

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The contemporary understanding that even sex, like gender, is a cultural entity (rather than a biological essential) adds a critical significance to the process of subject formation. The sustenance of sexual and gender discriminations relies much on the process of subject formation as they protract solely by repetitive performance of identities¹. However, the ongoing nature of the process of subjectification also gives us a political hope to ‘undo’ or perform gender identities differently². Thus, to ‘undo’ our gender there is a primary necessity to contextualize and study gender constitution within specific discursive contexts³. Cultural Studies along with Postcolonial Studies creates a prospect for English studies to accommodate such a regional and cultural contextualisation of gender into its disciplinary boundary. This thesis is situated in this theoretical milieu and attempts to study the constitution of the Tamil political subjectivity during 1930-60s. This subjectivity primarily defines itself in relation to Tamil language and is constituted through a self-conception of Tamilian, a category of identity, as someone who is ready to die or fight bravely for his language. This study titled “Gendered Passions and Masculinity Construction: Reflections on Tamil Identity during 1930-60s” is conducted on the hypothetical ground that this Tamil subjectivity is primarily masculine in its constitution.

¹ Judith Butler’s ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’ (1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) – these works, among other things, talk about the discursive construction of ‘sex’. Ref also: *Judith Butler* (2002) by Sara Salih and “Being Performative: Butler” in *Performativity* (2007) by James Loxley.

² Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004). While the prior works highlight how gender is performative i.e. how we are ‘doing’ gender rather than being, in this work Butler unfolds the possibility that such a performative offers to ‘undo’ one’s gender. entitlement of a entitlement to a livable life when no such prior authorization exists, when no clearly enabling conventions is in place” (224).

³ Judith Butler’s ‘What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue’

1.2. Focus of the Study

The Tamil-speaking Madras Presidency⁴ saw nine public suicides (including five self-immolations) and continuous vehement protests by college and school students during 1964-65 for the sake of guarding Tamil against the making of Hindi as national/official language of India. The line of suicides was begun by a young, middle class peasant of 27 years named Chinnasamy. On 24 January 1964 he came with a can of petrol in his hand to the Trichy (a city in the southern Tamil Nadu) railway station and burnt himself alive shouting “Long Live Tamil! Down with Hindi” as a form of protest. This was among the first recorded incidents in the global history where one publicly lay down his life for the sake of saving one’s mother tongue from the encroachment of another language⁵. Eight others followed him the next year.

There were also continuous and vehement protests by college and school students for 50 days which necessitated the interference of Indian army to bring back the situation under control in the state. When the government record goes like this, A. Ramasamy, one of the student-protestor, in his book, notes that more than 200 people were killed by the police and the army during this time. Two among the nine who died were students. One died by consuming pesticide and the other became a prey to the police bullet (14-18 *Theeyil Vendha Tamil Puligal*). Some significant student leaders also later admitted that they considered committing suicide by self-immolation during that context (151 *Struggle for the Freedom of Languages in India*).

⁴ Though India was linguistically reorganized in 1956, the name Madras Presidency was retained for the Tamil speaking region even after separating the Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada speaking regions from it and they were formed as separate linguistic states namely Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka respectively. The name Madras Presidency was changed as Tamil Nadu only in 1968 after DMK came into power in the state.

⁵ Before Chinnasamy, Potti Sriramulu, a nationalist freedom fighter undertook a fast unto death for a separate Telugu speaking administrative territory with Madras (today Chennai) city as its capital within the independent Indian nation. His fasting ended dramatically with his death on 15 December, 1952. Such an act clearly shows an affective attachment that he shared with his mother tongue Telugu and the emergence of a new imagination of united identity in India based on the language one speaks.

Among the nine who laid down their lives, some had studied up to fifth to seventh standard, some up to SSLC and some had graduated. A few were married and had children and others were unmarried. But curiously all were men, belonging to non-Brahmin castes, middle or lower middle-class backgrounds and were young aged from 19 to 34.

What made them choose their ‘body’ as a weapon and show their civil protest in this particular way? How do people like Chinnasamy who were young and educated only up to elementary level (i.e. literate to the extent of reading and writing) indulged in such an act for Tamil language? What tied him so close to Tamil that he became ready even to leave his young wife, aged mother and only child and die for its safety? What do the act of self-proclaimed suicide meant for people like Chinnasamy and other student protestors? More significantly, why only young men that too belonging to non-Brahmin and middle and lower class backgrounds consider the life of Tamil more important than their own? These are the questions which this thesis primarily tries to explore. It concentrates predominantly on the constitution of this non-Brahmin, literate, middle or lower-middle class Tamil political subjectivity with a specific focus on the role of gender in such a process.

1.3. Significance of the Period of Study

Though this thesis primarily focuses on the Tamil subjectivity which fervidly demonstrated its passion and loyalty to mother tongue, Tamil during mid 1960s, it cannot begin there to examine how such subjectivity is constituted. Thus, this thesis begins from 1930s which is a very crucial moment in the history of modern *Tamilpattru*, an affective relationship with Tamil language and identity. This period saw the coming together of various organizations and groups of different ideological backgrounds to form a common and united Tamil identity with a Non/Anti-Brahminic signification. More particularly, the late 1930s saw a coalesce of groups of various ideological backgrounds like the Self-Respect movement, Tamil associations, Saivite organizations, independent Tamil scholars and

pundits, Tamil teachers of schools and colleges, women activists, depressed class groups, Muslim organizations and so on against the Congress government's decision of making Hindi a compulsory language in schools⁶. These forces maintained diverse associations with Tamil language. For instance, the Saivites imagined Tamil as the language of Lord Shiva and a powerful means for their religious revivalism. Tamil scholars saw it as the language of civilization. Social reformers like Periyar and the self-respecters, women activists like Dr. Tharumambal, Moovaloor Ramaamirtham Ammal and so on, and depressed class activists like Sivaraj, Meenambal Sivaraj, and many other Muslim leaders opposed Hindi for varied but interconnected reasons like: 1) it would affect the educational and employment opportunities of the students of the south especially that of the backward and scheduled castes 2) the introduction of Hindi is done with communal and religious motives which would help them later to make Sanskrit as a national language. This marks a crucial shift in the imagination of modern *Tamilpattu* and identity, which is dealt in detail in the next chapter, and has a telling significance in the constitution of the Tamil subjectivity of the mid-1960s. Thus this thesis focuses on the period 1930-60s.

This period is familiar for the vehement protests against introduction of Hindi – widely known as ‘Anti-Hindi Agitations’ – in the Tamil speaking region of Madras Presidency which at certain moments even challenged the unity of India as a country⁷. These protests took place during four different occasions from 1938-1965. The first set of anti-Hindi agitations took place during 1938 to 1940 against the Government Order (G.O.) issued on 21 April 1938 by the Congress Ministry headed by C. Rajagopalachari announcing the government's decision of introducing Hindi as a compulsory subject at the first three forms in

⁶ Rajaji's observation/vision about how introduction of Hindi would enable the reading of Thulasidoss/Valmiki *Ramayana* was often quoted by them. In a context in which Sanskrit and Hinduism were viewed as the tools of varna and caste orders such observations were interpreted as attempts to assure the place of varna/caste orders in the society. And the Devanagiri script advocated for Hindi was found to be close with Sanskrit and was opposed by the Muslim leaders as Congress' attempt to Hinduize India.

⁷ Periyar's "Tamizh Nadu Thamizharukke" propagation and the claim for separate Dravida Nadu which was first put forth by the Dravidian movement and continued by the DMK till 1962 anti-sessionist act.

125 secondary schools in the Tamil speaking regions of Madras Presidency. The second set of agitations took place during 1948-50. This was again against the introduction of Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools by the Congress Ministry. The third anti-Hindi agitations took place in the mid-1950s against the intrusion of Hindi in the public and government administrative places like railway stations, post offices, and other central government offices. The fourth and the most popular anti-Hindi agitations took place in 1964-65 against the making of Hindi as an official language of India.

Among these, the fourth set of protests that took place during 1964-65 is very crucial as the Tamil subject's passion and loyalty towards language is performed more vehemently during this time. The vigorous students' protests and suicides of this period gained much attention in both the international and national media. These suicides and the 50days bloody agitations of the students⁸ – which were widely read as an expression of the 'collective will' of the 'Tamil people' – were pivotally responsible for certain significant political decisions and happenings both in the country and the state. At the national level this incident led to the continuation of English as the official/link language in the country. In the state it was responsible for the historic victory of the DMK – the flag-holder of the desires and aspirations of the Tamil people regarding their language and nation – in the 1967 elections and established a strong ground for the sustenance of a politics based on Tamil language and identity in the state. In addition to these, at the international level these protests – both the suicides and the students' agitations – drew in the popular consciousness of the world the picture of Tamilians as someone who are sentimentally and emotionally attached to their language and are even impulsive as they would even go to the extent of laying down their own lives for its sake. These things mark the significance of the period.

⁸ These students' agitations are very significant political events in the history of modern Tamil Nadu. Begun just as a one day non-violent protest to show their solidarity against the introduction of Hindi this protest grew violent and uncontrollable for the state government. It necessitated the intervention of the Indian army in whose measures for bringing the situation under control nearly 200 people were killed.

To understand the importance of this study it is obligatory to see a detailed review of works done prior in this area and critically analyse the limitations of their theoretical frameworks. Such a detailed and critical review of literature would also help us draw the background of this thesis clearly. Thus, it is dealt separately as a chapter (Chapter II) rather than given as a part of this chapter.

1.4. Methodology

This thesis derives its general methodological assistances from Foucault's concept of 'discourse' and 'subjectification' and Judith Butler's conception of 'gender performativity'. It examines how the Tamil subjectivity taken for consideration in this thesis is constituted by the political, social, literary and historical discourses of C.N. Annadurai. It approaches these discourses in a Foucauldian sense of the term: as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (The Archeology of Knowledge 49). Though the constitution of the Tamil subject in relation to the discourse of C.N. Annadurai is the focus of the thesis, the latter is not approached as an individual from whom these discourses emanate. He is approached as a discursive body/field in which the Tamil subject is constituted. In this sense, Anna is a field of discourse which produces something else "rather than something which exists in and of itself and which can be analysed in isolation" (17 Mills).

Though Anna is viewed as a production field of the Tamil subject, he is not viewed in this thesis as someone who is passively formed in the interaction among various modes of domination. It sees the self-formation of the Tamil subject as a process in which the person is active. It is primarily concerned with "isolating those techniques through which the person initiates an active self-formation" where variety of operations are performed "on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct" (Foucault quoted in Rainbow 11). In other words it aims "to study the constitution of the subject as an object for himself: the formation of the procedures by which the subject is led to observe

himself, analyse himself, recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge” (quoted in Hall 92). Paul Rainbow calls this mode of analysis of the subject by Foucault as “subjectification”⁹.

Extending on this particular aspect of Foucault, and drawing from various theories ranging from phenomenology, speech-act theory and performance, Judith Butler has evolved a significant conception regarding subject-formation called the theory of “performativity”. This theory emerges with a specific focus for the regulations and normalisations of gender identity. As James Loxley rightly points out, “the force that [Butler] associates with the performative is partly a normalising power that constitutes by exclusion” but “there always remains a chance within the performativity of identity for dissonant or disruptive gestures” (123). He further adds about Butler that:

Gender is thus a groundless performance, a kind of fiction, that presents itself otherwise in *appearing* to proceed from a prior ground or origin. Our gendered behaviour seems to be an aspect of a natural or given identity, but that identity is itself a product of the performative process. So the politics of gender performativity as Butler sees it will consist in exposing this process to view, revealing the pervasive performativity that our standard accounts of identity fail to see” (125).

This brings in a significant insight into the notions of Tamil identity and subject formation, especially relating to gender in this thesis. It helps us study the functions of the acts of Chinnasamy and the student-protestors more incisively paying attention to their performative nature.

⁹ He recognizes three modes of objectification of the subject identified by Foucault namely: 1) the mode of dividing practices; 2) the mode of scientific classification and 3) the mode of subjectification and points out how unlike the first two, in the last mode the person is active in the process of self-formation. However, as he points out, one can see an overlapping of these modes in the process of self-formation and there are instances in Foucault himself where these modes are “effectively combined, although they are analytically distinguishable”. See. Paul Rainbow “Introduction” in *Foucault Reader* for further references (pg. 7-11).

However, this thesis does not intend just to apply these concepts to study the object of research. It takes them up for a general methodological assistance while examining the object of study with a specific eye on its vernacularity. It predominantly focuses on print sources like books, journals, public orations of Anna published in print, and so on with a few interviews with the student anti-Hindi protestors and video recordings of Anna's public meetings.

1.5. Relevance of the Study

Though there are prior research works done in this area they have not studied how the Tamil subjectivity is materially constructed through various institutions and forces during this period. More significantly, they have not paid attention to the implication of the subject's relationship with the leader in the construction of the former's relationship to language. The relevance of this study rests primarily on the new theoretical lens it uses to study the areas of research.

1.6. Limitations of the Study

Firstly, this thesis as we have noted down in the section 1.4. predominantly relies on published print along with a few interviews of the anti-Hindi student-protestors to map the subject's relationship with C.N. Annadurai. This explicitly directs the thesis' focus to the relationship that the literate community (including school dropouts) shared with Anna. But wide and diverse groups of people including the lower classes and uneducated groups were related with Anna. The details of their relationship cannot be found in the published print. Even in places they were hinted in the print they appear just as turbulent masses who uproar listening to Anna in the public meetings and films. Marking their relationship demands an exhaustive field study in the various regions of the state with a specific eye for the local stories and lore on Anna. But such a study goes beyond the scope of the present study.

Secondly, this thesis focuses only on Anna because he is the predominant and most significant personality of the period. Nevertheless there were other leaders like Periyar, E.V.K. Sampath, other leaders of the DMK like Nedunchezian, M. Karunanidhi, C.P.Chitrarasu and so on and leaders like Ma. Po. Sivagnanam with whom the subjects were associated too. Thus, the sketch of Tamil subjectivity that this thesis draws is not complete.

Thirdly, though this thesis focuses only on Anna it limits itself to his print and public orations and does not analyse his cinema and drama performances. Both these fields emerge as significant institutions during this context and play a vital role in the constitution of Tamil subjectivity. Annadurai and many other DMK leaders like M. Karunanidhi were indulged in writing drama and cinema scripts and lyrics for films. Many significant drama and cinema actors like D.V. Narayanasamy, MGR (M.G. Ramachandran), S.S. Rajendran, N.S. Krishnan and many others were members and sympathizers of the DMK which made drama and cinema a significant field of Tamil self-formation. Anna stands as an important personality in these two fields as he has spearheaded many transformations in them. More significantly, they also comprise the wide range of Tamil masses, especially the subaltern classes and castes' association with Anna. A study of Tamil subjectivity of this period cannot be complete without them. Though this study analyses certain dramas of Anna and touches in certain places about the significance of cinema in the constitution of Tamil subjectivity (especially in relation to Annadurai) it does not go into a detailed analysis of them. Performances of Anna's dramas are not available today. And cinema and drama performances belong to the visual medium – a vast area which demands a separate exhaustive study. Such a demand of the visual goes beyond the scope of one thesis. Thus, in order to limit the scope and focus of the thesis these fields were not dealt in detail and precision.

1.7. Chapter Divisions

This thesis is divided into six chapters. **Chapter I** provides introduction about the research area and explains the significance of the period taken for consideration, focus and methodology of the thesis. It also elucidates the relevance and limitations of the thesis and explains the chapter divisions. **Chapter II** gives a detailed review of literature and demonstrates the relevance of this thesis in studying the formation of modern Tamil subjectivity with an affective relation to Tamil language. Marking the historical disjunctures in the modern *tamilpatru* this chapter points out the transformations in the relationship of the Tamil subject with Tamil language in this context, and explains the limitations of the framework of devotion used by Sumathi Ramaswamy in her book *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*, a path-breaking work done in this area. It foregrounds how an understanding of Annadurai is necessary to understand the disjuncture of the 1930s in the history of modern *tamilpatru* and the uniqueness of the Tamil passion expressed during the 1930s-60s. Unlike prior researches, this thesis approaches him as an assemblage of the new socio-political and cultural institutions, spaces and power relations. Thus, this chapter argues that a closer look at the relationship between C. N. Annadurai and the Tamil subject provides an understanding of the latter's relationship with Tamil language.

Chapter III focuses on the varied and heterogeneous relationships that exist between the subject and Anna. It discusses how the modern Tamil subject's beliefs, desires, values, dreams, aspirations, pleasures and so on are formed in the discursive realm called Anna. It is in these discursive formations that the subject's relationship with Tamil language is constructed. Thus, this chapter also demonstrates that this multifarious relationship that the subject shares with Anna is also the relationship that the subject shares with Tamil language. **Chapter IV** focuses on three main constitutive ethics of the Tamil subjectivity namely *maanam*, *veeram* and *tamilpatru*. It analyses the discursive process through which these qualities emerge as essential features of the Tamil self and highlights their modern

characteristics. This chapter investigates how the reconstructions of the Tamil golden past in Anna's discourse indulge in constructing a historical continuity for the new sense of Tamil self marked by *maanam*, *veeram* and *tamilpattru* and validate it as ahistorical, universal and unchangeable. Pointing out the distinct things that these ethics signify to men and women it draws attention to the gendered nature of the Tamil Political subjectivity.

Chapter V focuses on the functions of the category 'woman' and its extension 'domestic' in the constitution of the masculine Tamil political subjectivity. It also marks the complex, dialogic relation that exists between the political and the literary in this matrix and demonstrates their function as a productive field of subjectivity. **Chapter VI** encapsulates the arguments in the previous chapters and raises certain questions regarding the intricacies involved in studying the role of gender in the subject constitution.