This dissertation has dealt with two different historical periods: the first four decades of the twentieth century and the present. I have attempted to place in conversation four different ideological moments emerging at these two historical periods, the moment of Hindutva, the moment of liberalization, the moment of nationalism and the moment of Dravidian nationalism, mapping each of these moments through constructions of the Indian woman/the Tamil woman. My task has been one of invoking a specific past, the moment of Dravidian nationalism, as a critique of certain moments in the present. One of the risks attendant on such a task is that it does not permit the telling of a linear history. Thus, for instance, the four decades following independence, the decades which saw the formation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (a breakaway group from Periyar's Dravida Kazhagam), its aggressive entry into electoral politics and its dramatic rise, the coming to power of the AIADMK (an offshoot of the DMK), the M.G.R phenomenon, the Jayalalitha government, are not written into my narrative.* One of the questions left unanswered in this dissertation is: What happens to non-Brahmin women after the consolidation of the DK and the DMK? How does the entry into electoral politics affect the gender question as it was articulated by the Self-Respect movement? My dissertation has also not dealt with the ways in which Tamil cinema has constituted the non-Brahmin public sphere in Tamilnadu.²
My task in this dissertation has been to argue for the opening up of a new area of enquiry: the subjectivity of the Self-Respect woman. To write a women's history of the Self-Respect movement (and not, a history that develops on "Periyar scholarship", is really to write history from below. It would be a history of those on the margins of the movement. This is not an easy task and requires firstly that we re-define what constitutes research material, evidence, facts, historical truths. We need really to look for very different texts. Secondly, we have to develop a theoretical framework adequate to the task of interpreting these texts. To theorize the Self-Respect woman's agency, we need to move away from the visible ways in which the gender question has already been theorized, from the problematic of the critique of Hinduism/Brahminism, from the construction of the Self-Respect marriage as the "progressive" alternative to Hindu marriage, from the construction of the Self-Respect Self as rational, iconoclastic, male. We need to ask if the Self-Respect woman's challenge to patriarchy figured in the critique of Brahminism and, if not, why not? What did this critique enable for Self-Respect women? And what questions and issues did it foreclose? Addressing these questions is crucial for feminism, the Dravidian movement, and for a better historical account of the inter-connections between gender and caste.
Notes

1 To briefly address this gap then. The Dravida Munnetra Kazha-
gam or the DMK was formed in 1949 under the leadership of C.N
Annadurai. The decision of Annadurai and his associates to leave
the Dravida Kazhagam to which they belonged, followed on the
heels of the 72 year old Periyar's highly controversial marriage
with Maniammai, a trusted party member who was several years
junior to him in age. Periyar believed that Maniammai would lead
the Dravida Kazhagam ably after his death. The marriage, however,
was only the apparent reason for Annadurai's decision. Other
differences had been festering between Annadurai and Periyar.
While Periyar boycotted the Independence Day celebrations of
1947, declaring the day as one of mourning, Annadurai, as General
Secretary of the Dravida Kazhagam, had opposed this stand. In a
12-page letter in the journal Dravidanadu, the latter explained
the necessity (on the part of the party members) of celebrating
India's Independence Day (Dravidanadu, 1/8/1947). In the 1967
general elections, Annadurai became the Chief Minister of Tamil-
nadu, having secured the majority of the seats in the Tamilnadu
assembly. He pledged his ministry to Periyar and his ideals and,
in turn, Periyar extended his support to the DMK until his death
on the 24th of December, 1973. Annadurai enacted the Self-Res-
pect Marriages Act, legalizing all the Self-Respect marriages
which had been conducted in the past and granting legal status to
all such marriages to be conducted in the future. He also
introduced the two language formula of Tamil and English for
Tamilnadu, in place of the three language formula, including
Hindu, prescribed by the Central Government. The AIADMK was
founded on 17th October 1972 by M.G.Ramachandran following his
suspension earlier that year from the DMK for flouting party
discipline. On the 30th of June 1977 he was elected the Chief
Minister of Tamilnadu. He was sworn in as Chief Minister for two
successive terms after that, in June 1980 and in February 1985.
Jayalalitha assumed the role of his successor after his death in
1987 and assumed office as Chief Minister in 1991. The
Jayalalitha government reversed many of the policies of the
Dravidian movement, diluted its politics of Tamil nationalism and
its anti-Brahmin, anti-religion rhetoric, and actively encouraged
Hindu religious causes, even supporting the kar seva at Ayodhya.
In 1997, the caste-clashes between dalits and the dominant
non-Brahmin castes in rural South Tamilnadu and the tacit support
which the ruling DMK under the Chief Ministership of
M.Karunanidhi has extended to the non-Brahmins, has raised the
issue of the relevance of the non-Brahmin movement to dalits
(See, for instance, K.A Manikumar, "Caste Clashes in South
Tamilnadu", EPW, 32.36 (September 6, 1997): 2242-2243).

2 For analyses of the post-independence non-Brahmin public
sphere, see M.S.S Pandian, The Image Trap: M.G Ramachandran in
Film and Politics (New Delhi: Sage, 1992); Vivek Dhareshwar, and

If the nationalist and Social reform movements made it possible for upper-caste women like Sister Balammal and Vai.Mu.Ko to start their own magazines, the Self-Respect movement created the space for non-Brahmin women writers of the calibre of Moovalur Rama-mi rthathammal and Neelambikai Ammayar whose writings were inseparable from their activism. Moovalur, who was initiated into the devadasi system at a young age, started her political career as a Congress activist. One of the initiatives she took up was the abolition of the devadasi system. In the mid-1920s she broke away from the Congress to join the Self-Respect movement. She addressed various conferences of the movement and spoke about how Hinduism and upper-caste men were enslaving women. She was also involved in the anti-Hindi agitation in 1938. In 1936, Moovalur published the novel Dasigalin Mosa valai Allathu Mathipettra Mainer ("The Treacherous Net of the Dasis or a Minor Grown Wise"). This semi-autobiographical novel deals with the lives of two devadasi sisters, exploited by upper-class men, who leave their profession to organize a "Devadasigal Munnetra Sangam" (Federation for the Progress of Devadasis).

Vijaya Ramaswamy in her paper "Transition: Gender Politics and Literature in Tamilnadu" presented at a seminar on Interrogating Post-colonialism at Shimla in 1994 tells us about another writer, Neelambikai Ammayar, who was a scholar with a remarkable grounding in Hindi, English as well as in Tamil. In 1937, she compiled a Hindi-Tamil dictionary in which more than 7000 technical terms in Hindi were provided with a Tamil equivalent. Her book Six Hundred Parallel Proverbs in Tamil and English published in 1931 was motivated by her desire to prove that the English language did not have anything more to offer than the Tamil language in terms of the richness of its vocabulary, its idioms or its literary traditions. Neelambikai's anti-sanskrit/Hindi essays earned her the title of "Tani Tamizh Tiruvattii". Neelambikai's Muppenmanigal Varalaru (1940) was written in order to familiarize Tamil women with spiritual literature. The book was a hagiography of three chaste Tamil women who belonged to the Saivite Nayanar pantheon, Karaikkal Ammaiyan, Mangaiyarkarasiyam and Tilakavatiyam.

Most critical works on Tamil literature do not mention either of these writers. For instance, C.S Lakshmi in her book The Face Behind the Mask: Women in Tamil Literature (New Delhi: Shakti, 1984) mentions Vai.Mu, "Kumudhini", "Gugapriyai", Visa-lakshi Ammal, Sister Balammal, K.Savitri Ammal, K.Saraswathi Animal, and "Lakshmi", all of whom were upper-caste women writing in the early twentieth century. However, the fact that Moovalur was a novelist and that Neelambikai, a biographer, translator and compiler of dictionaries, ensure that their work is discussed at least by feminist scholars interested in women's literary creations and historians of the Dravidian movement. Susie Tharu and K.Lalitha in their introduction to Women Writing in India Volume 2 mention Moovalur's "self-recriminatory posture" in
Dasigalin Mosa Valai (p.13). Vijaya Ramaswamy (1994) discusses the work of Neelambikai Ammayar and Moovalur. What is overlooked however is the work of many non-Brahmin women essayists, Jayasekari, Meenakshi and S.Neelavathi, who wrote for the columns of Puratchi and Kudi Arasu. Many of these women were also powerful orators and their speeches, published in the Self-Respect journals, are equally impressive. In Appendix II, I have provided a translation of essays by the Self-Respect activists, Jayasekari and Alhaj Subako.