> From the examples we have thus far seen we realize that though Ramalinga Adigal was a *cittar* who could do miracles, he not only did not indulge in the child's play of doing them, thus tricking people and obtaining fame, but that he actually detested such [trickery].[79]

The second strategy, which is implied in the aforementioned statement is one where scepticism gives way to qualified acceptance: it shows that the author of *The Unity* cannot be accused of bad faith, of being a disbeliever. Thus, the belief in Ramalingar's charisma is reiterated and his capacity to perform miracles is taken for granted. In pursuing this line of thought *The Unity* says:

> In the *Tiruvaruṭpā* text [of the first five *tirumuṟai*s) published by the *Ceṉṉai Camaraca Cutta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*, there is a synopsis of Ramalinga Adigal's life. In that there is a list which alleges that Adigal supposedly performed all kinds of *siddhi*s. We do not reject the view that Adigal would have had the ability to do those activities. But would he, who had obtained the boon of deathlessness and attained the state of non-dualism, have turned his intentions towards doing *siddhi*s? We cannot believe this. Further, it should be noted that not a single poem is to be found in the *Aruṭpā* which substantiates the *siddhi*s mentioned in that biographical account.[80]

The reconciliation between the irrational and the rational here is achieved through an appeal, if we like, to Ramalingar's own agency. It is argued that someone who has attained the higher level of spirituality (claimed by him in his own writings) would not be interested in performing miracles, he would deliberately make the choice of not doing so. Such an interpretation presupposes that Ramalingar himself believed that miracles belong to a "lower" level of spirituality. In other words, that he would share the authorial view of a dichotomy between a lower, magical religion and a higher, rational religion, a cleavage created by modernity.

A variant of the aforementioned interpretation, which could be theologically justified and would deprive Ramalingar of his agency in his own miracles, is also proposed. This is the view that it is not Ramalingar who is doing the miracles but the divine within him. Selective miraculous episodes in his life that might permit such an interpretation are included in *The Unity* and discussed. These episodes include the visit to the temple at Chidambaram,[81] the acquisition of education without being taught, and the sight of the god Murukaṉ in the mirror. The latter two episodes, especially, are integral to an approach which sees Ramalingar as a charismatic leader formed by a pre-colonial educational system, whose unusual abilities came to light even in his childhood. Primarily, in this version Ramalingar is grasped as a divine messenger (*teyvattūtar*),

because this is how he understood himself. This divinity is nothing but that particular self-perception which is characteristic of all great men who see themselves as servants of God. God himself works through his divine messenger. Thus, in referring to such miracles *The Unity* says:

> This is the play of *siddhi* which God brought about, without the knowledge of Adigal, such that even he was astonished.[82]

These various strategies adopted by *The Unity* are concessions and a qualified surrender to the miraculous in Ramalinga Swamigal. In pursuing the question of why *The Unity* has to make these concessions at all and why we do not have a biography which can ground the charisma on purely affective terms, on the impact Ramalingar's sheer presence had on people, we must confront the fact that for the author of the text the miracles are part of an aspect of his own subjectivity which is fundamentally important. This structure can be described in various ways but one ingredient of it is Śaiva *bhakti*.

In his essay on Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and the urban middle class of Bengal in the 19th century, Partha Chatterjee (1992)[83] building on Sumit Sarkar (1985)[84] argues that the hagiography of Ramakrishna provides, "a new religion for urban domestic life" because it provided an escape from "the prisonhouse of Reason".[85] Chatterjee goes on to point out that:

> For the colonized middle-class mind, caught in its "middleness", the discourse of Reason was not unequivocally liberating. The invariable implication it carried with it of the historical necessity of colonial rule and its condemnation of indigenous culture as the storehouse of unreason, or (in a stage-of-civilization argument) of reason yet unborn – which only colonial rule would bring to birth . . . made the discourse of Reason oppressive. It was an oppression which the middle-class mind often sought to escape.[86]

One escape was into the "popular" which is then appropriated as,

> the repository of natural truth, naturally self-sustaining and therefore timeless. It has to be approached not by the calculating analytic of rational reasoning but by "feelings of the heart", by lyrical compassion. The popular is also the timeless truth of the national culture, uncontaminated by colonial reason.[87]

Here, I would argue that for someone who had worked his way into the Tamil middle class, like Ma.Po.Ci, who had ingested the discourse of reason, the popular also included the intimately religious and, moreover, that aspect of the religious which was most inaccessible, even irrelevant to the national agenda. For the author of *The Unity* Śaiva *bhakti* is that intimate domain. It is the domain of nostalgia which he can access from his childhood but which

is no longer uncompromisingly his inasmuch as it has been relegated to his infancy and the ties with the mother. Its consistent pull counteracts the national agenda of the text – hence the persistent attempt to reconcile the two through the talk of veracity and "evidence". Thus, here, "objective" testimony can and does affirm the miraculous. This kind of reasoning is transparent when it comes to the greatest miracle of all: Ramalingar's disappearance.

The questions regarding the disappearance are raised with great urgency in the text:

> What is the reason for the divine messenger to disappear prior to the fulfillment of his tasks? The messenger who had come to see [the creation of] a new world after changing people who are black within and white without. Was this because of the sense of defeat? Or did he reject earthly existence because he wished to reach the world of the immortals? It is not so, for the aim of Adigal was to live immanently while obtaining the transcendent. Further, would our great person who wishes to serve all human beings reject worldly existence, desiring to experience only for himself the great happiness of salvation? Never. Did he reject life, disappointed because he did not obtain God's grace? No.[88]

All these possibilities being summarily rejected, *The Unity* takes recourse to the testimony of Ramalingar's trusted disciple Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. Replicating the account he gave to the *Theosophical Society*, discussed in detail in the second chapter, Ma.Po.Ci adds:

> We know that Toḻuvūr Mutaliyār was Adigal's foremost disciple. Hence, we are compelled to believe the information he gives us about Adigal's disappearance. We gather, without any doubt, from Mutaliyār's information, that Adigal had at that stage retained the belief that his aims would be fulfilled one day, that he was firm in the resolve that that victorious day would come quickly and that there was not an iota of defeat in him.[89]

Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār's account, according to *The Unity*, can be distilled to yield two crucial statements about the disappearance of Ramalingar: one, that his work would be carried out by those from the north and two, that he would come again, though no clear statement was given as to the modalities of this coming. *The Unity*, in accepting the truth of these presuppositions, takes the view that Ramalingar did not die but vanished and became immortal. At this juncture we have the confessional statement: "Ramalingar was a *Siddha*. In order to understand his disappearance the intellect alone is not enough". Mahatma Gandhi is then quoted to underscore this point:

> Rationality cannot solve everything. Realising that certain things cannot be reached by reason, one should have *bhakti*. The faith required

> for devotion does not reject reason, it goes beyond it. This faith is a sort of sixth sense which is a part of the five senses. Only this sixth sense can be of use in matters which are beyond reason.[90]

The author boldly declares that he will now abandon those who seek a rational explanation for Ramalingar's disappearance. This statement, and the liberty conferred by the abandonment of reason, is palpable in the loosening of the ties between what purports to be a biography and what is revealed to be a hagiography. At this juncture, even if only temporarily, Ramalingar as a nationalist socio-religious reformer fades into the background. Instead, his disappearance becomes part of the typology of "holy vanishings" in Śaivite hagiographical literature.

Thus, *The Unity* compiles a list of the *nāyaṉmār* who all did not die but vanished in some way and the *Periyapurāṇam*, as in the earliest hagiographies, becomes its validating text for this information.

In narrating these legends again, *The Unity* establishes a polarity between "scientific knowledge" and "knowledge of the truth". Those who believe that the latter exists also cannot doubt that it is possible for extraordinary humans who have attained sainthood to depart the world with their earthly bodies.[91] It mocks those orthodox Śaivites who would never doubt that the *nāyaṉmār* did indeed depart from life in this fashion and yet would fail to acknowledge that Ramalingar did the same. The author asks:

> Certain orthodox Śaivites say that it is true that in the case of Ñāṉacampantar and others the material body turned into the wise body of light. The scriptures too accept this. Nevertheless, Ramalinga Adigal could not have attained that state. This argument cannot do justice to either Śaivism or God. If there is the truth that the material body can turn into the body of light, and if those such as Ñāṉacampantar had previously brought about such a miracle, why could not it not be possible for someone such as Ramalinga Adigal who came later also to do this? Has God ceased to have the compassion to give the deathless, immortal life to Śaivite men of wisdom? Or has the Śaivite religion itself lost the ability to produce *siddha*s who change, through their ascetic practice, their earthly body into a body of light?[92]

Claiming boldly, through this statement, an unbroken continuity for Śaivism as a living tradition from antiquity to the present the author of *The Unity* now comes out with his personal statement of faith:

> My mind shies away from questioning the disappearance of Vaḷḷalār, since he himself has stated that he transformed his material body into a body of knowledge and light. The sage of Vadalur was a noble person, incapable of uttering a lie even within himself. Since the light of truth spread in his heart we see that same light also in his words. As

> far as I am concerned I believe the words of Vaḷḷalār that man can live the immortal, supreme life and that he had obtained that great life through God's grace, as a result of my *bhakti* for him and as a result of the truth in his sayings. If we could not believe the words of men of wisdom such as Vaḷḷalār our lives would become a desert.[93]

The belief that Ramalingar vanished is also extended to his reappearance. Here, on this important matter the testimony of Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār becomes decisive. Here, it is necessary to recollect a portion of Mutaliyār's statement to the *Theosophical Society* about his master's last days where Ramalingar was supposed to have said to his disciples:

> You are not fit to become members of this *Society of Universal Brotherhood.* The real members of that brotherhood are living far away, towards the North of India. You do not listen to me. You do not follow the principles of my teachings. You seem to be determined not to be convinced by me. Yet, the time is not far off, when persons from Russia, America (these two countries were always named) and other foreign lands will come to India and preach to you this same doctrine of universal brotherhood. Then only will you know and appreciate the grand truths that I am now vainly trying to make you accept.

In his own understanding Mutaliyār, as we saw, took this announcement to prophesy the arrival of the *Theosophical Society* in India. But, as Ma.Po.Ci shows, this statement can be subjected to an alternative interpretation. Thus, for instance, this statement itself is understood to contain the relevant and crucial information about Ramalingar's reappearance. Of it, *The Unity* says:

> Vaḷḷalār took as his homeland the entire universe created by the Supreme. Hence, we can assume that if the goods he tried to sell by opening shop in the Tamil country did not sell, he left in order to open shop in another part of this world.[94]

Here, Toḻuvūr Vēlāyutaṉār's statement is seen in a different light: when Ramalingar spoke of the members of the brotherhood in the north he was really referring to himself. Here, it is he who goes away from the Tamil country, which has essentially rejected his vision to reappear elsewhere. Toḻuvūr Vēlāyutaṉār had interpreted the north to be at some distance away, as Europe or the Americas and had seen the brotherhood as composed of Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky. But Ma.Po.Ci locates the brotherhood within Ramalingar and he himself as the brother from the north: "As Vaḷḷalār taught, after his disappearance a Mahatma became known to us from northern India. He is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi".[95]

The move to the second phase of his life, which already began with the peregrinations to pilgrimage places outside Chennai, is now linked with

Gandhian motifs. One is a revulsion to urban life and the corruption which it represents. Ramalingar's retreat from Chennai is seen as a courageous retreat from urban wealth and a materialistic culture. It is here, for the first time, that the parallel is drawn, retrospectively, with Gandhi and his embrace of rural India.[96] Thus, *The Unity* quotes two articles from 1913 and 1927, respectively, where Gandhi says that the poor do not require philosophical discourses but food. To preach Vedānta to them is to hurt their feelings. They have experienced only a merciless and fearsome God. When one sees their lifeless eyes one would hesitate to speak to them about the divine. After all, food is their only god.[97] Other parallels emerge throughout the text: in appearance both of them dressed minimally in white. Both lived in extreme austerity and an important expression of this austerity was their relationship to food. Both believed in curbing food intake and fasting. In terms of their ethical attitudes there was the common ground of non-injury towards all living beings, in Ramalingar it was *cīvakāruṇyam*, in Gandhi it was *ahiṃsā*. In both, *The Unity* identifies the same attitude towards *vaṃa* divisions and, as we had seen earlier, quoted Gandhi on caste to explain Ramalingar's views. Finally, and decisively, *The Unity* sees in both men the same combination of a deep-rooted faith and *bhakti* combined with social activism.

There is no doubt that we have, at least in Ramalingar's core doctrine of *cīvakāruṇyam*, at a superficial level, a comparative doctrine in the *ahiṃsā* of Gandhi. There is also no doubt both figures also shared the ascetic ideal and, here, Gandhi's attitude towards food and fasting are useful in generating insights about Ramalingar's relationship to food and hunger. What is interesting is that *The Unity* draws all these parallels not just to enable one to make better sense of the lives and philosophies of either or both men but to set up magical homologies by which Ramalingar, in effect, becomes Gandhi. Thus it says:

> When Vaḷḷalār disappeared, Gandhi was a five-year-old child. Vaḷḷalār appeared on October 5th 1823. Gandhi was born on October 2nd 1869 in the north in a place called Porbandar. In the disappearance of both these great men we see an astonishing unity. Vaḷḷalār disappeared on the 30th of January 1874, a Friday. Gandhi disappeared on January 30th 1948, a Friday.[98]

The homology of these numbers and dates are seen as irresistibly pointing to an astonishing and singular truth in the section which Ma.Po.Ci has titled, "*The Two are indeed One!*" *(iruvarum oruvarē!)*:

> I am someone who is attempting to follow Gandhi Adigal not just in politics but also in spiritual matters. When, in the light of the experience I have gained in that effort, I compared him with Vaḷḷalār, I came to believe that Karamchand Gandhi born in northern India appeared as the great Vaḷḷalār who appeared and vanished in southern India. Yes,

> we must consider Gandhi Adigal, who was born in northern India and figured as the leader of the whole of India as the representative/image (*piratiniti/pratinidhi*) of the great Vaḷḷalār who, having said, "I will come again", vanished. This could be the belief which has arisen in me as the result of the *bhakti* I have for these great men.[99]

At this point *The Unity*, as a text, has fulfilled its purpose. A range of homologies enables the identification of Ramalingar and Gandhi. Through identifying him as re-emerging in Gandhi (here, the language is not clear and is one to assume that the "spirit" of Ramalingar entered Gandhi and thus became him?), the author is able to reconcile Tamil Śaivite *bhakti* and Indian nationalism as also the polarities of faith and reason in favour of an all-encompassing *bhakti* which is Śaiva, Gandhian, and national. In Chapter 2 we saw how another ardent believer in Ramalingar, his closest disciple Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār reconciled himself to the disappearance of his master by reorienting himself in theosophy and finding his teacher again in it. Here, in *The Unity*, Ma.Po.Ci reconciles, through homologies, the child within himself who heard the sweet songs of the Tamil saint from his mother and the adult man who is the follower of Gandhi.

Dravidian Śaivism and Tamil Sainthood

It is with Ma.Po.Ci's understanding of Ramalingar that we arrive, finally, at what might be called a Modern Śaivism which is recognizably a part of a mainstream and majoritarian Dravidian nationalism, even while it aligns itself with a pan-Indian socio-religious reform and *bhakti*. This becomes evident when we see the extent to which Ma.Po.Ci's distinction between fake and real Śaivites is very much a part of the Dravidianist critique of "traditional" Śaivite establishments, a critique that the Self-Respecters gave voice to in their writings in both the Tamil publications such as the *Kuṭi Aracu* and their briefly lived English journal, the *Revolt*, which was in circulation for a mere two years between 1928 and 1930. In this *Revolt* article of 27th March 1929, written by an anonymous B.G., we have this denunciation of the traditional Śaiva establishments:

> A mutt is endowed only for the princely life of a single individual. He is taken in procession on ornamental chairs and palanquins with footmen and elephants around. It is a charity to throw gold coins at his feet, when in the adjoining *Cheri* copper coins are scarce. Then again, there are innumerable chatrams and mutts where wandering "devotees of god" are fed sumptuously. These "devotees" wander about bag and baggage with their "women devotees" and "children devotees". They stay in these chatrams at their pleasure, eating, intoxicating and even enjoying. There are again less fortunate "devotees" whose *Kavi* (*saffron robes* – editors) clothes and other appurtenances fetch them their daily

> food. It is this sort of proverbial charity of the Hindus which is responsible for the ills of Hindu society.[100]

In another lengthy article from between August and September 1929, the decay of the Śaivite institutions is traced to the influence of Smārta Śaivism on the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta, with the result that a pure Dravidian religion has been destroyed by an Aryan and Sanskritic religious influence:

> The intellectual Saivites who are forced by circumstances to be in a minority; they are philosophers, most of them, they are exponents of our famous Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, which has been evolved as a science out of the Saivite religion as it existed more than a thousand years ago. . . . While Brahmins and Vellala Saivites joined hands and fought like brothers in putting down Jainism, we find the self same Brahmins leaving the Saiva fold and flocking around Sankaracharya who had evolved a very convenient philosophy and that out of Buddhism which was also ruthlessly suppressed. . . . The Saivites in order to treasure up their philosophy founded Mutts on the monastic pattern of the Jains and the Buddhists and now disaster has overtaken the Saivite and his philosophy here too. These Adhinams (*Saivite mutts* – editors) of today were our old Annamalai Universities – for promulgating our Saivite religion and Saivite philosophy. Today when we think of our Saivite Adhinams we, Saivites have to hang our heads in very shame . . . Our temples have become "dens of prostitution" and our Mutts have become "dens of iniquity".[101]

Thus, in the *Revolt*'s analysis there is a twofold problem with traditional Śaivite institutions. The first is described through a discourse of loss and defeat, the second by one of corruption and decay. The loss is that of an originally Tamil and ancient Śaivasiddhānta philosophy to a Brahmanical and Smārta Śaivism not indigenous to the Tamil country. The corruption and decay are that of the *maṭam*s and the *ātīṉam*'s as they are today – caste-ridden, corrupt, licentious, and avaricious. In the light of this understanding, there has to be a complete rupture between a "priest-led" religious tradition with its genuflection to all the hierarchies of Brahmanism and a protestantized, laicized religion, embedded in caste critique, led by a lay, subaltern figure such as Ramalingar. That this questioning, critique and scathing rejection of "establishment" religion was not confined to the Tamil region but a pan-India phenomenon in the colonial period has been amply demonstrated by several scholars of religion in colonial India. The most notorious example of the contempt generated by traditional guru lineages, already in the mid-19th century, was the Maharaj Libel case, the subject of several insightful articles by Haberman (1993), Lütt (1995), and most recently Scott (2015), among others. What this case showed was the incommensurability between traditional notions of the guru and the new ideas of

his/her person under the pressure of Victorian ideas of puritanism, sexual abstinence, and celibacy, combined with a reformist Hindu clarion call to return to a pure and ancient scriptural "Hinduism". Kasturi (2009) has also shown how ascetic orders in North India in the late colonial period resorted to colonial law to purify their orders of ascetic families consisting of male ascetics, their female companions, and children. In all these modern processes, they were aided by colonial laws that defined asceticism in such a manner as to render it antithetical to both sexuality and domesticity. Taken together these developments both in public discourse and legal institutions favoured an understanding of a kind of "reformed asceticism" that someone like Ma.Po.Ci sees in Ramalingar – an austere and abstemious figure not linked to any known Śaiva *maṭha*.

The distaste for the traditional Śaiva *maṭha* as a mark of Tamil modernity had additional and profound consequences for the understanding of the scriptural traditions of Tamil Śaivism.[102] The Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Vīraśaiva *maṭha*s had been the crucible of an ocean of remarkably diverse and rich religious literature, starting from possibly the 15th century and continuously till Ramalingar's time and beyond. Just a slice of this literature considered in Chapters 3 and 4 gives us a glimpse of a treasure house of works, rendered most often in a high, literary Tamil poetry. But, from the perspective of the kind of Modern Śaivism Ma.Po.Ci envisaged, this body of literature that assumed the bilingual naturalized interpellation of Sanskrit and Tamil had to be relegated to the periphery if not put aside altogether. Even where *The Unity* does not say this explicitly this would be the implication of an understanding of the Śaivasiddhānta as a purely Tamil philosophy and religion, uncontaminated by Aryan and Sanskritic influence. Thus, the setting aside of the Śaiva *maṭha*s had the effect of also severing the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta from its own historical past. This also minimized or entirely overlooked, in Ramalingar's case, his deep knowledge of and debt to works like the *Oḷiviloṭukkam*, the *Cuttacātakam,* and the *Ciṉmayatīpikai* in formulating his central doctrines, including those of *cīvakāruṇyam.* Instead, this iteration of Modern Śaivism sought to recoup a hallowed past and link it directly to the colonial present, laying aside as much as possible what came in between. The hallowed past was the legendary time of the "origins" of Śaiva *bhakti* and the age of the early poet-saints or the *Nāyaṉmār.* And unlike Arumuga Navalar, who explicitly rejected any comparison between the time of the poet-saints, their lives, and their miracles and his own contemporary time of Ramalingar (as we saw in Chapter 5), Ma.Po.Ci does not hesitate to draw precisely this equation. Ramalingar is removed from the vicinity of *maṭha*s and *ātīṉam*s and guru-ship to be placed on par with those in whose time none of this institutional edifice was considered to exist and when, allegedly, there was a direct mediation between Śiva and his highest devotee. But there is a further, more important reason for mediating a direct and non-temporal link between Ramalingar and the *nāyaṉmār*s, with *bhakti* as the linking thread. We must recollect that *The Unity* was being serialized in

1962, hardly a decade after Indian independence. It was not Ma.Po.Ci alone who was concerned with creating a tableau of "Hinduism" that would reconcile and represent all parts of India, with "great, religious figures" from each geographical region of it represented in that tableau. Thus, Ma.Po.Ci places Rammohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, and Ramalingar as representative figures in that tableau, who achieve a new India through their progressive religious views. And, as Hawley (2015) has shown hardly two years later, in 1964, V. Raghavan, the pre-eminent Sanskritist from the same part of India as Ma.Po.Ci, had created another powerful and influential pan-Indian narrative about *bhakti* – describing it via specific figures from each part of India as a national movement of religious integration even before the nation state had existed. *Bhakti* – understood as anti-caste, as aiming at gender equality, as subaltern – marks, implicitly, Ma.Po. Ci's strategy of uniting Ramalingar with the ancient and authentic religion of the Tamils as well as with pan-Indian reform. This makes him both a Dravidian saint and a national saint. Also, in crafting this framework Mā.Po.Ci pushed further and completed the task that was begun only tentatively and with other premises in Tiru.Vi.Ka's understanding of Ramalingar – which was to confer upon him a Dravidian sainthood, purely Tamil, non-Brahman, popular in its authenticity, the herald of a new and progressive Śaivism which could also feed into a transregional socio-religious reform that was linked to the new nation state.

Notes

1 This chapter refers exclusively to the Tamil edition of the book.
2 Ramaswamy (1997:227).
3 For a colonial account of the community, see Caldwell (1819). For the transformation of the community into a socially mobile one in modernity, see Hardgrave (1962).
4 For a brief biography of Civañāṉam, see Ramaswamy (1997:227–228). For a bibliography of his works, see Zvelebil (1995:173). For more details on his life story, see his autobiography *Eṉatu pōrāṭṭam* (*My Struggle*, 2003).
5 Thus he wrote multiple books on those slowly being mythologized even within their own lifetime as Tamil nationalist heroes such as Bharatiyār and V.O. Cidambaram Pillai (known as Kappalōṭṭiya Tamiḻaṉ or The Tamil who sailed ships) and on the classics such as the *Silappatikāram*, the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*, etc.
6 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:13). That Mā.Po.Ci remembered with great pleasure and nostalgia the lullabies his mother sang to him in his infancy is substantiated by the fact that he dedicated an entire section to this topic also in his autobiography. See Ma.Po.Ci (1974:44–45).
7 I can vouchsafe for their widespread use and popularity myself, having been made to learn several of these simple and elegant compositions, set to music as a child, without knowing that they had been composed by Ramalingar.
8 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:1–34).
9 For a summary of the diverging scholarship and controversies regarding the construction of "Hinduism" in the colonial period, see King (1999:96–117) and Esther Bloch, Marianne Keppens, and Rajaram Hegde (2010).
10 See King (1999:105): This new *episteme* created a conceptual space in the form of a rising perception that "Hinduism" had become a corrupt shadow of its

former self . . . The perceived shortcomings of contemporary "Hinduism" in comparison to the ideal form, as represented in the text, thus created the belief (among Westerners and Indians) that Hindu religion had stagnated over the centuries and was therefore in need of reformation.

11 See van der Veer (1998:20).
12 Basu (2013:114).
13 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:39–41).
14 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:25).
15 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:46–47).
16 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:47).
17 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:35).
18 Mā.Po.Ci (2008:31).
19 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:34).
20 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:48).
21 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:3–4).
22 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:8).
23 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:168).
24 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:130).
25 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:148).
26 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:147).
27 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:143).
28 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:144).
29 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:144).
30 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:144).
31 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:141).
32 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:148).
33 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:147).
34 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:254–255).
35 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:168).
36 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:129).
37 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:249).
38 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:86).
39 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:99).
40 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:101).
41 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:76).
42 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:109).
43 Quoted in Ma.Po.Ci (2008:70–71).
44 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:62).
45 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:68–69).
46 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:161).
47 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:174).
48 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:79).
49 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:189).
50 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:205).
51 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:214).
52 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:159).
53 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:297).
54 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:190–191).
55 See Killingley (1975) for an overview.
56 Kopf (1969:199–200).
57 King (1996:125) shows that this understanding of Vedānta is at the centre of Rudolf Otto's classic work on the comparative study of mysticism in Śaṃkara and Meister Eckhart which came out in 1932. In contrasting the two systems Otto formulated his critique of Vedānta: "Otto's critique of Advaita Vedānta as

detached, amoral and world-denying, therefore, allows him to displace contemporary Christian debates about the status and implications of Eckhart's mystical theology onto an Indian 'screen' ".

58 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan quoted in King (1996:136).
59 Green (2016:12).
60 Green (2016:109).
61 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:190–191).
62 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:389).
63 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:110).
64 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:111).
65 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:229).
66 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:256)
67 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:263).
68 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:263).
69 Ramalingar quoted in Ma.Po.Ci (2008:164).
70 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:257–258).
71 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:258).
72 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:258).
73 Bayly (1998:96–97).
74 Bayly (1998:103).
75 Bayly (1998:103–107). She adds:

> The best known of these expressions of universalised spirituality is that of the Arya Samaj. Swami Dayananda's concept of *vaṃa vyavasthā* conceived of the regenerated "Aryan" nation as a domain of purified Hindu peity in which classifications of *vaṃa*, which were portrayed as hierarchical grades of moral affiliations, would be assigned to each sharer in the vedic faith of "Aryavarta" on the basis of the individual's learning and other personal attainments (107).

76 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:51).
77 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:53).
78 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:54).
79 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:331).
80 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:327).
81 A visit to the shrine of Śiva-Naṭarāja at Chidambaram by the family of Ramalingar, when he was an infant, features in several of the hagiographies. Carried by his father in his arms, the child Ramalingar laughs joyously when the ārati, the waving of the lamp before the idol, is taking place. Hearing the child's laughter, the priest who is performing the ritual recognizes that he is a divine child and invites the family to his house for a meal.
82 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:330).
83 Chatterjee, Partha (1992).
84 Sarkar, Sumit (1985).
85 Chatterjee (1992:42).
86 Chatterjee (1992:42).
87 Chatterjee (1992:65–66).
88 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:438).
89 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:442–443).
90 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:485–486).
91 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:492).
92 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:496–497).
93 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:503).
94 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:508–509).
95 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:509).

96 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:108–109).
97 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:148–149).
98 Ma.Po.Ci (2008:105).
99 Ma. Po.Ci (2008:510).
100 Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai (2018:284).
101 Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai (2018:370–371).
102 That this distaste persists to this day is evident in a remarkable short story of the contemporary Tamil writer Jeyamohan titled "Pōti", where the narrator records his horrific journey to a traditional Śaivasiddhānta *ātīṉam* and personally witnesses the contemporary decay both of the institution and its religious head.

Conclusion

Ramalingar Redux

Whatever happened to Ramalingar? This question hovers over the succession of events that conclude the life in all the hagiographies – the disappointment he expressed, the final words, the closed door, the vanishing, the dematerialization, and the tantalizing promise of a return. The return, as we saw, haunted the earliest hagiographies, which dealt with it through an understanding of his *siddha*-hood and his miraculous powers. They envisaged him rising again somewhere as a Siddha or, as in Toḻuvūr Vēlāyutaṉār's account to the *Theosophical Society*, as a Theosophical master. We saw also that modern biographers like Tiru.Vi.Ka or Ma.Po.Ci were not exempt from making "whatever happened" a central feature of their earnest and devout works on Ramalingar. Tiru.Vi.Ka reconciled Ramalingar's potential deathlessness and immortality with Oliver Lodge's spiritualism while Ma.Po.Ci took refuge in some kind of implicit *avatāra* theory that linked Ramalingar and Gandhi, while explicitly admitting that in his reflections on the matter he had surrendered to faith and devotion. As in the case of the disappearance and return of Martin Guerre in medieval France examined by Natalie Zemon Davis in her 1983 landmark book, the reflections on the disappearance and anticipated return of Ramalingar can best be understood as telling us more about the micro-histories of the various local and regional authors of his tale at specific historical moments than about him. Thus, they give us an important perspective on how a whole range of issues relating to saints, miracles, and the befitting end to a holy life were negotiated in the colonial period and how this, in turn, contributed to the transformation of Tamil Śaivism between the 19th and 20th centuries.[1] In this *Conclusion*, I consider two intertwined narratives, which sought to give answers to "whatever happened" offering a finished and final ending to the story of Ramalingar's life and a further one which imagined his second coming. After considering these narratives and how they cement a certain version of Ramalingar for modernity I turn to what remains after these varied posthumous accounts – the legacy of Ramalingar as it persists in the Tamil region even today. The circulation of the divergent and manifold perspectives of him that we have seen in the previous chapters and here, along with the ubiquitous shrines, almshouses, and innumerable, modest *Caṉmārkka Caṅkam*s that dot Tamil

Nadu, has meant that his presence never left the Tamil lands. Like other such beloved, sacred presences, he continues to be evoked in its streets and its literature, and in the most quotidian of moments, till the very present.

The Death

The one person who could try to and provided half-way to a definitive answer to what happened to Ramalingar was Maraimalai Adigal. Occupying as he did the central position in the establishment of Modern Tamil Śaivasiddhāntic institutions and in the creation of the defining features of a Modern Śaivism, Maraimalai Adigal had had a long-standing commitment to Ramalingar which led to his decisive involvement in the latter's posthumous history. This involvement, which led him to also play the detective, is well chronicled in his son Tirunāvukkaracu's biography of him.

In his account of his father's life, Tirunāvukkaracu begins the story of Ramalingar (always addressed as Vaḷḷalār) with his account of *the Aruṭpā–Maruṭpā* War (*pōr*), as he calls it, and the central role which Katirvēṟpiḷḷai (Sri Lankan Śaivasiddhānta polemicist, disciple of Arumuga Navalar, and the beloved teacher of Tiru.Vi.Ka) played in the ongoing fight. Tirunāvukkaracu describes the conflicting emotions within Maraimalai Adigal's heart on this fight, even while he came down decisively in support of Ramalingar. In Tirunāvukkaracu's account of the matter Maraimalai Adigal had great respect for the luminaries of Sri Lankan Śaivism and the vital role they had played in the "revival" of Śaivism in South India in the 19th century. He particularly revered Arumuga Navalar for being at the forefront of these efforts. Thus, Katirvēṟpiḷḷai as Navalar's direct disciple had his deep respect. Nevertheless, once the "war" had commenced, with Katirvēṟpiḷḷai leading the charge against Ramalingar, Maraimalai Adigal was dragged into it by Ramalingar's devotees. They entrusted him with the task of leading the counter-charge, of defending Ramalingar and South Indian Śaivism. Tirunāvukkaracu sees the Vaḷḷalār camp as instrumental in starting the war by denigrating Navalar and forcing his disciple to counter-attack.[2] Initially, when approached by Ramalingar's acolytes Maramalai Adigal refused to take up the defense.[3] Nevertheless, he eventually assented:

> Unable to tolerate the denigrating talk of Katiraiyār as well as the steady importuning of Vaḷḷalār's devotees and out of the desire to elucidate the truth Aṭikaḷār entered into the *Aruṭpā* agitation.[4]

In Tirunāvukkaracu's account the entry of Maraimalai Adigal into the battlefield led to a decisive victory for the Ramalingar camp. He speaks of three public meetings that were convened by the pro-Ramalingar group to set up a debate between Maraimalai Adigal and Katirvēṟpiḷḷai. The first two took place on 20th and 27th September 1903 in Cintātarippēṭṭai in Ceṉṉai. In the first, says Tirunāvukkaracu, Katirvēṟpiḷḷai turned up but did not talk

about the *Aruṭpā* at all! In the second and third meetings on 27th September 1903 and 18th October 1903, which he committed to, he did not even make an appearance. Victory was declared, deduced from the absence of the opponent, by the Ramalingar camp.[5]

Tirunāvukkaracu narrates the story of the polemical war as a preface to the relationship that Maraimalai Adigal established with Ramalingar. His love and respect for the latter united him, when it came to the protection of Tamil Śaivism, with Tiru.Vi.Ka, says Tirunāvukkaracu. Ramalingar's *Camaraca Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* was nothing other than a modern name for the ultimate truths of the path of Śaivism, according to Maraimalai Adigal, and it is this view that he expressed in a book called *Ampalavāṇar tirukkūttiṉ uṇmaiyum, ñāṉayōkamum.*[6] Also, he went further and established in his house in Pallāvaram, which he moved into in 1911, the *Camaraca Caṉmārkka Nilayam,* the principles of which were inspired by what he had come to consider the fundamental doctrines of Ramalingar by this time.[7] At the same time, Maraimalai Adigal took a keen interest in Vadalur and went there to participate in annual festivities.

> Aṭikaḷ had a great interest in the Cirrampalam that Vaḷḷarperumāṉ established at Vadalur. During his lifetime he went there several times, headed the festivities of the *Cutta Caṉmārkka Caṅkam* and served by giving the keynote address.[8]

We now come to the crucial part of the biography, where Adigal decided to personally pay a visit to Vadalur in 1912:

> With a huge desire to see these institutions that had been established as a result of Vaḷḷalār's feeling for the divine, Aṭikaḷ left [his home in] Pallāvaram and started out. [After a stop for a period in Vēlūr] he left Vēlūr and on 1–2–1912 he reached Vadalur. There were no houses in which people lived or anything else there. Seeing the *Ñāṉa Capai* that Vaḷḷalār had established Aṭikaḷ was excited; he rejoiced.[9]

Tirunāvukkaracu points out how, even in the first decades of the 20th century, Vadalur was a naturally sparse, unpopulated crossroads between the north-east and the south-east of the Tamil lands. It did not have water sources and, hence, no fertile land to cultivate. In effect, it was an expansive and hot place traversed only by travellers. It is keeping the needs of hungry and poor travellers in mind, Tirunāvukkaracu says, that Ramalingar established the almshouse there. What the almshouse, the *Taruma Cālai,* served in those days also reflected its scarce resources – porridge (*kañci*) during the morning and, at noon, some modest fare.

> It is in this *Cālai* that Aṭikaḷ [meaning Maraimalai Adigal] also stayed. As a poor person among poor folk, he too ate the simple food that was

> given there. That [food] was Vaḷḷalār's divine *prasāda*, was it not? The time that Aṭikaḷ stayed there was that of *Tai Pūcam*.[10] The devotees of Vaḷḷalār celebrated the annual festival of Ramalingar's *Capai* there on 2.2.1912. Aṭikaḷ headed the celebrations and enriched it.[11]

At this point in the biography, we come to the relevant section titled *The information learnt regarding Vaḷḷalār's disappearance* (*Vaḷḷalār maṟaivupaṟṟi aṟinta ceyti*).

> On 4–2–1912 38 years after Vaḷḷalār vanished Aṭikaḷ reached Mēṭṭukkuppam. He worshipped the light that Vaḷḷalār had lit. He saw the small hut in which he had practiced his austerities; he melted. He stood worshipping Vaḷḷalār with love and with an outpouring of tears. One day at the entrance of the Cittivaḷāka house (1874), standing covering his body and head as he usually did with a white cloth, he had said, devastated, to some of his dear students, "We opened our shop, there was none to purchase, we closed it". Then, he went into that house and locked the door. His foremost disciple and Tamil Professor at Chennai University Toḻuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār has written that, "Vaḷḷalār went into the house and lay down on the bed". But Vaḷḷalār's devotees say, "He went into the house and disappeared". Nowadays many people say different things about his disappearance. Aṭikaḷ is a researcher, is he not? Therefore, Aṭikaḷ searchingly investigated in Mēṭṭukuppam about Vaḷḷal's disappearance. He asked many questions of the elders in that place who had lived there at the time of the incident of Vaḷḷal's disappearance. He came to a conclusion. He [wrote] of all of it, as was customary, in English in his daily dairy in English "We went to Mettukuppam where Swami Ramalinga left his gross material today. I gathered the secret information that Swami had actually died and the remains of his body were taken in an earthen pot and placed under the akasa chamber in a celler (*sic*) room, and that he did no miracles. This shows that no man, however great he may be, should of his own will Attempt (*sic*) to work miracles. He must depend on the will and grace of God".[12]

Tirunāvukkaracu follows up this astonishing piece of information by giving a Tamil translation of his father's diary notes for those who might not have grasped the English. Then, he hones in on what he sees as the main reason for the propagation of the view that Ramalingar disappeared rather than that he died and offers a sympathetic explanation for the account of the disappearance. Vaḷḷalār, he says, had promised to raise the dead. He had done this out of his great compassion, desiring immortality for all.

> Nevertheless, such a time for raising the dead must come only in the future, with the grace of Ampalavar [Śiva-Naṭarāja]. He [Ramalingar] kept saying that when it comes the dead would be raised. It was because of that that we know he said one should not cremate the dead and one

> should bury them in the earth. His devotees, out of the huge love for their guru, mistakenly thinking that if Vaḷḷalār died, contradicting the objectives he spoke of, that would be a stain on his fame, seem to have said that their Vaḷḷal vanished into the light![13]

Tirunāvukkaracu concludes this by reflecting on how the accounts about the disappearance in no way taint Ramalingar's legacy.

> We should know that if we say that Vaḷḷalār's body collapsed there is, by that, no stain on his greatness. . . . Why does the world praise Vaḷḷalār? Is it for the miracles he is purported to have done? Or is it because it has been said that he disappeared into the light? Not at all. He is praised, is it not, for the devotion to God on the part of Vaḷḷal, for his great love of living beings, his boundless compassion, his pure asceticism and for the beautiful and melodious Tiruvaruṭpā songs that he gave humans?[14]

Thus, with Maraimalai Adigal and his son, the story of Ramalingar receives a decisive and uncompromising death. Maraimalai Adigal's own words, cited from his daily dairy, have, unwittingly perhaps, a slightly harsh tinge. They seem to suggest a certain hubris on the part of Ramalingar that had led to his downfall. This hubris is explicitly linked to a promise of doing miracles that is seen to have trapped him in a corner, leading to his death. The specific miracle was that of raising the dead back to life, which he was clearly unable to fulfil within his own lifetime. Maraimalai Adigal's and Tirunāvukkaracu's account suggests that this failure and the death of Ramalingar are linked but they do not explain how. Thus, even while Ramalingar's death is seen as the result of a certain failure the reader is still left with a lack of clarity as to the whys, if not the wherefores of it. Why did he die because he did not resuscitate the dead? Did he die because he was ill with disappointment at his inability to fulfil his promise? Did he just waste away? It becomes clear that Maraimalai Adigal and his son deliberately skirt these potentially troubling questions, for to confront them would lead to a further questioning that would decisively break with an elevated hagiographical ending to the life. And, in fact, we see that this is what happens in another narrative that acts as a coda to that of Maraimalai Adigal's. This is the narrative of Palarāmaiyyā from 1987 that pursued this line of thought even further and built upon it to provide a conclusive ending that explained the death and its aftermath most clearly.[15] Written by someone who was a retired judge, the narrative gives full rein to the detective mode of enquiry by going into and evaluating various pieces of seemingly contradictory evidence. These include the words attributed to Ramalingar in his final moments, the silences and evasions of his close disciples on what exactly happened in Mēṭṭukuppam on the final day and the letters he wrote to his disciples and friends in the final years. Examining all of these with

forensic exactness, Palarāmaiyyā paints a picture of the *Caṉmārkkam* in disarray in the final years of Ramalingar's life, the institutions administered contrary to his wishes, and Ramalingar himself increasingly encircled by a group of fraudsters and tricksters out to exploit him. He then comes to the conclusion that Maraimalai Adigal's discovery that Ramalingar died coincides with all this disturbing evidence that he died in the midst of turmoil. But he pushes Maraimalai Adigal's conclusion even further.

> If Vaḷḷalār's death had been natural his devotees would have buried his material body with great devotion. For, he was the person who said that the burning of the dead is equivalent to murder. We should ask ourselves as to why state officials hastily came within a few days after his death, as stated previously, to enquire about his end. If one buried him officials would have dug out his body and found out the reason for his death. Fearing this, his body was immediately taken away, burnt to ashes and even the ashes were not left but kept away in secret. The reason for doing this must also be considered by us. If Vaḷḷalār had died a natural death in Cittivaḷākam they would have opened that room after his disappearance and showed it. But if Vaḷḷalār had died there under suspicious circumstances and they had opened the door and showed, officials would have relentlessly searched and investigated the room and found out the reasons for Vaḷḷalār's disappearance. Out of the fear of this, one thinks, they did not open the door and show it to the officials.[16]

But Palarāmaiyyā goes even further than this. He returns to Maraimalai Adigal's questioning of the elders of the village who had experienced Ramalingar within their own living memory:

> There was no need for an erudite person like Maraimalai Adigal to lie. This is because he had a special devotion to Vaḷḷalār. Here we have to reflect on the fact as to why, when he asked several elders questions about Vaḷḷalār's disappearance in great secrecy, those elders replied in acute fear. If a murder happens in a village the villagers will speak of it in murmurs rather than openly. This is obvious. The reason for this is there are also those who think, "Why should I be bothered by this?". It is because the elders staying in Mēṭṭukuppam feared to tell the truth that it happened that Maraimalai Adigal had to secretly enquire in order to know the truth.[17]

Thus, with this answer to the question of whatever happened to Ramalingar in the Maraimalai Adigal version elaborated with further conclusions in that of Paḻarāmaiyyā, we come to an ending that inverts all the classical hagiographical topoi. Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ in his monograph devoted entirely to the topic of the disappearance of Ramalingar began the introduction to his

book by drawing on the stories of the poet-saints in the *Periyapurāṇam* to draw the explicit parallel between them and Ramalingar. Thus he says:

> The skill of deathlessness is special to the Tamil lands. Many men of wisdom of our land have attained this skill. Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar and Māṇkkavācakar did not allow their bodies to become fodder to the earth or to fire but vanished with their bodies. Ñāṉacampantar mingled with the light of Śiva in the main shrine of the temple at Nallūr. Appar became one with the Śivaliṅga in the main shrine of the Pukalūr temple. Cuntarar rose to Kayilai (< Kailāśa) on a white elephant. Māṇikkavācakar entered the Hall of Sentience (*ciṟcapai* < *citsabhā*) in Tillai and mingled with the ether of sentience (*citākācam* < *citākāśa*).[18]

By evoking the *samayācārya*s, the revered quartet of poet-saints of the Śaivasiddhānta canon, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ is setting the stage for a similar ending to Ramalingar's life, where his final moments will imitate theirs. The Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ monograph of more than 200 pages analyses exhaustively the substantial literature on yogic immortality in the Tamil Śaiva canon beginning with the *Tirumantiram*, to come to the following definitive conclusion:

> The body of the great Vaḷḷal is a body of camphor. It shone like a camphor that has been lit. It mingled with the supreme. Like it is stated in the *Cuttacātakam*, "This body here itself, through Śiva's grace from above, as space, for the world to see", the Great Person's body through grace, for the world to see, became space. Just as Māṇikkavācakar entered the Hall of Sentience in Tillai and disappeared, in the same way Vaḷḷalār entered and disappeared in his mansion of Cittivaḷākam, into his room.[19]

It is not just by chance that Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ quoted the *Cuttacātakam* of Kumāratēvar in this context. We have already seen the influence of Kumāratēvar's doctrines on Ramalingar's directly as well as through the writings of the teachers who follow in his lineage, like Muttaiyā Cuvāmikaḷ. And it is in the *Cuttacātakam*, as we saw in Chapter 2, that we have the detailed exposition of a typology of three different kinds of bodies, with the final pure stage (*śuddhāvasthā*) attained by the body being that of bodily immortality, attained while being liberated within one's own lifetime, as a *jīvanmukta*. It is this idea of the three bodies and the attainment of bodily immortality that also comes to be taken up and adapted in Ramalingar. But the comparison, at this juncture, goes even deeper than this. In the early years of the 20th century, a Sri Lankan Śaivite scholar Ca. Kantaiyapiḷḷai published a small treatise called *Uṇmaimukti nilai* (*The State of True Liberation*) and appended it to his edition of the *Cuttacātakam* defending Kumāratēvar's idea of bodily immortality against purported Śaivasiddhāntic critics.[20] In a similar fashion, Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ wrote his treatise to establish the validity of Ramalingar's disappearance in his body and for similar reasons. To remove or ignore the

doctrines of bodily immortality in Ramalingar, as Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ rightly saw, would be to invalidate his core religious ideology as it evolved over the years. It is for this reason that the hagiographical tradition on Ramalingar, from its inception, and relying on his poetry, established the parallels between his doctrines of bodily immortality and his own physical body. To accept the demise or decay of his physical body, in turn, would be to repudiate his words at some fundamental level and could lead to the kind of charges against him levelled by Arumuga Navalar. Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, as the foremost 20th-century guardian of Ramalingar's religious, textual legacy, clearly sees the need for upholding all aspects of the legacy and to stress the parallels between Ramalingar and the revered former teachers of the Tamil Śaivite canon, whose passing from life provides clear parallels. Here, the Tamil Śaiva tradition is seen as an unbroken and timeless living continuity. The great difference between him and the other 20th-century biographers of Ramalingar we have thus far encountered, in the preceding chapters as much as in this one, is that they do not see the compulsion to accept Ramalingar's doctrines as whole, complete system. Thus, with Maraimalai Adigal's assertion that this is what happens when someone tries to do miracles and the further conclusions drawn by Palarāmaiyyā the mystery and miracle of Ramalingar's vanishing is brought to a decisive end. Instead of a coda most appropriate to the life of the Śaivite poet-saint, repeated in many variants in the *locus classicus* the *Periyapurāṇam*, we now have, at the very least, an inexplicable death and, at the very worst, murder and a cover-up. This clearly is a death from which there can be no return. Through various secularizing moves and through the deep unease with miracles that now have to be reconfigured to align with science and nature, Ramalingar's death had to be fundamentally rethought and explained or explained away. From this perspective the Tamil Śaivite tradition has to be thought anew, to be ruptured and reconfigured, and rescued for modernity and for the Tamil nation. In doing so Ramalingar's eventual legacy is also reconfigured. Attention is shifted from the life of an exemplary Śaivite poet-saint with its classical tropes to that of the Dravidian saint who rejects castes and feeds the poor and hungry in a time of dire need. Or, even more radically, as we will now see, he could also be seen as the saint who was not a saint, disassociated from religion.

The Second Coming

On 6th December 1942 a Tamil politician, a "barely five-and-a-quarter feet man with a balding pate, tobacco-stained teeth, stubble chin and a captivating husky voice"[21] addressed a crowd, possibly in Vadalur, possibly somewhere nearby. The politician was C.N. Annadurai (Ci.En. Aṇṇāturai), Dravidian ideologue, close comrade, and prodigy of E.V. Rāmacāmi Nāyakar or Periyar until he fell out with him in 1949, and the leader of the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*), the party which has been on and off consistently in power in Tamil Nadu since 1967. Ariñar Aṇṇā (henceforth, Anna),

as he was generally known, begins his speech with the well-known motif of the expectation of Ramalingar's second coming, now drastically reimagined:

> Vaḷḷalār is coming I gather! Not to give lavishly to those who are wilting in poverty, nor to give succor to the poor and the humble. Vaḷḷalār means generous not in possessions, but in grace. Grace will create a path to reach the feet of God but not to drive away poverty! The [name] Vaḷḷalār is the "title" given by those devoted to Cōti Irāmaliṅkar, who were unable to give him anything else and thought let us give him at least this. The devotee who saw the *Garuṭacēvai* [in Kāñcipuram] said, "Kañci Varatappā, Kañci Varatappa!"[22] The person with a depleted stomach next to him, thinking that porridge that gets rid of hunger is coming, asked with yearning, "Oh really! Where is it coming?"

The very first part of the speech thus sets the tone for the fiery polemics. It sarcastically speaks of the religious expectations regarding the return and immediately undercuts them. Ramalingar was not appreciated for the right reasons, says Anna. People gave him nothing except a useless title like Vaḷḷalār, and they expect him to reciprocate with his grace. But, he goes on, even places of worship are actually filled with beggars who seek not so much the sight of God as food. He then continues:

> Similar to this, as soon as one says, "Vaḷḷalār who sang the *Aruṭpā* is coming", you beggar friends, don't get going asking where. Vaḷḷalār is not coming for this. He is coming, one understands, to threaten the Self-Respecters and drive them away, to gather the believers and to round up the doubters. Yes! The person who disappeared one day is coming outside today in the Vadalur festival! Hearing this my friends of faith did not allow [us] to come to the festival, [telling us to] start holding up the lamps, wave them in circles, praise the divine feet and to give away food as alms. "Oh you Self-Respecters! You Enemies of that which is Vaidika! Our Vaḷḷalār is coming, be careful, beware, silence!", they threaten and throw paper tracts at Self-Respecters!

Anna continues in this mocking vein, telling those who are poverty-stricken and hungry to not come rushing when Ramalingar turns up because he is not going to come to give them food. Rather, he is coming to satisfy the religious fervour of his followers who are there at Vadalur to worship him and to drive away the Self-Respecters who are critical of religious worship. For the Self-Respecters, Anna says, the coming of Ramalingar is irrelevant. It is a mere curiosity; it is only an occasion for Self-Respecters to ask him a few searching questions for his absence until then:

> Let Vaḷḷalār come, he is very welcome to come. Let him bring for companionship one or two people who had disappeared before him, are we

> going to prevent this, or are we going to lock the doors and imprison him? Even if he comes are we going to stand with mouths agape, prostrating in obeisance, or fold our hands and beg for protection? Oh! Who has come? Is it Vaḷḷalār? We will only ask: "Oh white-clothed Vedānti! Where all had you gone in all this time? What all have you seen? What have you now brought for the people?" . . . Thus, Oh you Supreme Bhāgavata, head-jewels drowning in *bhakti*, there is no need for us to invite the devotees. Let them go not only to Vadalur but to sacred places like Kacci, Kāḷatti, Tillai, Kaṭampūr, Marutūr and feast daily, their minds melting sing, search for the path of truth, approach the true guru, reach the shade of the divine feet of God – how does this matter to us?

The speech then takes an important turn. Anna envisages Ramalingar paying a visit to Periyar in Erode, and, on meeting him he will find the true Ramalingar follower, the one who decries the false devotion and commercialization of places of worship, the ostentatious spending on religious festivals, the permanent retreat into the opiate that is religion instead of seeking social justice and caring for fellow citizens:

> Let Vaḷḷalār come! . . . He will take the train to Erode, he will see Periyār Ī.Ve.Rā., he will say, delighted, is it not he who has been saying that my words are the means of progress for people. Oh People of the Land of Refined Tamil! Oh People of Good Conduct! This restless crowd, with ulcerous hearts, are merely advertising like this, searching to fill the rows at the Vadalur festival, to gather crowds and to assemble armies. They are not doing this for anything else. Nature, commerce, market conditions makes them behave like this. It is not their fault. Unfortunate people – how many festivals will they celebrate, how many great souls will they worship, how many devotees will they seek out, won't they get tired of this?

The speech now turns to mocking and despairing at the perfervid religiosity of Tamils, their permanent neediness with regard to sacred places, gods, and holy persons:

> They worship so many goddesses like Kañci Kāmāṭci, Maturai Mīṉāṭci, Kāci Vicālāṭci, Nākai Nīlātayāṭci; This group is over. The next group is the "Four"[23] and the *Āḻvār*s. After having worshipped them they elevate, successively, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharishi, Aurobindo, Ramananda and try to worship them. Then they commence with the Silent Guru (*mauṉacāmikaḷ*), the Chillipowder Guru (*miḷakāyppoṭicāmikaḷ*), the Grasslawn Guru (*pultōṭṭattucāmi*), the Handful-of-earth-eating Guru (*piṭimaṇtiṉṉumcāmi*), the Pistachio-eating Guru (*pistāparuppuṇṇumcāmi*) and the Hands-tied-behind-the-back Guru (*piṉkaikaṭṭiyacāmi*). Thus, they begin with a Cāmi for each city,

> worshipping them, giving them milk and fruits, offering them lentils and ghee and also cannabis and opium and standing with their hands folded. They hope that at least through the grace of these people their sufferings will cease.

But, Ramalingar, he wishes to show, had never meant to be worshipped, had shunned such religiosity, had sought only an active compassion, grounded in the real world. When considered from this point of view, Annadurai points out, the real followers of Ramalingar are the Self-Respecters and not the so-called devotees:

> I repeat Oh Clever Ones! Bring Vaḷḷalār! Irāmaliṅkar – listen! You said, did you not, that all differences of caste and religion are like the games of a demented child (*pittuppiḷḷai viḷaiyāṭṭu*)? Now look at these people of wisdom celebrating your religious festivals! Ask them if the madness called "caste and religion separation" has gone away from their consciousness! These people will smear sacred ash on their foreheads but, when considered, only the pettiness of caste and religious separation is smeared on them. Ask if the delight in caste, the arrogance in one's clan has decreased; now look at us – we trample upon the differences of caste and religion till they die, we search out and catch the demented children and reprove their games. There is only one family, my friend, we say. "Aren't one thousand castes enough?", we call out. We catch hold of and drag to the crossroads those who say they belong to the Aiyar caste[24] and make their bruises palpable. Oh Vaḷḷalār! I would ask – Who spread your *Camaraca Caṉmārkkam*? These people who call themselves your devotes who composed verses, sang your *cintu*-songs, saw the light and rolled on the ground like someone who had wailed and fallen? Or us? The man from Vadalur would be embarrassed at the sight of his devoted servants. He would say – "My devotees and my enemies! It is you [the latter] who understood my intentions, spoke of it in refined Tamil, and taught right conduct. I will say this in the Hall of Consciousness",[25] he will say, looking at the Self-Respecters. That is why I say let Vaḷḷalār come. Let him come, let him come!

The speech segues into the imagined disappointment of Ramalingar at how little he had been heeded in the land of his birth, at how little had been done to make the life of the poor better, of how much more his second coming would have to accomplish:

> If Vaḷḷalār were to come he would have toil for at least ten to twenty years to be involved in the efforts to make people act according to his speeches. It will take one or two years for the sorrow he felt, that what he spoke of did not happen to cease. He will suffer at those deceitful people who say that they saw the light and do all the sixteen forms

> of worship, who though they chide with words do not do anything by their actions. He will have to sing devotional songs to be done with his lamentations. After that he will have to involve himself in social reform. Only if one works hard and does service fearlessly will this "all blind customs should be buried in sand" [come about].[26] Will poetic decades remove ignorance? Will the feeding of Brahmins remove the distress caused by caste? The standing brass lamp will shine, songs will ring out in the building, but will this purify the pathetic attitude of the low-level bureaucrat? Let Vaḷḷalār come, there is a lot of work to be done. A great deal to be done. . . .
>
> Tell him to come to the festivity at Vadalur, Oh you dignitaries! We are not perturbed – not just Vaḷḷalār but also if the Nāyaṉmār, the Āḻvārs come, that is alright with us. If they come there is a lot of work awaiting particularly them. Go bring them, get going, get going!

Anna's political rise was in no small measure to his oratorical skills and the Tamil he used – a Tamil easily accessible yet closely aligned with modern written Tamil. As Sujatha tells it,

> He introduced a new style of Tamil prose with a stress on a refined form of Tamil language, often deemed as *thooyatamizh* (pure Tamil), which shows little or no difference from the written form. This new style – a prose which is semi-poetic, adorned with alliterations, rhymes, simple vocabulary and mundane similes, metaphors, analogies, stories and an unorthodox use of syntax along with the novel subject matter – created a new and enduring aesthetic sensibility in Tamil print, public oratory, drama and cinema.[27]

The impact of this speech in real time and space, instead of on the printed page as we read it, would have been that much more visceral and powerful. Further, the speech appears to reflect the views of both the Self-Respect Movement and that of Anna himself at the most radical phase of their movement. It frames Ramalingar's second coming as one whose real significance is not to be found within any religious, *bhakti* paradigm or nationalist paradigm even though India was but a decade away from independence and is a very different understanding of Ramalingar than the one put forth by Ma.Po.Ci. Here, Ramalingar makes common cause not with Swami Vivekananda or Gandhi, and even when the word Vedantin is used of him in the speech, it is not used as a mark of respect but as a mocking misnomer. Ramalingar in this second coming will not be interested in the paraphernalia of religious worship but roll up his sleeves, so to speak, and get down to the work of social reform at the local, modest level where much has to be done. In the radical Self-Respecter world view Ramalingar would disassociate himself entirely from religion as both an ideology and as social practice. The ideology and practice of religion, its insidious effect on all aspects of

daily life was what was to be rejected and Ramalingar had been the Dravidian Self-Respecter all along who had seen and rejected this.

By the time Annadurai made his speech about Ramalingar the Dravidian political movement led by Periyār, in the journal *Kuṭi Arasu*, as well as in the writings of some of the intellectuals of the movement like Cāmi Citamparaṉār,[28] had lauded and raised Ramalingar to those who were part of the intellectual forerunners of the Dravidian movement. The Self-Respecters placed Ramalingar squarely within a progressive and distinctly Tamil historical teleology – one which, far removed from the superstitions of religion, would point the way towards a utopian and humanistic society, undergirded by rationality (*pakuttaṟivu*) and created through social reform. This utopian and progressive vision of Ramalingar's historical role in a Tamil primarily atheistic and secular teleological universe, one which rejected entirely the religious, was part of the Self-Respect Movement's decisive, yet perhaps less influential, contribution towards the former's paradoxical Dravidian and atheist, secular sainthood.

There are many more stories to be explored about the reception history of Ramalingar which do not find room in this book – his impact on Tamil Brahman families which adopted his views, his significance for Tamil Jains, the musical performance of his works in both film and within the performative traditions of Tamil music even today, to name just a few of these unexplored venues. But the book closes with around the 1960s, when the Dravidian paradigm becomes entrenched and part of mainstream political and cultural common sense. In the final section, with which the book now concludes, I consider, briefly, both the academic significance of Ramalingar and his living and persisting charisma, as it circulates in the Tamil region today.

Beyond Hinduism

This book is about the life and intellectual genealogies of a singular religious figure of the 19th century in the Tamil region. In tracing Ramalingar's intellectual genealogy, it has concentrated on the concept that is considered to underpin his final doctrines and to reflect whatever was unique about his religious vision in modernity – this is *cīvakāruṇyam* or compassion towards all living beings. The book has shown that *cīvakāruṇyam* was not unique to Ramalingar and has a long prehistory in lesser known or neglected works that traverse both the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Tamil Vīraśaivism between the 15th and the 19th centuries. Further, particularly in the 19th century, the concept of *cīvakāruṇyam* came to be of particular interest to religious figures from subaltern or Dalit backgrounds in the Tamil country – these figures included Īcūr Caccitāṉanta Cuvāmikaḷ, Ayothee Thass Pandithar, and Ramalingar. In exploring particularly the way in which the last two figures deploy *cīvakāruṇyam* in their writings, we see that it comes to be radically reconfigured to fit a new social ethic and a new vision of religion, whether Buddhism or a Śaivite *caṉmārkkam* in the colonial period. This thread of the

book makes an attempt to also provide a glimpse of what an intellectual history of Tamil Śaivism needs to do, by showing what can be done, through its tracing of *cīvakāruṇyam* between the pre-modern and the colonial periods, in the intertextuality of specific genres of texts. In doing so, it also indirectly shows how Tamil Śaivism adapted itself over the centuries to the tensions of caste, the negotiation between householdership and domesticity, on the one hand, and asceticism on the other, to newer and simpler ways of speaking about salvation, to creating a soteriological doctrine focusing on the experiential and the subjective dimensions of the experience of God, and finally also rose to the challenges thrown up by colonial modernity. In all this, when we look at the writings and discourses of some of its protagonists, from Ramalingar to Ñāṉiyār Aṭikaḷ, from Tiru.Vi.Ka to the Self-Respecters what we see is a serious engagement with the concepts of *camayam* or *matam*, a Tamil translation for one's specific religious tradition or for "religion" as a new conceptual category. At the same time, what we also see is a strategic lack of disinterest or even sustained disengagement with "Hinduism". It appears that some major strands of Tamil religion between the early colonial period and well into the first half of the 20th century sought to establish, rather, the links between religious reform and the regional and the local, seeking to anchor itself in newly imagined ways of being "Tamil", instantiated in spaces of community scattered through the Tamil landscape and not just in the large urban centres.

Therefore, the study of Tamil Śaivism in this book hopes to also show that religious innovation, in the period of Ramalingar and beyond, did not see itself as needing to conform to the hegemonizing norms that become part of the discourse of "Hinduism" but rather, as Pandian has argued, in its most radical forms of expression, it could even endorse a peculiarly Tamil this-worldly religiosity whereby "religion, atheism, and communism could be partners in envisioning a world of equality".[29] In his new and thought-provoking book, Brian Hatcher (2020) speaks of the "empire of reform" as that discursive construction relating to religious modernity that couples empire with religious reform and progress at the late colonial moment, a discursive construction that also links "Hinduism" to the nation state. He asks us to interrogate this discursive construction and makes an appeal for us to "make sense of religious innovation. . . . without framing it in terms of the expectations associated with hegemonic norms of religious modernity".[30] The transformation of Tamil religion was achieved in discourses between the 19th and the 20th centuries that often subverted, implicitly or explicitly, the hegemonic norms of religious modernity linked to notions of "Hinduism" through strategic evasions, through silence, or through the strength of being provincial, speaking for other ways of modernizing from the local and from the margins. By showing how Tamil Śaivism's myriad forms and innovations can best be understood in its own terms, in its specifically localized forms, in the religious visions of people like Ramalingar, this book seeks to also show how only a critical and methodological move

to centre the peripheral and the margins can decentre the universalistic claims inherent in a historiography of a "Modern Hinduism" closely linked to the pre- or emergent history of the nation state.

The Many Lives

The second major thread of the book deals with the posthumous reception of Ramalingar in hagiographies, anti-hagiographies, biographies, and speeches about him.

In examining both the life and the many afterlives of Ramalingar, it partakes of the concerns of scholars who have explored such similar figures in the same period. Indeed, the 19th century seems to have had a propensity to throw up these fascinating holy women and men, straddling the pre-, early, and late colonial worlds, with a sudden and sustained exposure to other forms of thinking and the emancipatory potentials that such exposure unlocked. Two book-length studies which relate directly to how such "modern" figures come to be narrativized, both in and after their times, which impinge directly on my own work are those of Rinehart (1999) and Dobe (2015). Rinehart's 1999 study on Swami Rama Tirtha (1873–1906) was path-breaking. It took the approach that also lies at the heart of one major aspect of this book – that the sacred stories and biographies of a "saint" are reflective of the times of the hagiographers, their concerns, and the needs that such stories fulfil for the religious community at specific historical moments. Rinehart, following Jackson (1991), also created a periodization for such a hagiographical process, suggesting that the trajectory of such works moves from a more factual to a more mythological mode, the greater the temporal distance between the time of the holy person and the hagiographer. While this book might implicitly suggest such a trajectory when we compare Arumuga Navalar's account of Ramalingar with that of Ma.Po.Ci such a trajectory, nevertheless, is belied by other features. One is the need to fit Ramalingar into the idealized trope of the Tamil Śaivite saint in most of the hagiographies, and the other is the modern discomfort with miracles which is part of the religious conundrum of modernity as well as, for instance, the Self-Respect rejection of any religion in Ramalingar. Timothy Dobe's 2015 book deals again with Swami Rama Tirtha as well as the Christian convert Sundar Singh (1889–1939), looking at the biographies, and what he calls the "autohagiographies" of these two *faqīr* figures, in mid-19th-century Punjab. In also examining their Western tours, and their self-construction of their ascetic lineages, Dobe makes a vitally important argument which I have also made for Ramalingar – an argument not just for their passive assimilation of colonial ways of thinking into their own self and religious fashioning but an active self-construction showcasing their own agency.

But we need not turn to mid-19th-century Punjab to see that Ramalingar was not unique to this period. His life and activities are often compared to Chattampi Swamigal (1853–1924), Narayana Guru (1856–1928), and to

Ayyā Vaikuṇṭar/Vaikuṇṭa Cuvāmikaḷ (1833–1851) in the regions of Kerala and the southern Tamil regions, respectively. The last two were subaltern caste figures, prophesying new doctrines, new modes of worship and, sometimes millennarian views, with poetic literary compositions that inhabited the spaces between pre-modern and modern genres. In the case of Narayana Guru, we have a figure who was able to create a new religious movement that achieved social mobility for his entire caste.[31] There is even almost a doppelgänger of Ramalingar like Sri Sabhapathi Swami (1828–1923) with a Vīraśaiva guru lineage, hobnobbing with Theosophy and interested in a soteriological amalgam of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta and Tamil Vīraśaivism who founded his own form of yoga, the *śivarājayoga*.[32]

Then there are the other anonymous figures. Let us recollect Annadurai's speech earlier, in whose rendering you have, like an infestation, a guru for every use and locality, the drugged-to-their eyeballs Cāmis, who keep the people trapped in a religious fervour that renders them blind to their own pitiable state and to social inequalities. Yet his savage disavowal of them was precisely because such local and colourful religious figures had long been important in the Tamil landscape, both urban and rural. Their popularity had endured, albeit within limited circles of devout disciples and through networks of texts and performances. Not unusually, many of them like Ramalingar were distinctly subaltern figures whose lives endure only in the memories of a small village or in the thin leaves of an old, printed book once lovingly commissioned by a group of devotees. These are the countless almost Ramalingars – just like a language is a dialect with an army, the "saint" who makes it into a lasting public memory is a person with more than one hagiography, a compiler, an editor, and perhaps an institution or two that continues to exist after her or him. Ramalingar had all this, and it served him well posthumously but what perdures even more than the poetic compositions, splendid and lyrical as some of them are, more than print and paper, is an architecturally undistinguished building, the almshouse, and *cīvakāruṇyam* – the former an embodiment, a structural monument to the latter.

The Legacy or What Remains

> *and always though truth and love*
> *can never really differ, when they seem to,*
> *the subaltern should be truth.*
>
> *The Common Life*, W.H. Auden

On 23rd May 2020, a short report appeared on the BBC Tamil website. The reporter was Piramila Kiruṣṇaṉ. She reported that in the midst of the corona virus pandemic, when many thousands of people were suffering from lost livelihoods and a consequent food scarcity, the Vadalur almshouse of Ramalinga Swamigal was making sure that those in need of food would continue to be fed as always and, if need be, housed there to receive food

till pandemic lockdowns were lifted. In my own deeply moving first visit to Vadalur, for the *Tai Pūcam* festival in the first week of February 2001, I was immediately taken to the almshouse and seated and served food with evident delight as people sat with me and explained how this was the central aim and message of Ramalingar's life and movement. Clearly, both in popular imagination where the vision of Ramalingar seems to be informed most strongly by Ma.Po.Ci's views of him and in how the now existent Ramalingar organization in Vadalur conceives of itself – keeping a public kitchen permanently going to cook rice and feed the hungry is considered to be all and everything that one needs to do if one is his devotee and a member of the *Caṉmārkkam* today. This lasting legacy of Ramalingar can only be fully understood if we place it back in the moment of its emergence – in the historical context of the devastation wrought by famine. The true import of the almshouse, and Ramalingar himself, is best grasped through an act of imagination and storytelling – not of the kind achieved by hagiographies but by an inversion of imperial fiction.

Therefore, let us turn finally to a story from that contradictory, fascinating apologist and standard-bearer for the Imperial vision and the British Empire, Rudyard Kipling. This is the short story *William the Conqueror* published in 1895. Here, British civil servants have been despatched sometime in the late 19th century from the north of India to the south, to the Madras Presidency, to undertake relief measures during a famine:

> They came to an India more strange to them than to the untravelled Englishman – the flat, red India of the palm-tree, palmyra-palm, and rice, . . . all dead and dry in the baking heat. . . . Here the people crawled to the side of the train, holding their little ones in their arms; and a loaded truck would be left behind, men and women clustering round and above it like ants by spilled honey. Once in the twilight they saw on a dusty plain a regiment of little brown men, each bearing a body over his shoulder, and when the train stopped to leave yet another truck, they perceived that the burdens were not corpses, but only foodless people picked up beside their dead oxen by a corps of irregular troops . . . They ran out of ice, out of soda-water, and out of tea; for they were six days and six nights on the road, and it seemed to them like seven times seven years. At last, in a dry, hot dawn, in a land of death, lit by long red fires of railway sleepers, where they were burning their dead, they came to their destination, and were met by Jim Hawkins, the Head of the Famine, unshaven, unwashed, but cheery, and entirely in command of affairs.

What, one might ask, has this story to do with Ramalingar? Understanding the core doctrines of compassion or *cīvakāruṇyam* in Ramalingar, and the lasting legacy of the almshouse which feeds people even today, one comes to see Kipling's short story in a different light, a light which can finally lead us to question and rework Kipling's colonial vision. Terry Eagleton in his remarkable

essay on the Great Irish Famine titled *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* remarked on the paucity of both historical and literary writing on the subject – where he asked rhetorically is the famine in Joyce? – and then suggested:

> If the Famine stirred some to angry rhetoric, it would seem to have traumatized others into muteness. The event strains at the limits of the articulable, and is truly in this sense the Irish Auschwitz. In both cases, there would seem something trivializing or dangerously familiarizing about the very act of representation itself.

Eagleton is here referring to the limits of literary representation. And indeed there is very little vernacular and primary literature on famine in South India, even on the mother of all famines, the Great Famine of 1878. But here we have Ramalingar in the mid-19th century – articulating within the parameters of his religious vision, in his great work *The Conduct,* unflinchingly, the desperation of the poor and starving.

Kipling's story gives us another figure who is also up to the task of confronting famine and disorder in the imperial territories – the capable colonial administrator. It begins later than the period of Ramalingar, after the British formulated a Famine Code in response to the Great Famine of 1876–1878, when it is conjectured somewhere between eight and ten million died. The story, to return to it, concerns the Famine Head of the Madras Presidency Jim Hawkins. In it, famine, a ubiquitous occurrence, Kipling makes clear, has once again broken out in this harsh land. It is portrayed as an inevitable, cyclical natural calamity. The natives are helpless, they are unable to fend for themselves, they are dying like flies, and this is the Englishman's, the cheerful and competent Jim Hawkins's, finest hour.

In the reworking of the tale, which we can perhaps now propose, Jim Hawkins is despatched to the Madras Presidency, in charge of famine not in the late 19th century but the first half of it. In the course of his peregrinations, after witnessing a lack of native initiative everywhere, he arrives at one small corner of the domain over which he has temporarily unlimited power, the then-desolate, arid, and unattractive village of Vadalur in the South Arcot district of the Madras Presidency. He finds that he has been preceded there by a slender man, a native, hailed by many around him as a religious prophet, or denounced by others as a trickster, who claims to awaken the dead or immortalize his own body, – but right now he stands there, dressed only in one long piece of white cloth, not cheerful but anguished yet resolute, having long since set up an almshouse open to all who come there, to feed the starving.

Notes

1 As Zemon Davis (1983:viii) points out in her study of the return of Martin Guerre what the historian grapples with, in the case of a tale like this, are all "the uncertainties, the 'perhapses', the 'may-have-beens', to which the historian has recourse when the evidence is inadequate or perplexing".

2 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:42): His interpretation is based on Tiru.Vi.Ka's memoirs, where the latter tells us that Vaḷḷalār's defenders spread calumny about Navalar in advertisements in Chennai. The Navalar camp took them to court and won. Tiru.Vi.Ka adds that he saw the court judgement himself.
3 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:44).
4 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:44).
5 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:44–46).
6 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:50).
7 In his study of Maraimalai Adigal, Vaithees (2015:199–201) discusses the *Camaraca Caṉmārkka Nilayam* and suggests that an important difference between Maraimalai Adigal's ideas regarding Śaivism and the Śaivasiddhānta and that of Ramalingar is that the latter, in contrast to the former, is more radical in his rejection of tradition, opting for a universalistic religion. This understanding of Ramalingar's religion, common to many contemporary readings of Ramalingar including that of Weiss (2019), centre Ramalingar in modernity or an alternative modernity but have not sufficiently investigated, let alone understood how, in his core doctrinal tenets of *cīvakāruṇyam* and *caṉmārkkam,* he was firmly rooted in as well as innovative with regard to, not just the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta but also the Vīraśaiva textual traditions.
8 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:52).
9 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:150).
10 The date of the full moon in the Tamil month of *Tai* (mid-January to mid-February), usually dedicated to festivals of Murukaṉ. In Vadalūr, Ramalingar had inaugurated the celebration of the worship of the *Aruṭperuñcōti* on that day in the *Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai.* This remains the single most significant ritual event in his organizations even today.
11 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:151).
12 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:153).
13 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:154–155).
14 Tirunāvukkaracu (1998:155).
15 An abridged version of Palarāmaiyyā's book, *Vaḷḷalār maṟaivuc cittiyā, maraṇamā?* (*Was Vaḷḷalār's Disappearance siddhi or death?*) with the relevant portions on Ramalingar's death is cited in Caravaṇaṉ (2010:913–970).
16 Palarāmaiyyā quoted in Caravaṇaṉ (2010:970).
17 Ibid.
18 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:iv).
19 Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (1976:185).
20 The second edition which came out in 1928 is the one I was able to access and read.
21 This description of Annadurai is from Venkatachalapathy (2008) quoted in Sujatha (2018:270).
22 The reference is to the procession of Viṣṇu in his form as Varada, the main deity in the Kāñcipuram Varadarājapperumāḷ temple during the annual *Brahmotsava* festival which takes place usually in May. The processional deity is taken out on one day on his vehicle Garuḍa, the sacred bird and this famous event is known as the *Garuṭacēvai.* Annadurai makes a pun on the play between the words "Kāñci" (meaning the place) and "Kañci" (meaning porridge). While the devotee calls out to the deity, the starving man thinks he is referring to porridge.
23 This refers to the four *samayācārya*'s of the Tamil Śaivasiddhānta – Appar, Cuntarar, Tiruñāṉacampantar, and Māṉikkavācakar.
24 One of the caste names of Tamil Brahmans.
25 This is a reference to *the Cattiya Ñāṉa Capai,* the temple which Ramalingar had constructed at Vadalur.

26 This is a direct quote from Ramalingar, *kaṇmūṭi vaḻakkam ellām maṇmūṭip pōka vēṇṭum*, that comes to define his radicalism in modern biographies of him and is elevated as we also see in Dravidian nationalism. It is also the title of perhaps the most interesting biography of Ramalingar to emerge post-1960s, which is that of Kautamaṉ (2001).
27 Sujatha (2018:271).
28 Citamparaṉār edited a slim volume of Ramalingar's poetry called *Irāmaliṅkar Pāṭṭuttiraṭṭu* in 1923, and then three further works on the poetry and doctrines in the 1950s, *Vaṭalūrār kaviyamutam* (1955), *Vaḷḷalār kāṭṭum vaḻi* (1955), and *Vaṭalūrār vāymoḻi* (1959). For a biography of Citamparaṉār, see Celvarāj (2006).
29 Pandian (2012:66).
30 Hatcher (2020:234).
31 For Narayana Guru and Chattampi Swamigal, see Udaya Kumar (2009) and bibliography in Udaya Kumar. For Vaikuṇṭa Cuvāmikaḷ, see Patrick (2003).
32 For his life and works, see Cantú (2021).

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