

CHAPTER IV

Tamil Subjectivity and its Constitutive Ethics

4.1. A New Sense of the Tamil Self

Oh beloved Tamil,

I am going to die, so that you can live long! Oh, beloved Tamil! The Hindi act has been enacted to kill me! The assurances of Pandit Nehru have gone into oblivion. The Hindi act, which was out to kill the Tamil language, should be withdrawn. Anna and hundreds of the DMK volunteers, who are in prison should be released immediately. Therefore, I am marching to the battlefield. Tomorrow morning, before 11 o'clock, I will die pouring petrol on my body and setting fire to it. After witnessing my act, people will ask 'Why Hindi? What for Hindi?' At least afterwards the rulers (in Tamilnadu) will become courageous enough (to prevent the Hindi imposition).

Yours Sincerely,

... the bone remains of a Lion,. (quoted in A. Ramasamy)

Chinnasamy³⁵ wrote this letter before he committed his public suicide. It exhibits his passionate attachment with Tamil language to ascertain whose long life he laid down his own life. From his remark “The Hindi act which was out to kill the Tamil language” “has been enacted to kill me! [him]” it is clear that he sees his life as inseparable from that of Tamil. Such a perception and the intensified act show the extent to which language has become the determining factor of the modern Tamil-speaking individual. However, more significant is the sense of Tamil self that this letter exhibits.

It is obvious that Chinnasamy's self-immolation is a modern civil protest against a democratic form of government. In his letter he himself states “After witnessing my act

³⁵ Chinnasamy was 27 years old when he committed suicide for the sake of protecting Tamil language. He was the only child of his parents to whom he was born after 23 years of their marriage. He studied up to fifth standard and dropped his studies with the death of his father. Thus, he was the only support to his mother. He got married when he was 21 years old and soon after got a girl child. He was a farmer with one and half acres of land and a small house as his property.

people will ask “‘Why Hindi?’ ‘What for Hindi?’”. This shows that he **has** envisaged a wide audience for his performance. He has dreamt of heated debates in the public sphere about it which he believed would undoubtedly lead to an uprising. He has also believed that this uprising would be a pressure on the rulers of Tamilnadu (then Madras Presidency) and as a result they would become “‘courageous enough” to act against the Hindi imposition.

Surprisingly, this man, living in a modern age, under a democratic structure has conceived his civil protest – closely connected to the technologies of modernity like print and public sphere – as “war” and “marching towards battlefield” and has perceived himself, a modern individuated self, as a “lion”. How did such a perception of oneself become possible for him? This chapter studies the discursive formation of this self by analysing the varied ways in which the Tamil subject tries to know, understand and in turn fashion its self.

4.2. Technologies of the Tamil Self

Cognizing the political protests for the assertion of one’s linguistic rights and one’s identity in a modern nation-state via the ‘classical/medieval’ systems of self-assertions (like “warfare” and the self-perception of the one who indulges in them as “warrior” or “lion”) is neither an ahistorical nor a self-evident act. Nor it is a common characteristic of Tamil modernity. It is a distinctive feature of the new sense of Tamil self that emerges in the Dravidian-Tamil discourse of the anti-Hindi context.

The representation of a man as lion, bull, elephant or tiger is present even in the ancient Tamil literature especially in *Puram* poems that which deals with war. One can see such an imagination of male self in texts like *Puranaanooru* in the *Sangam Anthologies*, classical epics like *Silappathikaram* and in the medieval texts like *Kalingaththu Bharani* that eulogises war. These texts use images or metaphors symbolising physical robustness or the untameable valour of a warrior or a king and presents it an ideal masculine image. But what

one has to keep in mind is that this classical poetic space is part of an aesthetic and political culture of a different episteme whose perception towards and relation with literature and nation are radically different from that of the 20th century. The processes through which the ideal masculinity of the classical literary becoming an important technology in the constitution of the modern Tamil political subjectivity lies the story of the Dravidian/Tamil subjectivity of the 1960s.

Undoubtedly colonial modernity is the context that enables such a process. That is, the possibility of a classical poetic imagination becoming a significant mode through which the modern Tamil subjects like Chinnasamy and other anti-Hindi agitators know and make sense of themselves was created by modernity. Because it was a context in which the ancient literary texts were transformed into treasuries of the history of Tamil language, culture and the Tamil speaking people. Such a transformation of the literary into aspects of the cultural history led to other wider transformations in the perception of languages. Lisa Mitchell has incisively noted how such a transformation establishes a new relation between languages and the people who speak them. Chapter II has discussed this in some detail in (Ref. section 2.2. Modernity's New Affective Relationship with Language).

The shift in the perception of languages from “tools or locally available resources” for carrying out particular tasks to “fundamental bases of individual identities”, that Mitchell points out, is the significant effect of these wider transformations. It is in this context that the histories of literatures were imagined and written with reference to specific languages moving away from genres or kingdoms or courts. And, it is the context that enables literary histories to become both the history of the language and the people who speak it. These wider transformations provide the setting for such an imagination and become a shared epistemological ground for a new understanding of self in the anti-Hindi context. More specifically, it takes place in the Dravidian/Tamil discursive realm.

Chinnasamy's perception of himself and his action gains significance not for its uniqueness but for its prototypical representation of a wider socio-political and cultural context that produced him. During this period, the struggles against Hindi were continuously described or termed as "wars" and the participants were identified as "warriors" and "battalions". A book written in the late 1940s about the First Anti-Hindi agitation can be cited here. It chronologically documents the protests conducted against the introduction of Hindi during the late 1930s. The author defends its authenticity in his preface by citing his habit of diary writing. He explains how even when he was a small boy he started noting down in his diary the events of anti-Hindi agitations. He also explains how the vibrant political culture of his home – his father being involved in social reformist and political movements – instilled an interest for politics in him. His home had been a place where many significant political leaders would frequent and have their meetings. So he was interested in the politics of defending Tamil language even at his young age ("Preface" Illanchezhian).

But, a book which claims such a factual and historical value to it, curiously, carries a subjective and emotionally loaded title *Thamizhan Thoduththa Porra [The War Waged by the Tamilian]*. The descriptions of the various protests are given in a metaphorical language. It describes the demonstrations conducted by the anti-Hindi confederation as a war waged by the Tamils. It describes the leaders, participants and the 'martyrs' (both those who died and those who were imprisoned) as warriors, soldiers, battalions, young lions, tigers and leopards. The upraise of Tamizhagam (the Tamil land) during 1938 against Hindi is symbolised via the image of a lion which comes out with his horripilated nape" (33 Ilanchezhian). It labels the anti-Hindi protests in general as "another Silappathikaram War" (37). It also calls this history of protests as "The brave story of the progeny of Cheran Chenguttuvan defeating the progeny of Kanaga-Vijayan" (41). Such a metaphorical language seems to subvert the author's claim of reason, factuality and history. In addition, its narration is characterised by an overt

theatricality. In short, the language and narration of this historical account is extravagantly marked by the features of fiction.

Can this be interpreted as the proximity of this text to an ancient, or more particularly, a pre-modern literary convention? The fact that even in the protests the demonstrations, leaders, participants and ‘martyrs’ were addressed as war or battalion, army generals or dictators, warriors negates such a view. For instance, the long procession led by Moovaloor Ramamirtham Ammal travelling through many significant parts of Tamil Nadu displayed a long banner inscribed as “Thamizhar Padai” [The battalion of Tamils]. (Such perceptions continued even during the students’ anti-Hindi agitation of the mid 1960s. Interestingly one such student procession is called the “Battalion of Cheran Chenguttuvan” (181 *Struggle for Freedom of Languages in India*). The leaders of these protests were called “army generals” or “dictators” even during the time of their appointment. The participants and ‘martyrs’ were addressed as brave soldiers, warriors, lions and bulls. The public speeches of Anna during Thalamuthu and Nadarajan’s burial can be cited as an example here (188-9 Illanchezhian)³⁶. The political party which leads the anti-Hindi protests is called as an encampment or military quarters or the abode of the warriors. Most of Anna’s speeches and writings, including his letters and Pongal greetings, are crammed full of such references. On certain instances the one appointed as the leader of the struggle in an area is presented with a sword signifying the ‘army general’ (Ref. Fig. No. 10) and the leader one presents it was decorated with a crown signifying ‘a king’ (196 A. Ramasamy). This shows that the book while narrating the history is also participating in the emerging modern Tamil cognizance.

This clarifies that the narrative of the text cannot be seen as its proximity with a pre-modern literary culture. But in contrast, it is the modern political sphere that shapes its

³⁶ Nadarajan and Thalamuthu are participants of the first anti-Hindi agitation of 1938. Nadarajan belonged to Adi-dravida community and Thalamuthu belonged to Nadar community. Both of them were jailed for indulging in protests against making Hindi a compulsory subject in schools and died out of ill-health in hospital during their prison tenure.

language and narrative. Chinnasamy's self-perception as a 'lion' and 'warrior' is also undoubtedly constituted by this political context. Can such a perception be labeled as "pre-modern" as it seems to forge an ancient or medieval system of self-perception? We had also seen frequent analogies between the present day anti-Hindi protests and the war in *Silappathikaram*. How do such analogies become possible? In addition, the protestors were also perceived as the direct progeny of Chenguttuvan, whom the epic *Silappathikaram* claims as the king of Chera dynasty who moved by the story of Kannagi propounds Kannagi worship. Moreover the one who wrote the epic, it was claimed in the epic itself, is none other than Chenguttuvan's own brother, Ilango Adigal. But, how do the modern individuals perceive themselves as the offspring of literary creations (kings and warriors) of a distant past? How come their actions were imagined and justified/legitimized through such classical analogies? To understand this process, we need to look at the specific construction of the Tamil self in the Dravidian/Tamil (Anna's) discourse.

4.4. Tamil Self in Anna's discourse

As we noted in our discussion of the Tamil golden past in the last chapter, the Tamilness in Anna's discourse is marked by three significant but interrelated qualities called *veeram*, *maanam* and *Tamilpattru*. It is the presence of these qualities that validates one's claim to rule Tamil land and people. The presence of these qualities does not differentiate the king from his subjects and offers him a superior position. His authority is qualified by highlighting the presence of Tamilness – a common marker of Tamil self irrespective of the position they occupy.

What do these qualities mean? *Tamilpattru* can be roughly translated into English as the strong emotional attachment for Tamil language. *Maanam* can be translated as honour or

the sense of pride. Likewise, *Veeram* can be translated as “bravery” or “valour”. But besides these meanings these words attain certain significations in Anna’s discourse.

Firstly, *tamilpattru* though can be translated as strong emotional attachment for Tamil language, as we discussed in Chapter II, it cannot be called as “devotion” from a religious or pre-modern sense of the term. The attachment with Tamil language is established in a modern plane here. It does not assume metaphysical or transcendental powers in the pre-modern sense. This new conception or a relation with language as “mother tongues” emerged only during modernity. Language here attains a modern character as a primary determinant of its speakers’ identity. It is in this modern matrix one could notice a significant transformation in the position of the language and the nature of people’s attachment with it. This transformation necessitates an understanding of the modernness, that resists one from calling it as devotion.

Secondly, *Maanam* can roughly be translated into English as ‘a sense of pride or honour’. V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai observe that:

Maanam could mean pride in one’s Tamil past and history; pride in being ‘Tamil’. It exists as an attribute of the Tamil language, its ‘pure’ essence, so to say. *Maanam* also defines one’s experience of righteousness.

They also mark that,

Thus a woman who is ‘chaste’ and ‘valorous’ is one endowed with *maanam*, while a man who prizes his self-possession and pride above everything else incarnates in himself this noble principle. Furthermore, *maanam* is characteristic of the ideal Tamil society that aspires to standards of normative excellence considered desirable and necessary by the ancient Tamil ethical texts. *Maanam* served the DMK ideologues as an ethical imperative. It has contributed to the creation of a self-image of the Tamils

as a proud and unrelenting people who would not tolerate any infringement of their honour and would redeem it, if need be, by courting death. (554)

As it has been observed, *maanam* means a kind of pride, honour, dignity and eminence that one feels with regard to their possession. As they rightly observe, the objects of possession differs between men and women. In other words, the semantic function of this quality is gendered in this discourse. But this sense of possession that one feels over language, land, history or even one's gender is not feudal as it is implied in the above mentioned work. In contrast, it is a modern discursive construct. The major transformation that occurs in one's relation to language, land, history, culture and gender during modernity constitutes these entities as primary determinants of one's identity. Lisa Mitchell explains how during modernity language is constructed as one's possession or something that a person 'naturally' has or possesses through the work of varied discourses³⁷. Such an argument can also be applied to land, culture, history and gender. Realising the modern-ness of this sense of possession is essential to realise its inevitable role in the constitution of the modern Tamil subjectivity.

Similarly, *veeram* which is generally translated as "bravery" also has got a specific meaning in this discourse. While establishing it as the natural and quintessential quality of a Tamil self, this discourse, nevertheless, highlights a specific kind of bravery/courage as *veeram* and legitimizes it over others.

For instance, in a public meeting conducted on 24th June 1960 while talking about the kind of mean activities in which the Congress party indulges Anna mentions about a macho man named Muthuvel of Pethunaayakkan Pettai. He was hired by Congress men to cause disturbance and scuffle in Anna's public meetings. This burly rowdy, Anna describes, after

³⁷ For detailed discussions see Lisa Mitchell and Benedict Anderson

hearing the latter's speech dropped the plan of causing disturbances and told the congressmen that "Annadurai is a good man! He talks very honestly! He even advised me; so I wouldn't disturb his meetings" (175 Aarumugam). When the Congress men warned that in such a case they would not pay him, that rowdy threatened them "if you don't pay me regularly, I'll disturb your meetings and create scuffle" and continued to get payment even without working for them. One comes across many such references in Anna's speeches. They function as evidences to prove the meanness of Congress leaders and were used to boast the DMK cadre's determination towards its principles.

It is interesting to note that in spite of his physical robustness and audacity this rowdy is not mentioned as a *veeran* (brave or a valourous man). The word 'rowdy' represents physical power with muscular body, fearlessness and one's ability to indulge in physical fists. He, though, is paid by the Congress men could assert his supremacy over them with this physical power. Such a power of the rowdy is undoubtedly forceful. But despite these he is not seen as someone who possesses *veeram*. In contrast, Pakkirisamy, a significant and powerful speaker of the Dravida Kazhagam is often addressed as a *veeran* for his fearless public speeches against the repressive measures of the Congress government. He is praised as "*anjaanenjan*" – one who has a daring heart – for continuing to speak even when he was affected by Tuberculosis and was vomiting blood on the stage. Similarly, Anna is called a "brave and daring man" (21 Thiruvilakku Anna Malar 1964) for the kind of courage that he exhibited in a meeting conducted in 1937 at Coimbatore. During this meeting when Congress hired hooligans started throwing stones during Periyar's speech, the writer notes, Anna suddenly caught the mike and started addressing the frightened crowd that was diffusing. Listening to him the crowd calmed down and gathered again to listen (21 *Thiruvilakku Anna Malar* 1964). Similarly Anna is referred to as the "brave army-general of those people who are neglected by the central government" (9 Thiruvilakku Anna Malar 1964) and "a warrior

who had created the force to drag the reins of the horse that runs uncontrollably in the craze of victory (referring to congress) and controls it” (10). Work in the modern political sphere is related to determination and the intellectual ability to attain one’s goal. It is termed as *veeram* here. Thus, here *veeram* becomes something that is associated not with physical robustness but with the firmness of mind and keen intellect. One could see here a transformation of *veeram* from the physical to psychological.

Though, firm mind and keen intellect are indicative of *veeram*, not all kinds of firmness of mind and intellect are parts of *veeram*. The discourse divides intellect into two kinds: one which accompanies *veeram* and the other which accompanies cunningness. When both signify a strong determination and the employment of wit and intelligence for attaining victory, how come one becomes *veeram* and another becomes cunningness? This division is marked by the presence and absence of *maanam* – a sense of honour. The one that is accompanied by *maanam* is *veeram*; the one that is devoid of *maanam* is cunningness.

For instance, in the *Dravida Nadu* of 20.7.1947 there is a comparison between two incidents that took place in the Aryan and Tamil household. In the Aryan household we see a husband telling his wife to go and surrender before his opponent. He asks her to submit herself to the opponent to save the former. He considers his life so precious that he says “Only if there is a wall, one can paint on it. Likewise only if we’re alive we can have progress, victory, everything.” He hastens her to kneel and surrender to the killer and cry and beg for her *thali* (mangala sutra). On the contrary, the woman of the Tamil household cries before a poet-singer for a different reason. She says that her brave husband who is wounded by sword is lying there. His body has stitches all over it. She pleads the poet to stop singing the songs of war as they would drive her husband to the battlefield.

This comparison strikes at the difference between an Aryan and Tamil male. The Aryan male is depicted as someone who is timid. He considers his life as more important than anything. He thinks that one can lose anything to save one's life and asks his wife to submit herself before the slayer. In contrast, the Tamil man is a brave warrior. In spite of his wounded condition, he would not hesitate to rush to the battlefield. For him, certain things, especially the objects related to his inner plane, have a greater priority over life. This feeling of priority one gives for certain things and the will he exhibits to protect it is *maanam*. Such a quality of *maanam*, as we saw from the analysis, is abundantly present in the Tamilian, but completely absent in the Aryan. When the former is ready to rush to the battlefield for the sake of his nation, the latter safeguards his life at the stake of his wife's honour. While the Tamil male feels a sense of *maanam* in relation to his nation and language and is determined to protect it in spite of his wounded condition, the Aryan male doesn't have the feeling. The Tamilian and Aryan are discriminated here by the respective presence and absence of *maanam*. This comparison presents the ethics it highlights as universal and claims it as a marker of the legitimate type of male self. It is the presence of this sense of *maanam* in Anna, the DMK members and Chinnasamy that qualifies their bravery as *veeram*. Similarly, it is the absence of it in the Aryan heroes that delegitimizes their determined mind and intellect as cunningness³⁸.

The Tamil male in the comparison also exhibits another significant quality called a readiness for self-sacrifice. Though he is wounded, he does not hesitate to go to the battlefield when some infringement happens to the object that symbolizes his *maanam*. This is another crucial ingredient of *veeram* in this discourse. Though the anti-Hindi agitations were metaphorised as wars and frequently had been seen even as "another Silappathikaram" (41 Illanchezhian) the asset of this war is measured not by the physical ability of the Tamil

³⁸ The skill shown by Krishnan in stealing the dresses of the Gopikas or that which shown by Rama in killing Vaali are considered as cunningness.

soldiers but by their determination to undergo any kind of ordeal for the sake of their language and land. For instance, in 1963 the DMK, which called itself as encampment and the abode of warriors, asked its cadres to come forward and register their names to sacrifice for the sake of Tamil language. This is just to make sure how many *veerars* are there for protecting Tamil language. Here the *veeram* of the warriors is measured not by their ability to kill several men, elephants and horses, as in the ancient texts, but by their readiness to surrender themselves for this noble task. In this matrix, one who is physically strong and is able to indulge in physical fists and feuds is not recognized as possessing valour and bravery.

Such an understanding of *veeram* as the will to sacrifice oneself for the sake of protecting *maanam* is a modern inception. The Tamil male who possesses this *veeram* marked by *maanam* is the one who has this *interiority* – an inner ethical plane. The Aryan male who asks his wife to surrender before the slayer is devoid of this plane. Thus, while recognizing Anna, Chinnasamy and others who fight for the sake of Tamil language as ‘*veerar*’ and ‘*theerar*’ this discourse validates them as having an *ethical interiority*.

Thus, *Tamilpattru*, *maanam* and *veeram* function here as an ethical frame that legitimizes oneself as a subject. But, it is not because of *having/possessing* these qualities individuals like Chinnasamy laid down their life for Tamil language. Registering his name in the list of people who are ready to die for Tamil, naming his daughter as Dravida Selvi, openly proclaiming his affection for Tamil through his letter and laying down his life for the sake of it seem to express this interiority. However he is validated as a Tamil subject installed with an ethical *interiority* only when the students tagged his photo with the caption “*Thee kuliththa Theeran, Thi.Mu.Ka. Veeran*” [The Valiant man who Self-immolated, the Warrior of DMK] (232 *Struggle for Freedom of Languages in India*) which means “the brave man who self-immolated, the warrior of DMK” for the sake of self-sacrifice he did for Tamil language and he was offered a title “Singa Thamizhan Chinnasamy” (the lion-Tamizhan

Chinnasamy) (233 *Struggle for Freedom of Languages in India*). The acts of tagging his photo with a caption and offering him a title in the public becomes acts/performances that install an ethical interiority within him and make him a subject. In other words, they function as an ethical frame that validates the subject.

When *tamilpatru*, *maanam* and *veeram* constitute the ethical frame that validates the individual as the subject, it is crucial to ask, what validates this frame? What provides a natural, ahistorical and universal value to this frame? A natural and universal dimension is provided to this frame by constructing a long and unbroken history. Let us now see how the construction of the classical history validates this ethical frame through varied means.

4.4.6. Classical History for the Modern Ethical Frame

It is clear that the qualities that constitute the ethical frame in this discourse have a different function within the socio-political context of modernity. Curiously, this modern quality is claimed to be present in the Tamil self since the classical days. Such a claim is justified by a specific interpretation and reconstruction of life in the classical Tamil literary texts.

For instance, let us take Anna's *Kal Sumantha Kasadar*³⁹ (*The dimwits who carried the Stone*). It is a one-act play centered on an episode from the classical epic *Silappathikaram*.

³⁹ It was published in Dravida Nadu on 13th March 1949. It is a reconstruction of an episode from the classical epic *Silappathikaram*. *Silappathikaram* has two main stories which encompass many branch stories. One is the story of the life of Kovalan and Kannagi and the other is the story of Chera Chenguttuvan to whom the first story is narrated. The one-act plays of Anna and Karanthai Ganesan deal with the second story. Anna's *Kal Sumantha Kasadar* (*The Dimwits who Carried the Stone*) deal with the story of the Chera King Chenguttuvan making the Aryan kings Kanakan and Vijayan carry stone for the statue of Kannagi and *Ilango Vin Sabhadam* (*The Vow of Ilango*) deals with the story of the Chenguttuvan's younger brother Ilango's renunciation. Karanthai Ganesan's *Manamaravan Chera Chenguttuvan* also deals with the story of Chenguttuvan making the Aryan kings carry stone for the statue of Kannagi. The story of King Chera Chenguttuvan that *Silappathikaram* narrates gained much attention during modernity as coincidentally *Pathitru Paththu* of Sangam Anthologies has dedicated ten poems on the praise of a king named the same. There were attempts to write the history of this king and the history of the Chera dynasty using *Pathitru Paththu*, *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* as the main sources. Mu. Raghavaiyengar's *Chera-Chenguttuvan* (3rd edn. 1933)³⁹ and the continuous reprint of it shows that the historicity of this king was well established in the Tamil academia despite discordance against it. Anna in his *Arya Maayai* expresses that the story of Chera Chenguttuvan that Ilango Adigal's *Silappathikaram* records is nothing but a literary representation of historical events that took place in the classical Tamil Nadu. He appreciates it as an "attempt to record the historical time in epic time". Thus, the aim of this dramatisation is an attempt to travel through that historical time

This episode is about Chera Chenguttuvan's war and victory over the two northern kings Kanakan and Vijayan. The victorious Chenguttuvan makes the defeated kings carry a stone from the Himalayas on their heads for making the statue of Kannagi. But it is just an outline of the actions, a historical frame within which the epic is narrated. As typical of epics, the action is just a supplementary to the grandeur of the epic narration characterised by exaggerated descriptions and symbolizations. This entire episode highlights the economical and cultural prosperity, political accomplishment, and the valour of Chenguttuvan. But the valour of Chenguttuvan lies in his ability to fight single-handedly against thousands of people. His speeches in the epic are characterised by classical and medieval significations of bravery, kingship and power.

Interestingly, this episode gets a different signification in Anna's reconstruction. Anna's *Kal Sumantha Kasadar* begins in a warriors' tent where a warrior sings in praise of Tamil language and land to a passionate audience. Another warrior comes hurriedly and their conversation goes like this:

Warrior who came running (W I): On what are you swearing?

Warrior who was singing(W II): Why? On mother, on father, on Tamil.

W I: Are you swearing on Tamilagam? Is that true?

W II: Why do you doubt it all of a sudden my friend?

W I: Friend! I swear on mother. We're the soldiers who fight for the honour of Tamilagam. But they consider it as empty and meaningless talks. (218)

In the conversation that continued we come to know that two Aryan kings named Kanagan and Vijayan, who live at the banks of the river Ganges ruling Kalinga talked ill of the Tamilians, Thamilagam and the Tamil king Chera Senguttuvan. Hearing this Warrior II gets

rather than the epic time. In other words, what Anna tries to recreate through his dramas is the 'history' that *Silappathikaram* 'carries' with it rather than its story.

furious and says: “Did wastrels mock at brave men? Did liars/gossipers dishonour people who are not afraid of war?... Let us tell this to our king. Let us wage a war.” (219)

Here a commoner is represented as an epitome of *tamilpattru*, *maanam* and *veeram*. Though belonging to the Chera Kingdom, Tamizhagam – the whole Tamil speaking area that includes the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdom – occupies the space of mother land in these warriors’ cognizance. They could not take any dishonour to Tamilians, Tamil lands and the Tamil kings. Hence they get furious at the Aryan kings and decide to wage a war against them. Such an imagination of Tamil identity and united Tamil Nadu as parts of one’s *maanam* is undoubtedly a modern product.

The soldiers’ view of the Aryan kings confirms their sense of identity. While the soldier who enters hurriedly informs the names of the kings who insulted the Tamils, the other identifies them as Aryans. The former confirms it as: “Yes. Those lowly dusts only. The mellowed crowd has started to roar. The crowd which stood before us with their hands and mouth tied has begun to crow over. It talks disgracefully about our Tamils.” (219) Such an imagination constructs that even the commoners of that time were aware of the low and subservient nature of the Aryans. It becomes a part of the Dravidian-Tamil common sense that continued to exist from the ancient Tamil society.

A different order of the power structure emerges here. When in the original *Silappathikaram* it is the king who decides to wage a war against the Aryan kings, in Anna’s reconstruction it is the soldiers who decide that they should wage a war against them and inform their decision to the king. The perception of the ordinary soldiers as someone who possess *tamilpattru*, *maanam*, and *veeram*, and as someone who is well aware of their superiority over the Aryans is what enables such a difference in the power structure. In other words, it is the installing of the modern Tamil self into these classical characters that creates the possibility for a new and different ordering of power.

In the second scene the Chera king Chenguttuvan is introduced. He is talking to a *puraanigan* (a Brahmin who tells the stories from Hindu Puranas) in his palace. The Brahmin is tells the story of the *Ramayana*. The king questions and criticizes it. The former describes how after Sita was abducted by Ravana, instead of getting angry Rama was simply worried and searched for her all through the forest but in vain. Lakshmana, seeing the grief of Rama, comforts him by telling that it is their bad time, and asks him not to lament. When the Brahmin says this, the king asks him, “What did Lakshman say? When he knows that someone has kidnapped Sita did he say that it is our bad time, leave it?” (219 *Peraignar Annavin Nadaga Chithirangal Vol.2*). The Brahmin explains that Lakshmana said so just to console Rama. He goes on to describe how while searching for Sita, Rama gets the friendship of Sukreeva in the forest. Sukreevan developed enmity with his brother Vaali, who chased him away from his kingdom. Rama promised Sukreevan that he would kill Vaali and get back the throne. Chenguttuvan again interrupts here and tells the Brahmin that it is a surprise to hear that the one who couldn’t find a way to regain his kidnapped wife promises to help someone regain the throne. When the Brahmin continues to narrate the story of Rama killing Vaali, Chenguttuvan’s army general Villavan enters and clarifies that Rama did it by hiding himself behind a tree. Shocked by it, Chenguttuvan criticizes that the act of Rama is unethical. Villavan then says that such unethical fight is part and parcel of the Aryan culture. During this time the warriors enter the place and inform the king about the insulting speech of the Aryan kings Kanagan and Vijayan. The infuriated king orders a war against them.

One can see here how the values and codes that mark the hero of the Aryan epic, *Ramayana* is established as mean, unethical and low in stature. This is done primarily by hinting at their lack of *veeram* and *maanam*. When both Rama and Lakshman knew that someone has stolen Sita, the former cries and the latter consoles him by telling that it is their bad time. This segment is given after the conversation of the Tamil commoners getting

furious on hearing that someone demeaned their land. The sharp contrast is significant here. Unlike the Tamil commoners, Aryan princes like Rama and Lakshman cry and talk of bad time even after their woman is being stolen. Chenguttuvan is portrayed as someone who is critical of Aryan values, ethics and logic. He is presented as someone who is rational and ethical. The ethics that he represents are undoubtedly the values that constitute the modern Tamil ethical frame. Such a presentation of Chenguttuvan and other significant classical characters like Illango Adigal as rational, anti-Brahminic, anti-superstitious, anti-caste and embodiments of *maanam*, *veeram* and *tamilpatru* is also present in various other reconstructions of this epic. Annadurai's *Illangovin Sabhatham*, Karanthai Ganesan's *Maanamaravan Cheran Chenguttuvan*, and M. Karunanithi's *Cheran Chenguttuvan* and *Silappathikara Nadaga Kaapiyam* can be noted as few examples here.

In addition to these literary reconstructions, references to the victorious kings of Sangam texts and Cheran Chenguttuvan of *Silappathikaram* are often made in Anna's writings and public speeches. Such references to the ancient Tamils' relationship with Tamil language and country constitute this modern Tamil identity and its ethical matrix. For instance, in one of Anna's Pongal greetings there are references to victorious Tamil kings that Sangam texts like *Mullaipaattu* and *Nedunalvaadai*. (See Vaakaiyur" in *Thambikku Annavin Kadidhangal*. (1986) Vol. 1.) They are in the cantonments spending their sleepless nights thinking about the injured warriors, horses, elephants and so on. The king of *Nedunalvaadai* visits the injured warriors and the poem describes him as rejoicing. Anna interprets it as a rejoice over the fact that so many able warriors in his country are ready to risk their life to fight against the enemy (41). The kind of an emotional attachment with country that he imagines for the classical subjects is a modern phenomenon.

In addition, such scenes of battlefield and war were juxtaposed with poems on the pitiable condition of the love-stricken queen. In spite of all the sophistications in the palace,

she struggles without sleep unable to endure the pain of the king's separation. Anna explains that thought the king goes to war leaving behind a loving wife one should not think that the ancient Tamils did not care about the pleasures and greatness of love. If one does so, "*Agam [Agananooru]* would mock at [them]" he asserts (42). Poems that describe how fiercely and dearly the ancient Tamils loved are drawn to explain how the ancient Tamilian who had this amount of interest in love and knew its greatness very well, worked in the cantonments even without sleep to protect one's country. The ancient Tamils are those who knew fairly well the eminence of love and the amount of pain that separation causes. Still they went to the battlefield to protect their rights and tradition. This affixes a sense of duty-consciousness that the Tamil self feels in relation to Tamil language and land. By highlighting and overstressing the pleasures of love and the domestic that the kings of Sangam age deserted for the sake of protecting their *maanam*, their indulgence in war was interpreted as a wilful self-sacrifice. The descriptions of the duty-conscious, self-sacrificial classical Tamilians possessing *veeram* always carry a warning to the present day Tamilians to avoid blame for not fighting for their language. Thus, in addition to the present day political necessity their classical past puts an ethical demand on the Tamilians.

Such an attribution of modern political ethics to the classical constitutes the modern Tamilness or the Tamil self. The literature and arts⁴⁰ (through which such reconstructions are realised) function as a bridge that fills the gap between the classical and the modern by providing concrete body, voice and gesture to it. This bridging constitutes the ethical frame that validates the Tamil self as ahistorical, universal and non-changeable. It is within this discursive matrix that the modern Tamil subjects like Chinnasamy experience themselves as the direct progeny of the classical 'Tamil lion-heroes' and perceive their civil protests as a "march towards battlefield".

⁴⁰ Apart from drama such imaginations were articulated through posters, wall paintings, illustrations, paintings on journal and book covers, cinema and so on.

It is significant to note that the martyrs and the people who fought against Hindi imposition is again constituted by men. When there were people like Tharmambal, Moovaloor Ramamirtham Ammal, Meenambal Sivaraj, Kunjitham Guruswamy and so many others who fought against Hindi imposition during the first anti-Hindi agitations, from the second anti-Hindi agitations – when the ethical frame in Anna’s discourse started gaining strong ground – women participation was continuously decreasing for a considerable degree. During the anti-Hindi agitations of 1964-65 it can be said that there was hardly any women force. Linguistic protests became exclusively a plane of men. Even a few women colleges who participated in the struggle were made to do so by compulsion (196 A. Ramasamy). There is not even one woman political leader emerged via the anti-Hindi agitations when there were several male leaders. This raises the questions: How did such a sense of self endorse only the men? Whether the political subjectivity that this discourse constructs is only a field exclusive for the male performance?

The constitutive values of the Tamil self in this discourse, as we already marked, is gendered in nature. The objects of *maanam* differ between a man and woman. When a man who fights for his language and land is the one who has *maanam*, for a woman, in addition to these, it is her *karpu* that causes *maanam*. When for a man *maanam* is placed in the realm of *interiority*, for a woman it seems to be placed on her body itself. Similarly *veeram* for a man is referred to his readiness to fight and lay down his life if some infringement takes place to his *maanam*. Whereas, to a woman it refers to her readiness to stand as a support and encouragement to the man of her possession – whether husband or son – when he fights for his *maanam* and taking pride in his unrelenting *veeram*. Thus, a woman as we see here is negated of a direct political participation. Her participation takes place only through the man of her possession. In such a case, is this discourse gender discriminative? Do women have any space in this discourse? If yes, what kind of a space it is? Next chapter would explore

into these questions via a close study of the function of the category 'woman' in Anna's discourse.