RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND LANGUAGE

RESURGENCE: ADAPTATION AND REORIENTATION

Belief in the magical power of language in which the philosophies and other ritual devices exist is a common phenomenon in many religions. In Tamil Nadu, Tamil and Sanskrit are regarded as ‘divine languages’, capable of working miracles, efficacious in pleasing God. However the claims of one or other of the two languages are often contested. The poems of Saiva Nayanmaars and the Vaishnava Alwars are regarded as sacred and salvational by the followers of the two sects. Ooran Adigal writes, “The language of Saivism is Tamil. Saivisim and Tamil are not different: Saivism is Tamil and Tamil is Saivism.”¹ Such formulations indicate the importance of the language to religion. The importance of Tamil to Vaishnavism is no different. Naalayira Divya Prabandham holds the same sacred place in Vaishnavism as the Thriumurais do in Saivism. Religious orders are intimately connected in the preservation and propagation of these poems and other religious texts.

The important Saivite Orders in Tamil Nadu are the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, the Dharmapuram Adheenam, Kasi Madam,

Suriyanar Koil Adheenam, Thondai Mandala Adheenam, Thirugnana Sambandar Adheenam (Madurai) and Thiruvannamalai Adheenam (Kundrakudi). Among the Veera Saiva Adheenams in Tamil Nadu, the Perur Adheenam in Coimbatore and Mayilam Bommapuram Adheenam are the most famous ones. The important Vaishnavaite Orders are the Vanamaamalai Mutt, Sriranga Narayana Jeeyar Adheenam, Sriperumbudur Yatiraja Jeeyar Mutt, Thirukkurungudi Mutt (See Appendix VI.), Srirangam Andavan Ashramam, Parakaala Mutt (See Appendix VII.) and Ahobila Mutt (See Appendix V.). While the first four belong to the Southern school of Vaishnavism, the last three belong to the Northern school. Ahobila Mutt is in Andhra Pradesh and The Parakaala Mutt is in Karnataka. However, numerous branches of these Orders are in Tamil Nadu and the pontiffs make frequent visits to these branches. The famous Advaitic orders are Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in Kanchipuram and Sringeri Saradha Peetam. There are three other Advaitic orders founded by Shankara in Varanasi, Dwaraka and Puri.

PROFILES

Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam

The Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam was founded during the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century by Namasivaya Desikar. The present pontiff is the twenty third in line and is presiding over the Order from 1983.

Among the Saivite Orders, Thiruvavaduthurai Order is generally regarded as the most ancient one with a hoary past. One of the reasons for this is that the Order has more branches than any other Saivite Order and also the landed property of the Order is considerably larger than the other ones. The majority of Saivite Orders belong to the tradition of Meikandar, the greatest exponent of Saiva Siddhantha philosophy in Tamil. While the followers of Saiva tradition belong to no one single caste, the Thriuvavaduthurai Adheenam is usually headed by a Saiva Vellala, a higher caste in the non-Brahman fold. As already noted, ‘Vellala’ is a generic term for all agricultural castes. Among them, the Saiva Vellala is a vegetarian caste and generally known for its puritanical practices and observances.

In the following few paragraphs, we shall see some of the important events and instances that happened during the history of the Adheenam. Many of the pontiffs of the Order were eminent scholars in Tamil and a few of them have written works in Sanskrit also. (See Appendix VIII.). While the founder-preceptor himself did not write any books, at least twelve books were written in his praise during his times, an indication of his influence and popularity. The other interesting aspect that is to be noted is that the close similarity between Royal Courts and the Orders. It is a well known phenomenon that during these times, that kings and chieftains

---

3 However the Madurai Adheenam seems to have existed from late eighth century and the Kundrakudi Adheenam from the thirteenth century. But among the followers, Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam definitely ranks as the most prestigious.
4 No precise information seems to be available on the extent of land holding of the mutt.
were the main objects of eulogy and praise – a privilege that seems to have been extended to the pontiffs of the various Orders. This practice seems to have persisted till the present day and U.V. Saminatha Iyer has noted in his autobiography several instances where poems were written in praise of the then pontiff.

The third pontiff, Sri Ambalavan Desikar (16th century) is credited with writing the maximum number of books among the pontiffs. He has written around ten books, which are known as Pandara Sathirams. The period of the fourth pontiff Sri Rudhirakodi Deiskar (1610-21 A.D.) was marked by a wide expansion of the mutt’s property and branches, especially in the southern regions. This was the result of the pontiff’s close association with the then chieftain of Madurai, Muthu Veerapa Nayakkar. Also Muthu Veerappa Nayakkar seems to have resisted the spreading influence of Christianity in the region and the resistance is directly traced to his association with the Thiruvavaduthurai Order. He was also a good Tamil poet and again the influence of the mutt could be seen here.

Another aspect that is to be noted is that many of the pontiffs and scholars associated with Saiva Orders were credited with writing numerous devotional and canonical works. This is indicative of the role of the religious orders in not only preserving old Tamil manuscripts, but also in

---

6 Ibid., p.14. Generally, the pontiffs are called Pandarams. "Pandara Sathiram" literally means "Treatises of Pandarams".
7 Ibid., p.16-17. Also see Dinamani Deepavali Malar 2000, p.48.
the production of a large corpus of Tamil literature. Like all Saiva Orders, Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam too, has brought out a large number of publications. (See Appendix IX).

**Dharmapuram Adheenam**

Dharmapuram Adheenam was founded in the middle of the sixteenth century by Guru Gnana Sambandar, a Saiva Vellala, to spread Saiva Siddhantha philosophy. As per the rich tradition of Saiva Orders, the founder preceptor was a scholar in Tamil and had authored eight books. The repeated reference to the authorship of Tamil devotional and canonical works by the pontiffs in many of the Adheenam publications attest to the fact that Tamil language has been accorded prime importance right throughout their history. This is in somewhat of a contrast to Orders of other sects, for we find that the other Orders have generally given more importance to Sanskrit, especially the Kanchi Kamakoti Advaita Order or *Manipravala* in case of Vaishnavite Orders. However, while the Saiva Orders had generally given more importance to Tamil, their attitude towards Sanskrit is accommodative.

The fourth pontiff of the Dharmapuram Adheenam asked one of his disciples, Sri Kumara Guruparar Swamigal to proceed to Varanasi, and spread Saivism there. He learnt Hindi and founded a mutt there, namely Sri Kumara Sami Mutt, which exists till date. The legend avers that Kumara

---

Guruparar proved the superiority of Saivism to the Mughal Emperor there and was given many land grants. The head office of the mutt was however shifted to Thirupanandal in Kumbakonam district during the eighteenth century\(^\text{10}\) and today it is one of the leading Saivite Orders. It is regarded as the ‘\textit{Shishya} (disciple) Order’ of the Dharmapuram Order and the head of the Kasi Order is usually coronated by the pontiff of the Dharmapuram Order.

The Adheenam has contributed in the clarification of important issues regarding caste and varna for headship in the religious orders. The seventh pontiff wrote a Sanskrit book called \textit{Varnashrama Chandrika}, which argues that even Shudras, members of the fourth varna are eligible for initiation into monk hood and headship of religious orders.\(^\text{11}\) The need to write such a book indicates that the issue of sanyas for Shudras was a point of contention.

The growing importance to Tamil language among Saiva mutts was again indicated by the seventh pontiff Thiru Ambala Desikar, who wrote apart from \textit{Varnashrama Chandrika}, a book called \textit{Samadhi Linga Prathitavidhi} (The Rules for the installation of Linga) in Tamil to overcome the defect of non-existence of Saiva Agama works in Tamil. The close association of Saivism and Tamil is reinforced by several aspects of Saiva literature and religious practice. Apart from a preoccupation with writing

\(^{10}\) Mu. Varadharajan, 1988, \textit{op. cit.}, p.203.
\(^{11}\) Selvaganapathy, 1984, \textit{op. cit.}, p.6.
books in Tamil, Saivism also believes that Lord Shiva, the foremost deity of Saivism to be the author of many works in Tamil.

**Thirupanandhal Kasi Mutt**

Thirupanandal Kasi Mutt is located in the Kumbakonam-Chennai National Highway in the Kumbakonam district. As already noted, Kasi Mutt is regarded as the disciple mutt of the Dharmapuram Adheenam. The Mutt was founded in the seventeenth century, and the founder was a great scholar in Tamil. *Meenakshi Amman Pillai Thamizh, Needhi Neri Vilakkam, Chidambara Mummanik Kovai, Chidambarach Seyyul Kovai and Sakalakala Valli Maalai* were some of the Tamil works written by him. Initially, the Mutt was called as Kumarasamy Mutt and later when the head quarters of the Mutt was shifted to Thirupanandal, it came to be called as the Thirupanandal Kasi Mutt. The present pontiff is Kasivasi Muthu Kumara Swamy Thambiraan and is the twenty-first in the line of succession. (See Appendix II.). He is also the advisor to the HR&CE Board of the Tamil Nadu government.

The Mutt has also appointed *othuvars*\(^{12}\) in famous temples like Varanasi, New Delhi, Vadathiruvaalankadu, Kanchipuram, Thiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Rameswaram. The Mutt brings out a monthly *Kumara Gurubarar*. The Order has also instituted several educational endowments. In the tradition of Saiva orders, Kasi mutt too has a history of patronising

\(^{12}\) *Othuvars* are non-Brahman singers who sing the Thirumurais in Saivite temples on ritual occasions.
Tamil scholars. Keeva Jagannathan and V.M. Subramanayan are among the scholars who are patronised by the order. The mutt has also brought out cheap editions of famous Tamil works like *Thevaram, Thiruvaasagam, Thirukkovaiyaar, Thiruvisaippa, Thirumandhiram, Kandha Puraanam, Periya Puraanam and other Thirumurais*, canonical works and works of the founder Kumara Gurubarar.\(^\text{13}\)

**Kundrakudi Adheenam**

Kundrakudi Adheenam was founded around 1310 A.D. in Thiruvannamalai by Deivaasigamani Desikar. Around 1690 A.D., the Adheenam was shifted to Piraanmalai by the seventeenth pontiff Naagalinga Desikar, following a request by the Ramanathapuram king, who was greatly pleased with the pontiff for bringing rains during a drought. Marudhu Pandiya kings who were ruling over Sivagangai, renovated the Kundrakudi temple and asked the thirty-first pontiff Marudha Naayaga Desikar to take care of the administration of the temple. So the headquarters of the Mutt was shifted to Kundrakudi in 1778.

Arumuga Naavalar, the famous Saiva Siddhanthin, who was associated with the language and religious resurgence during the nineteenth century visited the Adheenam in 1864 A.D. during the period of the thirty eighth pontiff Arumuga Desikar and delivered a lecture there. The pontiff was greatly pleased by Naavalar and his service to Tamil gifted

a palanquin to him. Naavalar was also closely associated with Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam and the Adheenam gave him the title 'Naavalar' roughly meaning 'one who is proficient in speech'.

The most famous of the pontiffs of Kundrakudi Adheenam was Deivasigaamani Arunachala Desika Parmachaariar, affectionately called as 'Kundrakudi Adigalar'. From obscurity, the Adheenam became well known throughout Tamil Nadu because of the activities of Kundrakudi Adigalar. Kundrakudi Adigalar, sometimes called as 'revolutionary ascetic' was well-known for his wide participation in social reform activities and was among the first religious heads to reach out to the people. He also founded a religious forum called Arul Neri Thiru Kootam to fight atheism and another one called Thriukkural Peravi to spread Tamil culture and Thirukkural. His success in making the Kundrakudi village self-sufficient drew praise from the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Kundrakudi Adigalar was also known for his insistence on worship in Tamil language, dynamic activities during his years at the helm of Deiveega Peravai, as a member of the Upper House of the Tamil Nadu Assembly and his peace initiatives during communal riots in early eighties in Tamil Nadu. The present pontiff is Deivasigamani Ponnambala Adigalar, the forty-sixth in line and took charge in 1995.14

14 Ibid., pp.8-10. Also see, Maru. Paramaguru, ed., Kundrakudi Thirukayilaaya Paramparaith Thriuvannamalai Adheena Varalaru, Kundrakudi, 1990.
Perur Adheenam

Perur Adheenam was established by Santhanlinga Adigal around four hundred years back and belongs to the Vira Saiva tradition. The founder had written four books: Kolai Marruthal, Vairaakiya Sadhagam, Vairaakiya Dheepam and Avirotha Unndhiyaar. There is no information about those who were in charge of the Adheenam till the nineteenth century. From 1850 A.D. onwards Nacchimuthu Adigal, Ramalinga Adigal, Sachidhanandha Adigal and Mouna Adigal were presiding over the Order. It is during the period of Mannicka Adigalar, the religious order came into prominence. He founded an organisation called Sathvidhya Sanmarga Sangam which was active during that period and during the annual celebrations, various religious leaders from all over Tamil Nadu participated. This was one of the first attempts to bring all the religious leaders in the one platform. Maraimalai Adigal, the doyen of pure Tamil Movement had attended the seminars conducted by the Adheenam.

Also Perur Adheenam is one of the religious orders which forcefully insists that the language of liturgy in Tamil Nadu should be Tamil. The present pontiff is in charge of the Order from 1967 A.D., and Marudhachala Adigalar has been nominated as his successor.\(^{15}\)

---

Mayilam Bommapura Vira Saiva Adheenam

Bommapura Adheenam is in Villupuram district and was founded by Baala Siddhar, probably in the seventeenth century. The Bommapuram Murugan temple is under the administration of the Adheenam. The main temple tower was built by the fifteenth pontiff, and the eighteenth pontiff created the paraphernalia like jewels, temple cart and other endowments for the conduct of regular worship.

In 1938, Bommapuram Adheenam became the first among the religious orders to establish a Tamil College. The present pontiff is the nineteenth in line and is called Srilakshmi Sivagnana Balayswamigal. Many Tamil works were written in this religious order.  

Andavan Ashramam, Srirangam

Andavan Ashramam in Srirangam is one of the foremost Vaishnavite Orders of Vadagalai School. The Order was founded in the seventeenth century by Sri Vazhuthoor Andavan, the famous disciple of 'Thiru Kudanthai Desikan'. The present incumbent Srimad Andavan Sri Ranga Ramanuja Maha Desikan is the eleventh in line of succession of pontiffs, and is in charge of the Order from 1989. Apart from being a renowned scholar in Vishistadvaita, he is well versed in music, ayurveda and astrology. Among its many achievements, this is one of the Orders which has established

---

branches in foreign countries, the most famous being “Sri Ramanuja Mission” in Maryland, United States of America, an indication of growing diasporic connection of the religious orders.

The Order also brings out a monthly magazine namely *Ranganatha Paduka* with the avowed purpose of spreading Vishishtadvaita philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism and general ethics. The other major activity of the Order is to help the renovation of old temples in Tamil Nadu. The Order has also brought out ancient Sanskrit texts like *Geetha Bashyam* and *Paduka Sasthiram* in simple Tamil, books which are regarded as important by orthodox Sri Vaishnavas. The contemporary popularity of the Order is reinforced by the initiation of former President Shankar Dayal Sharma by the current pontiff.¹⁷

**Vaanamaamalai Mutt, Tirunelveli**

Vaanamaamalai mutt is one of the most prestigious Orders of the Southern School of Sri Vaishnavism. It was founded by the great Vaishnavite Acharya of the fourteenth century and a doyen of the Southern School, Manavaala Maamunigal, who appointed his second in command, Azhagiya Varadan as the first pontiff of the mutt.¹⁸ The current occupant of the seat is thirteeth in line, and is called Pramahamsa Sri Kaliyan Vaanamaamalai Jeeyar Swamigal (See Appendix III.) and a renowned scholar in both Tamil and Sanskrit. He has translated the famous Tamil

ethical book *Thirukural* in Sanskrit. The mutt is easily among the richest of Vaishnavite Orders, and is in charge of the administration of the very famous Vaanamaamalai temple in Thirunelveli district. The followers of the mutt are spread across the subcontinent right upto Nepal and according to popular lore, the mutt has the largest disciple base among all the Vaishnavite Orders in Tamil Nadu. The pontiff is seen by many Vaishnavite followers as the most enterprising, who makes frequent tours to all parts of the country to spread the influence the Vaishnavism and also these tours are also very successful fund-raising campaigns to further the activities of the Order.

**Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam**

Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt is the most famous and influential religious order in the country and follows Sankara’s Advaita philosophy. Even though the religious order claims that it was one of the orders founded by Adi Sankara and in the year 477 B.C., the claim is contested by other Advaita orders. The Order’s sixty-eighth pontiff Sri Chandrasekara Sarasvathi was one of the revered religious leaders in the country, who was cultivated by various political leaders, including some former presidents and prime ministers. The governments, both at the centre and the state have been sensitive to the views of this religious order regarding religious policy. The scope and depth of the religious order’s activities are very diverse encompassing education, medicine, and social service. The current pontiff is Sri Jayendra Sarasvathi and he has nominated Sankara Vijayendra
Sarasvathi. (See Appendix IV.). Renovation of old temples is one of the principal activities of the Mutt and it has built new temples in Delhi, Coimbatore, Salem and Secundrabad. The Mutt has built a number of Veda patashalas, Oriental Schools and Sankara Schools. The religious order serves as the model for other orders in the state.

**WHAT DO RELIGIOUS ORDERS DO?**

Religious orders are essentially religious institutions presided over by ascetics. The main functions of the religious orders are to initiate people into their respective sects, to practice spiritual pursuits and meditation. Most of the religious orders are attached to temples and train choristers who sing Vedic and other sacred hymns during worship. The heads of the religious orders are also in charge of the administration of temples, supervise the religious functions and participate in rituals. Perpetuation of the memory of the founder is one of the chief functions of religious orders. In course of time, the religious orders started functioning as educational institutions – teaching Philosophy, Agamas, Lexicography, Grammar, Arts and Medicine. Some of the religious orders preserved valuable manuscripts of great works and developed facilities for taking out copies.

Apart from religious and educational facilities, religious orders provided charitable services providing boarding and lodging facilities for the inmates, food and shelter for the poor, destitute and pilgrims. Kings and
merchants during the medieval period richly endowed the religious orders to carry out their various activities.\textsuperscript{19}

Nilakanta Sastri writes that in contemporary times religious orders are,

...trying to take into account the impact of modern forces and move with the times, but without in any way departing from their original raison d'etre. They seek to combine a modicum of modern studies with traditional studies in the educational institutions in their charge. They seek to distinguish the essentials of religion from the externals, and bring about a common understanding and co-operation among the mathas of different schools – a thing undreamt of in the old Order. They seek to check the division in the Hindu fold and secure a fresh and vital unity on a ground of social philosophy and ethics commonly accepted by them.\textsuperscript{20}

How accurate is Sastri's description on the present state and activities of religious orders?

**Propagation Of Religious Philosophy**

Religious orders, have founded many endowments and prizes to encourage study in their areas of interest – religious philosophy, Tamil culture and language. For example, one of the publications of Kasi Thriupanandal Order lists a total of two hundred and eighty six endowments under different heads like Tamil Culture, Saiva Siddhantha, Thevara Thriumurais and public benefits. A substantial number of these


endowments are operated through educational institutions. Similar lists of endowments are available in other mutts too. In many of the publications and souvenirs of the Orders, usually a section is allocated to describe the propagation of religious philosophy of the Orders. The publication of Dharmapuram Adheenam (Saiva Order) describing the various achievements of the first decennial rule of the twenty fourth pontiff, lists various activities of the Order. Among them, ‘Service to promoting religion’, ‘Aid to conferences’, ‘Conduct of the grand conference at the Adheenam’ (to promote Saiva Siddhantha), ‘literary treatises published with the aid of the Adheenam’, ‘Works for which exclusive copy-right has been obtained’, ‘Dissemination of Agamas’, ‘Printing press’, ‘Patashalas’, and ‘Libraries find a prominent mention. A careful perusal of the above list would indicate that promoting religious studies form the core of the agenda. Both Vaishnavite and Saivite orders bring out journals and magazines for the propagation of their philosophies: Ahobila Mutt brings out a magazine called Narasimha Priya, Andavan Mutt publishes Ranganatha Padhuka, Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam publishes Meikandar, while Dharmapuram’s monthly is called Gnana Sambandhan and Thirupanandal Mutt brings out Sri Kumara Gurubarar. Also, the various religious orders conduct religious discourses in various towns and specially depute people from the order to conduct the discourses. In case of Vaishnavite orders, the pontiffs

themselves give a number of lectures during their tours. When the Vaanamaamali and Andavan mutt pontiffs were staying in New Delhi during the year 2000 and 2001 A.D., they gave more than thirty such lectures. The Vaishnavite orders also conduct Sadas (Seminars) on occasions of the memorial days of their founders, when a number of eminent scholars are invited to discuss intricate spiritual and religious issues. Saivite orders organise lecture clubs in various towns for interested devotees on a particular day every month. A scholar deputed by the Adheenam visits the particular clubs. These occasions are used to discuss various religious issues. During the field visit in Erode district, the researcher attended several classes conducted by Dr. Sundramoorthy of Dharmapuram Adheenam. The occasion is also used to discuss issues like the efficacy of Thirumurais over other works. The general pattern of these discourses is to propagte the philosophy and to resolve the doubts of their respective followers over religious questions.

The Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam conducts a Saiva Siddhantha correspondence course for interested persons and distributes free educational material for those who attend the course. The Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam has also endowed a sum of fifty thousand rupees in the Saiva Siddhantha Department of the Madras University. Several seminars like Meikandan Siddhantha Maanadu are conducted by the religious orders. The Dharmapuram Adheenam has established an organisation called Dharumai Adheena Madaalaya Devvalaya Samayap
Prachaara Nilayam (Centre for the propagation of religion by Dharmapuram Adheenam and Temple) in Madras. The religious orders have also brought out hundreds of books on religious philosophies of their sects.

The Saiva Naayanmaar Appar was known for his Uzhavaara Pani, cleaning of temples. Following his lead, the Saiva religious orders, in the recent decades have resurrected this practice and have encouraged the Saiva followers to visit all the temples in their vicinity and clean the temples – removal of weeds, washing the walls of the temples, sweeping and making the surrounding environment look spotless are the major activities in Uzhavaara Pani. Symbolically, the temples upon which the Bhakti poets have composed poems are selected. Kunrrakudi Adigalar, as soon as he took charge of the mutt, undertook Uzhavaara Pani in the temples under the mutt’s control. Adigalar has also encouraged ‘congregational worship’. The days on which the temples are cleaned is also used for congregational worship. This mode of involvement is popularised by other orders also. The follower of the Perur Adheenam, “Apparadigal” Pulavar Sokkalingam of Erode has formed a voluntary group called Apparadigal Sivaneri Vazhipaatu Thirukootam. The voluntary group decide about their weekly programme in advance and on the appointed day visit the particular temple and with the help of the local population, clean the temple. (See Appendix X.). Pulavar Sokkalingam claimed that the group has members from all the communities and transcends class barriers too. This is another way in which the Adheenams attract people to their
fold, since the people who get involved in this activity, in course of time become followers of the mutt.

**Modes Of Initiation**

Here we have to understand the historical and certain philosophical differences between Saivism and Vaishnavism in Tamil Nadu. First of all it has to be understood that the population in Tamil Nadu is largely Saivite than Vaishnavite. While there are no precise numbers available, it is a well-recognised fact that Shiva is a more popular deity than Vishnu.

In Vaishnavism, Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite teacher envisaged different functions for the Sanyasins in the Orders and other teachers. For initiation into Vaishnavism, Ramanuja's ritual handbook lays down the following five sacraments and they “begin with the branding of Vishnu’s symbols or weapons and also include the application of the sectarian mark on the forehead, the taking of a religious name, receiving a mantra and presenting an image for worship...” In Sri Vaishnavism, the initiation can only be conducted by Acharya Purushas, or the teachers appointed by Ramanuja for that specific purpose. The initiation ceremony in Tamil Vaishnavism is called *Pancha Samskara* or *Samashrayanam*. Arjun Appadurai writes,

...by the twelfth century, the role of the acharya, which combines in practice the meanings of preceptor, mediator (between man and God), and sectarian leader, had achieved its centrality in Vaishnava praxis. The essence of the acharya’s role was the initiation (aksai) of outsiders into the Sri Vaishnava

---

This *Pancha Samskara* ritual becomes the formal process of initiation into the Sri Vaishnava community. Its monopoly by recognized acharyas was the sign of their privilege of recruiting who accepted the absolute authority of the acharya in sectarian matters.24

Appadurai goes on to link this role of acharya to administration of temples. However, this linkage is generally controversial and is not attested to by many members of the Tamil Vaishnava community.

Actually, one of our respondents, a respectable member of Vasihnavite community and a Suyamacharya Purusha himself, who is also intimately connected with the affairs of the religious order, gave the following detailed answer:

If you study the tradition of Shri Vaishnavism, you can come across two types of acharyas: matadhipathis (pontiffs) and the Suyamacharya Purushas. The roles given to the Suyamacharya Purushas and the matadhipathi respectively have to be analysed carefully. According to the *Guruparampara Prabhava*, it is said that there were seventy-four *Simhasinadhipathis* / acharya purushas. These seventy-four acharya purushas and their successors were requested to propagate the philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism and they should also initiate people into Sri Vaishnavism. They were Grahasthas (householders) and not Sanyasins. The Sanyasins / matadhipathis were attached to the temple and were to look after the administration of temples. Since they were recluses, they would have no family connection and they would not have any selfish motives and they could look after the temple administration impartially and see to that the worship is conducted properly. This is the idea you get after reading the *Guruparampara Prabhava*. If you got Thirupathi, you have got two Jeeyars (pontiffs), one is Periya Jeeyar and the other is Chinna Jeeyar. Their only duty is to go to the temple often and see to that the worship is conducted properly by the temple employees. They were having the upper hand, and they used to administer the entire temple. Unfortunately that has changed due to political and other reasons. (He refers to HR&CE).

Similarly Sri Ranga Narayana Jeeyar was attached to Srirangam temple. Even the great Vaishnavite Acharya Manavala Maamunigal took Sanyas (renounced) so that he can perform temple service in its spirit. Now, the role of matadhipathi / sanyasin is very dear. They should perform *Kainkaryam* / service in the temple, and being recluses, they should not freely mix with the society. They can also be impartial and incur the displeasure of anyone without worry so that worship is conducted properly.

However, the Suyamacharya Purushas are expected to move very closely in the society and at the same time initiate people into Shri Vaishnavism. Most of them are householders—mind you the Sanyasins do not have authority to perform the rituals. If you want to do Pancha Samskaras, the first ritual is branding. There are also other rituals involved like performing a homam (yagna). Being a sanyasin, one cannot perform these rituals. Therefore, what these people do now is take the disc from somebody else and brand. In my opinion, this is not a very correct procedure. Only emergencies and contingencies may warrant such things. The Suyamacharya Purushas were completely suppressed and the institution slowly went into decline. The matadhipathis, with their paraphernalia, attracted more and more people and today if we trace the seventy-four Acharya Purusha lineages, one could not get very far.

Despite Ramanuja being a renouncer and with his aura, he could have very well performed the function of propagation. Yet he created the institution of Suyamacharya Purushas and he took care of temple administration. Today the matadhipathis instead are performing the role of Suyamacharya purushas. This is what is happening to Sri Vaishnavism and this is not good. The sanyasins have not looked upon the administration of temples, but they have encroached upon the territory of some other persons.”

Another respondent, a follower of the Tenganai Vaanamaamalai Mutt responded in almost a similar fashion, except that he did not feel that the development was bad for Sri Vaishnavism. While there are still a handful of Suyamacharya Purushas who claim privileges and initiate members into Shri Vaishnavism and give lectures in various towns and temples to earn their living, the institution itself has fallen into disrepute.

There are three stages in the initiation (Dheekai) ceremonies in Saivism. They are Samaya Dheekai, Viseda Dheekai and Nirvaana Dheekai. Samaya Deekai (Religious Initiation) enables a person to live according to Saiva norms: applying sacred ash in sixteen places in the body, using the rudraksha garland (made of one rudraksha with five faces), reciting the five letter sacred name of Lord Shiva (Sivahya Nama). The Viseda Dheekai

---

26 Personal Interview with Murali, Srirangam, December, 2000.
(Special Initiation) enables a person to conduct Siva worship and rituals. However to conduct the rituals in religious institutions one should have received Acharya Abidekam. Only those who have received the Special Initiation should conduct the daily puja everyday without fail. Nirvaana Dheekai enables a person to initiate the process of reaching God. The person becomes a celibate and concentrates on realising god. The guru who initiates a person to Nirvaana Dheekai gives the new entrant a new name. The inmates of Saiva religious orders are progressively given the three initiations, the third of which gives him the qualification to succeed the head. Among the eligible persons, the head chooses the one who he avers has attained ‘the spiritual maturity’ to succeed him.

There is a major difference between Saivism and Vaishnavism. In Saivism, only a Nyshtika Brahmachari (life long celibate) can become the head of the religious order where as in Vaishnavism, a Grahastha after taking Sanyas can become the head of the order. In Vaishnavism too, the head usually chooses his successor. However, in case no successor is chosen, the followers of the mutt after due consultations among them, selects a suitable candidate.

**Educational Institutions**

Starting in the mid 1930s, most of the religious orders have founded educational institutions with modern curricula, especially Tamil colleges in the case of Saivite Orders. Burton Stein calls religious orders in Tamil Nadu
as seminaries\textsuperscript{27}. Religious orders which are also called as Ghatikas are defined as Brahmanical Educational Institutions by N. Subramanian.\textsuperscript{28} U. V. Saminathiar’s autobiography gives a detailed account of how religious orders functioned as educational institutions.\textsuperscript{29} The importance given to education by the religious orders can be understood by the number of educational institutions founded and administered by them. The Kundrakudi Saiva Order is administering sixteen educational institutions including Primary, Middle and Higher Secondary schools, technical institutes (popularly called ITIs) and colleges. The Mayilam Bommapuram Veerasaiva Order founded a Tamil college in 1938, the first Order to found a college exclusively for this purpose. There are also two schools under its administration. The Kanchi Kamakoti Advaita Order has a number of educational institutions under its control, including a deemed University called Sri Chandrasekara Saraswathi Viswa Maha Vidyalayam which conducts a number of courses including one which lead up to post graduate degrees in Business Administration and Computer Applications. Apart from these, there are a number of Engineering, Science and Medical Colleges (including one in Orissa) under its control. The nature of its involvement in education can be understood when it is known that it plans to open a Medical college in Nepal!

\textsuperscript{27} Burton Stein, \textit{Peasant State and Society in India}, New Delhi, 1994, p.236. \\
\textsuperscript{28} N. Subramanian, \textit{The Brahman in the Tamil Country}, Madurai, 1989, p.72. \\
\textsuperscript{29} See Iyer, 1950, \textit{op. cit.}
The Thiruvavaduthurai Order, apart from conducting a Saiva Siddhantha training course, has also founded many Primary and Middle schools in many of the towns where the branches of the mutt exist. The Thirupanandal Kasi Order has been administering many schools and also Sri Kasivasi Swaminathan Swamigal Arts College, where courses, leading up to doctoral degree are offered. It has also created a number of educational endowments in Annamalai, Kasi, Calcutta and Allahabad Universities. The Dharmapuram Saiva Order has a very famous college where hundreds of students from in and around Mayiladuthruai are getting educated. The college was started in 1946. The famous head of the Kundrakudi Saiva Order and the present pontiff of the Kasi Thirupanandal Order graduated from this college. The Andavan Ashramam in Srirangam administers Srimad Andavan Arts and Science College where many disciplines including Computer Applications are taught. The college also has a reputation of not collecting capitation fee, the bane of many a self-financing college in Tamil Nadu. The Perur Veerasaiva Order started a Tamil college in 1954, which was subsequently upgraded to include other disciplines. The College provides education leading right up to the Doctoral degree.30

The above details reinforce the notion that the religious orders are seminaries even in the modern sense, but with secular curricula. Basically, while many of the Orders look upon their educational institutions as

continuation of a historical duty in the dissemination of knowledge, the need to adapt to the contemporary demands and relevance has also played a role in diversifying their educational interests. The alumni of the institutions provides ready-made follower-base for the Order; it also helps the Orders to spread their influence and networking in the society.

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that the notion of religious Orders as educational institutions has a different connotation today. First and foremost, only the poorest approach the Orders for religious education – Agamas and Thirumurais in case of Saiva Orders, Prabandams and Vedas in case of Vaishnavite Orders – to earn a livelihood as a priest or a temple functionary. So the Orders serving as educational institutions in a traditional sense no longer exist. However, founding and administering secular educational institutions like Arts and Science colleges, technical institutes, engineering and medical colleges provide an important link to the Orders with outer society. Repeatedly, the famous personalities who were educated in the institutions administered by the Orders were quoted with pride by many of the respondents. The other aspect is that the Tamil colleges administered by the Orders have also served as a breeding ground for successors in various Orders, in the case of Saivism. For example, Kundrakudi Adigalar, the famous pontiff of the Kundrakudi Order and the present pontiff of the Kasi Order were educated in the Dharmapuram Tamil College.
LANGUAGE RESURGENCE: THE CONTEXT

Nineteenth century Tamil Nadu witnessed a powerful language and religious resurgence. The language resurgence was marked by the discovery and publication of several ancient Tamil texts, which brought out the antiquity and the great literary tradition in Tamil going back to nearly two thousand years. Many of the palm-leaf manuscripts of Tamil texts were preserved in religious orders. Among the nineteenth century poets, Meenatcisundaram Pillai was a pre-eminent scholar who was the author of the largest number of works in Tamil. Historically, religious orders, especially the Saiva ones patronised Tamil scholars and was a major centre of Tamil education. Meenatcisundaram Pillai was the Adheenam poet of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. The most important among his works were the ‘Murukan Pillaitamil, Tiruvitaikkalik Kuravanci Cuta Cankitai, Kutantait Tiripantati, Akilandanayaki Malai, Ambalavana Tecikar Kalambakam, Vatpokkik Kalambakam, Tiruvaidaumarutur Ula and Cuppramaniya Tecikar Nencuvitu Tutul. Sthalapuranas which are the legends of divine places is very famous in Tamil Nadu, whose knowledge brings scores of devotees to the temples concerned. A number of Sthalapuraanams were written by Meenatcisundaram Pillai. Apart from writing a large number of works, Meenatcisundaram Pillai also trained a vast number of Tamil Scholars during his association with Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. U.V. Saminatha Iyer who was instrumental in discovering many of the ancient Tamil works

32 Ibid.
was the student of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. Later, U.V.Saminatha Iyer himself became the Adheenam poet of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam.

Apart from training such a vast number of scholars, the practice of preserving old Tamil manuscripts by the religious orders was one of the defining moments in the history of Tamil literature. U.V. Saminatha Iyer, who discovered and published many Tamil texts, refers to the copy of the Jaina work 'Seevaga Sinathamanl made available to him in the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam.\textsuperscript{33} Later, the same Order helped U.V. Saminatha Iyer, in the discovery of many ancient Tamil texts.\textsuperscript{34} Today, when one has become aware of Tamil literature's antiquity, its richness and sophistication, the discovery and publication of such works might not bring much excitement. But one has to place the discoveries and publication in the proper context. Even, in his times, U.V. Saminatha Iyer was regarded as a doyen of Tamil literature and was a highly respected and acclaimed scholar among the literary circle. In his autobiography, he had graphically explained the discovery of the existence of such texts in some detail and perhaps a description of his first acquaintance with the texts would explain the enormity of the discovery, the importance of their publication and the impact it made on the consciousness of Tamil population about the literature's richness and antiquity.

\textsuperscript{33} Iyer, 1950, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 536.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 621-730.
Apparently, the Adheenam poet heard of a Tamil Scholar Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar, who at the time was a Judge of Kumbakonam Court. Being a scholar himself he wanted to acquaint himself with Ramaswamy Mudaliar. Once the gentleman himself visited Thiruvavuduthurai Adheenam and enquired about Tamil scholars there. Later in 1880, Iyer went and met Ramaswamy Mudaliar. Ramaswamy Mudaliar promptly asked about Iyer’s proficiency in Tamil books. Iyer writes that he decided to astonish Mudaliar with his answers and started listing the works in which he was proficient,

- Kudanthai Andhadhi, Maraiasai Andhadhi, Pugaloor Andhadhi, Thiruvarangath Andhadhi, Azhgar Andhadhi, Kambar Andhadhi, Mullai Andhadhi, Meenatchiamman Pillai Tamizh, Muthu Kumara Swamy Pillai Tamizh, Akillanda Nayagi Pillai Tamizh, Sekkizhar Pillai Tamizh, Thiru Kovai, Thanjai Vaanan Kovai...
- I went on listing twenty Andhadhi, twenty Kalmbagam, fifteen Kovai, thirty Pillai Tamizh, thirty Ula, twenty Thoodhu... but he was simply unmoved. Suddenly he asked what's the use of all this?... I went on listing: Thiruvilayadar Puranam, Thiru Naagakkarojap Puranam, Mayoorap Puranam, Kandha Puranam, Periya Puranam, Kutralap Puranam... He still stared at me stonily...

Iyer explains how he went on listing several other works, which he had learnt, but in the end, it made no impact upon Mudaliar. He asked in the end, about the nature of his proficiency in ancient Tamil works, even if he had learnt all the recent works. Iyer could not understand the object of the question and mentioned that in the list that he quoted there were many old compositions. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, quoted Mani Mekalai, Seevaga Sinthamani and Silappadhikaram as the truly ancient texts and said that they were in one sense the source of all the books that he had

35 Andhadhi, Pillaiith Tamizh, Kovai, Ula, and Thoodhu are different genres of Tamil poems.
When he started reading *Seevaga Sinthamani*, he felt a new world of Tamil literature had been opened to him.37

This incident illustrates the state of awareness about Tamil literature, even among scholars, during the nineteenth century. Therefore, when ancient texts were discovered and published, it added a new sense of pride about the antiquity and sophistication of Tamil language.

Two personalities were important in the printing and publication of ancient Tamil works, U.V. Saminatha Iyer (1855-1942) and C.Y. Thamodharan Pillai (1832-1901). Both Saminatha Iyer and Thamodharan Pillai drew upon the resources of religious orders for their printing and publication works. For example, palm leaf manuscripts for *Irayanaar Porulurai* and *Thiruththamizaip Puranam* were given to Thamodharan Pillai for correction, printing and publication. In course of their publication initiatives both U.V. Saminatha Iyer and Thamodharan Pillai found out that a number of ancient Tamil manuscripts, whose existence was hitherto unknown, were found in religious orders. For example, the ancient and much acclaimed Sangam classics *Narrinai* and *Etta Thogai* were discovered in Thiruvavaduthurai religious order. Further, the existence of *Pathup Pattu*, whose contents were again hitherto unknown, was found in the Thiruvavaduthurai religious order. Today, the *Pathup Pattu* – a collection of ten anthologies, namely *Thiru Murugarruppadai, Porunararruppadai,

Mullaip Pattu, Maduraik Kanchi, Nedunel Vaadai, Pattinap Paalai and Malai padu Kadum – is regarded as a classical collection of ancient Sangam literature. The discovery and printing of these works and the periodisation of these works by scholars like Vaiyapuri Pillai pushed the antiquity of Tamil literature by several centuries reaching right up to the period of Christ.

Again Aga Naanooru and Pura Naanooru, two of the most famous of Sangam collections were found in the Order (while many good translations of Aga Naanooru and Pura Naanooru have been published, A.K. Ramanujan’s translation, ‘Poems of Love and War’ is most enjoyable and beautiful). In 1885, Thamodharan Pillai published the earliest available Tamil work Tolkappiyam and in 1887, he published another ancient Tamil work, Kalithogai. After the publication of Sinthamani in 1887, U.V. Saminatha Iyer published another ancient Sangam Tamil text Padhitruppatthu in 1889, followed it up with Pura Naanooru in 1894 and in 1898, he published Mani Mekalai.38

During this same period, modern forms of Tamil art were also making their debut. The first modern Tamil drama was staged in 1876 by Gopalachaar.39 The first novel in Tamil Pratapa Mudaliar Sarithiram was

38 Ibid.
written by Veda Nayagam Pillai (1826-1889) and was published in 1879.\textsuperscript{40} The first newspaper in Tamil was brought out by Father Percival in 1855 and it was called \textit{Dinavardhamani Tamizh Magazine} (1831). \textit{Punitha George Gazette} (1832), \textit{Raja Viruthi Pothini} (1833), \textit{Madras Chronicle} (1835), \textit{Puthuvai Nadunilai} (1838), \textit{Udhyadharagai} (1841), \textit{Jana Vinodhini} (1870), and \textit{Lalitha Prasonodaya} (1887) were among the first Tamil magazines.\textsuperscript{41} The other famous Tamil magazines were \textit{Sudhesa Mithran} (1882), \textit{Vivekacinthamani} (1892), \textit{Lopokari} (1895), \textit{Tamizhar Nesam} (1917), \textit{Tamizh Nadu} (1919), \textit{Nava Sakthi} (1920), \textit{Senthamizh Selvi} (1923), and \textit{Tamizh Pozhil} (1925).\textsuperscript{42} Modern forms of Tamil arts and new introductions like newspapers and magazines gave a vibrant character to the language and characterised the language resurgence that the Tamil speaking regions witnessed during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

\section*{Language Resurgence, Politics and Religion}

We have to place the language resurgence in the socio-political context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Madras state. In 1856 A.D., Rev. Robert Caldwell (1819-191 A.D.), a Scottish missionary published his most famous book called, \textit{A Comparative Grammar of the

\textsuperscript{40} K.S. Anandan, \textit{Indhiyavil Desiya Inagalum Tamizh Desiyamum}, (Nationalities in India and Tamil Nationalism), Periyar, 1997, p. 270. Also see, Mu. Varadharajan, 1988, op. cit.


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
Dra_vidian or South Indian Family of Languages. In the book, he reached a number of important conclusions: (i) The languages Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam belong to the Dravidian group of languages. (ii). Tamil Dravidian culture dated back to the period of the Christ. (iii). Dravidian languages were not derived from Sanskrit. (iv). Tamil was the most sophisticated of all Dravidian languages. (v). It can dispense with Sanskrit and stand-alone. (vi). Sanskrit had been brought to India with their idol worship and peculiar brand of Hinduism. (vii). The Brahmans had written nothing worthy of preservation in Tamil and (viii). 'Native Tamilians' called Sudhras by the Brahmans, even though they were Dravidian chieftains, soldiers, and cultivators, cultivated Tamil. Another missionary, G.U. Pope (1829-1907 A.D.), who produced a number of Tamil dictionaries and grammars, translated Thiruvasagam, an important Saivite work and called Saiva Siddhantha as the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect. Such formulations had important consequences in the subsequent developments in Tamil language and developments.

The two major elite social groups of Tamil speaking regions at that time were the Brahmans and the upper-caste non-Brahmans – mainly Vellalas, Chettis, Reddis and Nayars. Brahmans with their early start in English education availed the many opportunities available to them in the colonial administration. A severe conflict ensued between the elites of

---

Tamil society, and Barnett defines, the conflict between them as the one between "landowning non-Brahman elite with a history of rural dominance, and nascent urban Brahman elite that had used the opportunities presented by British Rule."\textsuperscript{46} However, there is another aspect to this conflict. Irschick points out that

...the large landowners, particularly the Zamindars and the main peasant groups were all non-Brahman caste Hindus. Census figures on factory ownership in 1911 indicate that here too, non-Brahmans – mainly Báija Naidus, Vellalas, Kapus, Nattukottai Chettis and Komatis...were far ahead of Brahmans.\textsuperscript{47}

It is only on those occupations which required literary skills that Brahmans dominated, especially in the upper levels of administrative and professional services.\textsuperscript{48}

With the introduction of political reforms in India by the British government, new opportunities for political power and space expanded for the Indians. Also by the second decade of the twentieth century, literacy among the upper non-Brahman castes increased, resulting in a major competition with Brahmans for political power. With the expanding role of state, political power acquired more importance, status, and influence in the society.

Concurrently, a clear division among Brahmans and non-Brahmans was emerging in the consciousness of the people, with the identification of

\textsuperscript{47} Irschick, 1969, \textit{op. cit.}, p.12.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid}.
Brahmans and Sanskrit as outsiders to Tamil society and the non-Brahmans as the original inhabitants (now identified as Dravidians) of the region. This is where Saiva Siddhantha intellectuals strove their best to identify Tamil, Saiva Siddhantha and Dravidians into one single identity kit. The fact that among the many competing religious philosophies, like Saiva Siddhantha, Vishishtadvaita (Vaishnavism) and Advaita, (1) the largest number of Tamil works, existed only in Saiva Siddhantha and (2) Saiva religious orders operated as major institutions of Tamil learning that helped in the process of identification of Saiva Siddhantha as 'Tamil Religion'. One of the methods of achieving it was to identify 'Saiva Siddhantha' as a religious philosophy independent of Sanskritic Hinduism and so untainted by Brahmans and Brahmanism. Irschick notes,

Professor P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-1896) was perhaps the first Tamilian to propagate the ideas concerning the antiquity and cultural self-sufficiency of the Dravidians. Some of his theories are set out in a book entitled Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature, but also wrote a remarkable essay in the Madras Standard (1897) called the "The Basic Element in Hindu Civilization", in which he elaborated his view that South India, and particularly the Tamil area, was culturally self-sufficient and could be independent of the arts and philosophy of Sanskrit and the north.49

Maraimalai Adigal wrote,

Saivism is the true and original religion of all Tamilians who are not Brahman. It is also the most ancient religion of India, predating Sanskrit Hinduism by many centuries. Its principles are enshrined in the devotional and philosophical texts of divine Tamil, and it would be in vain, therefore, to seek it in the demonistic rituals of the populace... Further, it was not the Dravidians who corrupted a pristine Hinduism...on the contrary, it was Brahmanism and Aryanism that had debased the original Tamil religion and diverted it from its hallowed path of monotheism, rationalism and

egalitarianism into the "gutters" of polytheism, irrational rituals and unjust social hierarchies.\textsuperscript{50}

One has to note that historically, religious orders had Brahman-non-Brahman conflicts. We have already quoted some legends, which indicated tensions between Brahmans and non-Brahmans, but there were no explicit conflicts over the use of Sanskrit language and Sanskrit scholars and studies were historically encouraged in religious orders like Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and Thirupanandal. Many of the pontiffs of these Orders were scholars in Sanskrit. For example, the eighth pontiff of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam Maasilaamani Desikar was a renowned Sanskrit scholar.\textsuperscript{51} Saminatha Iyer, in his autobiography, mentions several incidents, in which Sanskrit scholars were invited and were given honours. But what was happening during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went beyond mere caste tension. It included the language, religious, and ethnic dimensions too. Regarding the role of religious orders, Oddie observes,

...the non-Brahman mathas were, nevertheless, helping to develop what came to be regarded as distinctive non-Brahman culture. The emphasis on Tamil rather than on Sanskrit and the study of propagation of Saiva Siddhantha (which subsequently, was often referred as the original Tamil religion) contributed towards a growth of a sense of Tamil identity – a regional consciousness and ideology which during the early decades of the twentieth century, were utilised by leaders of the non-Brahman movement in their struggle against Brahman dominance.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{51} Krishnamoorthy, 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p.29.
The intellectual atmosphere was vibrant with the claims made by the Saiva Siddhanthins. In 1886, a Saiva Siddhantha Sabha was established to foster the cause and at the local level, a number of Tamil Sangams were established, like the Madurai Tamil Sangam and Karandhai Tamil Sangam. Annual Saiva Siddhantha conferences were held and journals like *Siddhantha Deepika*, *Navasakthi* and *Senthamizh Selvi* were brought out.

One of the other important developments that took place during the period was the 'Pure Tamil Movement', which aspired to eradicate all Sanskrit words from Tamil expressions and to use them in speech and writing. Writing about the history of Pure Tamil Movement, Pavaleru Perunchithiranaar writes,

> ...vedic religion of Aryans, Jainism and Buddhism gradually corrupted our pure, sweet mother tongue and caused it to degenerate... Sanskrit, which was a combination of the Vedic language of the Aryans and the northern Dravidian language of Pali, mixed with Tamil in a religious disguise and debased it. So, Tamil language split into Telegu, Kannada, Malayalam, Tulu...and so on into twenty-two languages. Because of the splitting of the language, Tamil populace and territory diminished. Tamil source books were translated into Sanskrit by Vedic Aryans and elevated their language to a higher level and destroyed the Tamil sources. Similarly, Vedic religion internalised the salient features of foreign religions like Buddhism and Jainism, and the religious practices and gods of the native Saivism and Vaishnavism and thereby destroyed the uniqueness of these religions. Because of religious conflicts and the stupendous growth of Vedic religion, Tamil degenerated more and more and became a hybrid language of infamy.... Large number of Sanskrit words entered into the daily usage of people's life. The easy and elegant religious expressions were translated into Sanskrit. More and more Sanskrit works were written. Sanskrit dominated Prose, Poetry, Music and Theatre....

It is under these circumstances in the early twentieth century, Tamil scholars and the common people, who were worried about Tamil language, became aware of the situation and made tremendous efforts to protect Tamil from
corruption by foreign languages and preserve its chastity and ancient glory."³³

Such was the general understanding of the state of Tamil language during the Pure Tamil Movement among its votaries. As we can see from the quote, movement had linguistic, territorial, religious and ethnic features. The important names in Pure Tamil Movement were Maraimalai Adigal, K. Subramania Pillai, Bharathidasan, V. Subbiah Pillai, Devaneya Paavaanar, K. Appadurai, S. Illakuvanaar, Ilavazhaganaar, V. Suba Manikkanaar and K.A.P. Viswanathan.⁵⁴ Sumathi Ramaswamy writes, "The Tanittamil Movement associated with Maraimalai Adigal and his followers was largely an expression of contestatory classicism and radical neo-Shaivism. Their efforts to cleanse Tamil were propelled by hostility towards Brahmanism and its literary and ritual vehicle, Sanskrit."⁵⁵

During the same time the Saiva religious orders were conducting various conferences and the conferences were used by the Tamil enthusiasts to promote their cause. Religious orders, as an authoritative institution on religion and language provided a very effective platform to promote the new ideas on religion and language. For example, Dharmapuram Adheenam conducted a grand Saiva conference in Thirunelveli, known as the Meikanda Sastra Conference. Also, they

---


³⁴ For a short history and activities of these scholars see, S Meyyappan, Tamizh Iyakka Vergal, (Roots of Tamil Movement), Madras, 1994.

participated and patronised the conferences held by Saiva Siddhantha Maha Samajam. Similarly, the Adheenam participated in the Thiruppugazh Conference in Palani and the *Thirumurai* Conference in Thirunarayur.\textsuperscript{56} They also started patronising Tamil music and endowed a sum of Rs. 10,000 for the advancement of Tamil music in Madras Tamil Sangam.\textsuperscript{57} Also, the other major activity of the Adheenams was regarding the Tamil *Othuvars* in Saivite temples in Tamil Nadu. *Othuvars* are non-Brahman singers, who during the conduct of 'puja' in temples would sing the Saiva canons, standing just outside the sanctum sanctorum. Adheenams trained a large number of *Othuvars* and appointed them in the temples under their control. It has to be noted that pattern of singing has no relation to Tamil classical music, but a different one. While Tamil classical music is open to both Brahmans and non-Brahmans, *Othuvars* are non-Brahmans.

**Language, Archana and Religious Orders**

During all these years, Dravidian movement, with its anti-caste, anti-Brahman and anti-North Indian platform was gradually gaining strength and was posing a serious challenge to Brahmans in every sphere of activity. In addition, politically, they emerged as a viable alternative to Congress party and by 1962 A.D. they were the major opposition in the state assembly and for the first time captured power in 1967 A.D. Advocates of pure Tamil movement and Saiva Siddhantins were

\textsuperscript{56} The First Decennial Rule, op. cit., (1943), pp. 309-10. Also see Meikandan Siddhantha Maanadu, Dharmapuram, 1941.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
demanding a change in the language of liturgy in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian party saw in it another wonderful opportunity to oppose Brahmins and Sanskrit in Tamil Nadu. Here, a note about the language of worship in South Indian temples would not be out of place.

In the temples of Brahmanical deities in Tamil Nadu, Brahmins are the priests who conduct the rituals. Both in Saivism and Vaishnavism temple worship, the bhakti poetry of Alwars and Nayanmars is held in great reverence and esteem. However, the use of these poems varies from temple to temple. In most Vaishnavite temples, the poems of Alwars are literally used even in day-to-day rituals. For example, the use of Tamil bhakti literature is widespread in Srirangam temple (a Vaishnavite temple of Tengalai school) so much so that during the twenty-day Vaikunta Ekadasi festival in December-January, bhakti poems are recited along with a peculiar dance form called Arayar Sevai, for several hours everyday. Even during other festivals, recitation of Alwars' poems forms a part of the ritual. The Vadagalai School, in the temples under its control, uses these poems too, but to a lesser extent. However, traditionally, the language in which the archana is performed is usually, Sanskrit. Also, the poems on most occasions are recited by the Brahman priests themselves. But in Saivite temples, even though, there is a tradition of recitation of poems of Nayanmaars, it does not usually constitute an integral part of the ritual cycle, as it does in Vaishnavite temples. Also, the Tamil poems in Saivite

---

58 Here Brahmanical deities denote those other than village deities.
temples are recited by *Othuvars*, a class of non-Brahmans, specially trained and appointed for this purpose. The practice of reciting Tamil poems in temples was said to be initiated during the period of Raja Raja Chola I (d. 1014 A.D.), in both Saivite and Vaisnavite temples.\(^{59}\) The scarce use of Tamil in Saivite temples caused a heart burn for radical Saiva Siddanthins, who regarded Tamil as given by God Shiva Himself. They also consider that Shiva presided over the first of the three ancient Tamil Sangams. Religious orders, which are administering many temples in Tamil Nadu, naturally had a great interest in the issue. From 1920 A.D. onwards, Saiva Siddanthins were demanding the use of Tamil for worship in temples.\(^{60}\)

Presler defines as "a popular form of worship (in South Indian temples) outside the regular cycle of worship in the temple, in which, for a small fee, a devotee receives darshan of the deity and an abbreviated puja is performed for his personal welfare."\(^{61}\) It is usually the recitation of the various names of deity and the general language of worship in Sanskrit. However, in an atmosphere where the use of Sanskrit was not welcome, the language in which the archana performed became one of the points of contention among the religious community. In response to these demands, HR&CE (which controls the administration of temples and mutts in Tamil Nadu since 1925 A.D. More will be discussed about it in the next chapter.) was promoting the use of Tamil in temples, from 1950s and early 1960s.

The then pontiff of Thiruvannamalai Adheenam was quite supportive of the demand. He writes, "Moreover, to say that God belongs only to anyone language is to find flaw in the flawless wholeness of God. All languages belong to God."\(^6^2\) On June 24, 1953 he first initiated Tamil Puja in Patteeswaran temple, belonging to the Kundrakudi Adheenam. However, not all were convinced of the efficacy of puja in Tamil. The Kanchi Sankaracharya Chandrasekara Saraswathi Swami, speaking about the sacredness and efficacy of Sanskrit Vedas, observes that "...the Nathan of veda mantras with their special sound, they bring world peace even without their meaning. However, they are highly meaningful also."\(^6^3\)

However, Kundrakudi Adigalar differed from the view. He argued that to say that language of one community (Sanskrit and Brahmans) should be used was unacceptable and its imposition on another community unjust. So, it is only fair to have Tamil as the language of liturgy in temples where Tamils worship. Also, pressure for Tamil worship was building from the Dravidian movement. In 1962, Kundrakudi Adigalar placed a request with the then HR&CE Minister M. Baktavatsalam for the institution of Tamil language in the worship practices of temples in Tamil Nadu. Baktavatsalam responded by querying whether there was any precedence for worship in Tamil in temples in Tamil Nadu. Adigalar provided with historical evidence, the various instances of worship in Tamil and along with that, he also sent


a model of worship in Tamil in temples. This brought an immediate result, and on 4.1.1961, Tamil archana was performed in Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple.  

Advocates of Tamil worship are from both the Dravidian movement and Saiva Siddanthins. For the followers of Dravidan Movement,

Tamil arruchanai was only one of the several fronts on which to conduct their war against Brahmanical Sanskrit Hinduism, which included the breaking of Brahman monopoly on priesthood, the opening of the Sanctum Sanctorum in temples to all castes, and the public burning of Sanskrit scriptures.

However, Saiva Siddanthins demanded the use of Tamil on two additional grounds: (1) Tamil is a divine language and (2) is the mother tongue of the people of Tamil Nadu. For example, Kundrakudi Adigalar felt that the spread of atheism in Tamil Nadu was because of the use of unintelligible Sanskrit in temples rather than the mother tongue Tamil: “If pujaris were to cast off their superiority complex and to conduct archanais in a language which is understandable to the average devotee, there would be no anti-God demonstration in the street.” When the DMK came to power in 1967, they pursued the issue vigorously and in 1971, the HR&CE issued a circular to all major temples to change the language of archana to Tamil.

While religious orders like Thiruvannamalai, Kundrakudi, and Perur Adheenams were in favour of Tamil archanai, the position of other Orders

---

64 Ibid., p.57.
are little ambivalent. Since, in most Vaishnavite temples, Tamil was liberally used, they largely did not react to the announcement. Also, with their all India Brahman clientele, they had little reason to respond or mobilise public opinion on the issue, which was limited to Tamil Nadu. However, the Kanchi Kamakoti Sankara Mutt, which almost exclusively uses Sanskrit, did not react very positively to the announcement. Though they did not explicitly speak against Tamil archana, they opined that the use of Sanskrit is more preferable, for what they felt, as the special efficacy of Sanskrit words. Among the Saivite Orders, traditional Orders like Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and Kasi Order, gave preference to Tamil, even while not excluding Sanskrit. However, the refusal to perform Puja in Tamil was construed by them as caste superiority on the part of Brahman priests.

SAIVITE RELIGIOUS ORDERS: ARCHANA AND AMBIGUITY

Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam Poet Adi Muruga Vel summed up the reaction of eminent Saivite Orders like this: In the affairs of language – there are two outlooks. One is to regard Sanskrit as an enemy and the other is to regard both languages sacred. It is only the second outlook that our religious leaders took. For Appar, the famous Nayanmar sang 'Tamizh Kandaai Aryaam Kandaai', (You Founded Tamil and You Founded Sanskrit, meaning Shiva) and it is the outlook that our religious leaders took – that both the languages are great.
However, there is another group of people who took a different view. They gave more importance to community consciousness. However, the Adheenams did not share this view. They did not propagate such a view, did not publish books and none of them did. They used both the languages for propagation of religion. However, even during these times, the Brahman group interfered and argued that Tamil and Tamil Culture (read Saiva Siddhantha) owed everything to Sanskrit, and so indebted to Brahmans.

Again the Adheenams did not respond to this. However, people like Maraimalai Adigal protested and asserted the purity and autonomy of Tamil and its linkage to Saiva Siddhantha. This is where the Dravidian movement was able to identify with people like Maraimalai Adigal. While the Adheenams did not join the debate, they started giving more importance to Tamil. They brought out more Tamil books. They started using Tamil language, literature and grammar to establish Saiva Siddhantha. It was only a reaction.67

Thus, even while religious orders like Kundrakudi Adheenam insisted on the use of Tamil as religious language in temples, some other Orders like Dharmapuram and Thiruvavaduthurai merely insisted on parity between Tamil and Sanskrit. This may be because of the fact that while Kundrakudi Adheenam and other Adheenams which insisted on 'Tamil only'

67 Personal Interview with Adi Mururga Vel, Trichy, November 1999.
position, identified more closely with Dravidian Movement, while the traditional Orders generally had to take into account their existing traditions. Also, they sought to maintain a balance with all-India political forces. The ambivalent attitude of the Dravidian movement towards Indian independence is well known and on occasions, the movement had articulated their secessionist intentions. Traditional Orders like Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, however, had been generally supportive of India’s independence.

For example, when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru assumed the Prime Ministership of the country for the first time, sent him a congratulatory message which spoke about his sacrifices to the country:

We, twentieth in the Order of succession of Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, established by His Holiness Sri Panchakshara Desika Paramachariar, the seventh in the line of Meikanda Santhanam, whose successors for the welfare of humanity have propagated the worship of Sri Nataraja as also the worship of great souls, and preached universal brotherhood, the corner stone of Saiva Siddhantha Philosophy through the great work SIVA GNANA BODHAM, revealed by Lord Shiva, whose abode is Mount Kailas, the highest peak in Himalayas, to Sri Nandi Devar in order to dispel his doubts in the Vedas and Siva Agamas, who in turn has established the Meikanda Devar Santhanam to propagate incessantly the sacred ideas to ensure the bliss of the suffering humanity shower our blessings on Sri Jawaharlal Nehruji, who inspite of opulence and wealth, renounced the life of luxury and embraced the arduous life of tribulation and suffering in the cause of freedom, who succeeded his great father Sri Pandit Motilal Nehruji, as the distinguished leader of the Indian National Congress, who is the foremost among the disciples of the greatest world personality, Mahatma Gandhiji, who has succeeded in liberating our ancient and great Nation from the foreign yoke, and who in all fittingness is the first Premier of Free India, the most selfless worker, who has spent his whole lifetime in the service of his countrymen and the upliftment of humanity.68

68 See Sri Ambalavaana Desika Paramachary Swamigal Ninaivu Malar, Kundrakudi, 1951.
In clear contrast to the attitude of Dravidian movement to India's independence, the message was liberal in its praise for the independence movement and also to Gandhi and Nehru. The message also refers India as a 'great and ancient' nation. Going beyond delivering the message, the religious orders also made a symbolic presentation of gold sceptre with Saiva symbol of 'Bull' to Nehru on his assumption of Prime Ministership.

However, the issue of language of worship remains important to many Saiva followers. A respondent of Kundrakudi Adheenam put the issue in following words:

A man regards three kinds of attachments as important: Attachment to language, to the nation and to his religion. And all the three are necessary for a human being. It is the attachment to religion, which makes a person, a human being. So in order to know my religion clearly, it has to be in my own language. Attachment to my religion has to be an intelligent attachment, it should be rational and I believe only the mother tongue can provide such an intelligent understanding.... I don't believe any other language can provide it. Otherwise, I would need a translator/interpreter to reach God.... See, this urge to worship in mother tongue is there for more than one hundred years.... Books have been written.... It was not something new and it was Thavathiru Kundrakudi Adigalar who took the issue to the people... And my guru is Kundrakudi Adigalar's disciple. Now, the Perur Adheenam is also doing the same thing.... Both the Perur Adigalar and Kundrakudi Adigalar were responsible for the change where the religious orders reached out to the people from a situation where the people had to approach the institution for any kind of interaction to take place. And Gaumara Adheenam (another Saivite Order) has also participated in the process...

Even today, many Saivite Orders perform their worship only in Sanskrit. But at a few appropriate places, Tamil songs from Thevaram and Thiruvagam are used. Otherwise, everything else is in Sanskrit.... But what we say is that everything is available in Tamil in the form of the songs of Nayannaars—no need to search for anything new..... But even today, when Tamil consciousness has spread, the Mutt leaders are scared to introduce Tamil worship...... Probably, they don’t want to lose their tradition. May be they wonder whether God would accept if the puja is performed in Tamil. But, however, they do agree that Thirumurai's are efficacious and they could be placed on par with Sanskrit Mantras. At least they accept these things in public platforms, but how much of it would be implemented is open to question. Perur Adheenam and Kundrakudi Adheenam have published many books for conducting rituals like marriage, passage de rites in Tamil.... In Coimbatore, somebody has even filed a case against conducting such Tamil
rituals.... But Perur Adheenam is very insistent that they should be conducted in Tamil language inspite of the case.69

The fact that the temple priests are Brahmans has also added the edge to the controversy, perhaps reinforcing the Dravidian theory of 'Brahmans and their Sanskrit' and 'Non-Brahmans and our Tamil'. Actually, when the orders for Tamil Archana was passed in late 1970s and then reinforced in early 1971, a Brahman Priest one Dakshinamoorthy Battar, argued in Madras High Court that,

...the issue was not simply one of translation. Rather, the efficacy of the ritual depended on particular sounds, especially the Nathan which followed the deity's name. He concluded that 'disaster' would follow if 'he dared to perform archanai in Tamil'. He further argued that DMK which was a party with no faith in God was attempting to thrust its own religious feelings into the temple and destroy the temple's purity.70

However, the court ruled in favour of Sanskrit archanas, arguing that, "the circulars are not shown to affect freedom of conscience or the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion. Language is no part of religion and it cannot be taken that unless religious matters are expressed in a particular language they cease to be religious or religious practices."71

Soon, even the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam urged his followers to give importance to 'Tamil stotras and hymns'. Today, in many major temples, a prominent board is displayed with the message that 'Tamil Archanas also are conducted here'.

71 Ibid.
While the controversy in recent times has faded from public memory, among the devotional community, the issue has hardly died down. For example, one respondent of Perur Adheenam commented,

I believe the controversy has caste overtones and the upper caste people, who are practicing Sanskrit worship, believe that the status quo should be preserved. Nobody else has any objection. The caste which is in control of temple worship (read Brahmans) insist on continuation of worship in Sanskrit irrespective of whether priests who conduct the worship know its meaning properly or conduct the worship in the correct way. It is because of their adamance the situation hasn't changed...may be, they are scared of losing their position to others...even if they lose it to others, it is only appropriate, as it has been sanctioned...for example Kannappa Nayanaar (Kannappa Nayanaar was a hunter who used to worship a Shiva Linga in the forest and the God was supposed to have loved the worship more than the one conducted by Brahman priest). In worship, love is more important than ritual and love can be expressed only in mother tongue.... We are waging a grand struggle against this.... Please do not think I am against Sanskrit. I respect it greatly and we would not be here if there was no Sanskrit.... But they do not understand our feelings and they treat us like enemies.72

The Perur Adheenam has brought out a book to help people in performing the rituals, including domestic ones in Tamil. In the preface, Thavathiru Santhalinga Ramasamy Adigalar writes,

...If mysterious rituals are conducted in an unintelligible language, no purpose can be derived... The religious books in our sweet Tamil were hidden and people were allured by alien practices... That's how Sanskrit practices ascended the pedestal. Because of this, religious sphere abounded with meaningless and fake rituals and practices. Even those that were meaningful became a mystery. So, those who were interested felt dejected. It is at this juncture, that scholars and other great men have attempted to introduce Tamil into the domestic ritual and temple worship. We have used these methods in temples and in thousands of temples Kumbhaabhishekam (Renovation) was performed using these methods. This has increased the religiosity in the society. There is no doubt that those who perform these rituals in Tamil with passion and belief would succeed.73

The use of Tamil, in exclusion to Sanskrit, and other languages was also demanded by the followers of Dravidian Movement, who extended its

72 Personal Interview with Sokkalingam, Erode, March 2001.
use, to even secular sphere like administration and coining of scientific terms for educational purposes.

VAISHNAVITE RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND TAMIL ARCHANA

The Vaishnavite religious orders, with its long tradition of using Tamil in temples, generally, did not participate in the debate and on the whole indifferent to the whole issue. When the Pontiff of the Andavan Ashramam (religious order of Vadagalai School) was asked about Tamil archana, he simply said,

Archana should be performed in both the languages and let there not be any hatred because of language... And if the people prefer Archana in Tamil, let it be so, and there are no problems regarding that... Those who demand Tamil archana have neither changed their names to Tamil nor of their words... Tradition had been to conduct puja in Sanskrit, but if they insist on Tamil archana, as popular demand, let them do it, there is no problem...  

While the Pontiff had no objection to Tamil as language of liturgy, he obviously takes a dig at the Dravidian Movement on their perceived hypocrisy. (The DMK chief’s name is Karunanidhi, a Sanskrit name and his son’s name is Stalin).

When, a respondent of Vaanamaamalai Mutt was asked about the use of Tamil in Vaishnavite temple, he said,

No Vaishnavite disputes the supremacy of Vedas and Sanskrit. But veda, apart from speaking about salvation, speaks about so many other things too. However, the Tamil poems of Alwars speak exclusively about the grace of God. See, it is not possible for everybody to go and swim in the oceans. Some need a comfortable pond with easy steps... It is meant for the common man and compatible with kali yuga. And the Acharyaparampara from

---

74 Personal Interview with Pontiff, Andavan Ashramam, Srirangam, March 2000.
Nathamuni to Manavaala Maamunigal, give more importance to prabandams in comparison to Vedas... Vedas are supreme, but keeping in mind the present times, Prabandham are given more importance. In the poems of Alwars, the Vedas are substantiated through Tamil...the substance of the Northern language is explained through the Southern language... 

An analysis of the varied nature of responses should be classified, to explicate the reasons (for the varying responses of religious orders). Religious orders can be classified both according to their philosophy and also according to other criteria. Actually, the responses have to be classified: (1) Those that totally support the use of Tamil, almost to the exclusion of Sanskrit, (2) Those who prefer both the languages to be used, and (3) Those who are generally indifferent or accommodative to the debate. The religious orders classified according to their philosophy and castes are: Saiva non-Brahman Orders, Smartha Advaita Brahman Orders and Vaishnavite Brahman Orders. Saiva non-Brahman Orders can be classified into historically eminent Orders and the Orders which came into prominence recently. Vaishnavite Orders can be classified into Orders of Vadagalai school and Tengalai school. Since, the only Advaitic Order under analysis is Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, there is no need to classify it. In terms of responses, Saiva Orders show the greatest variance: traditional Orders like Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharmapuram and Kasi Madam, prefer both languages to be used and reluctant to deviate from tradition. Orders like Kundrakudi Adheenam and Perur Santhalingar Madam, which came into prominence only recently, are unequivocal in their preference for Tamil to Sanskrit. Kanchi Kamakoti Order, is generally indifferent to the debate,

---

75 Personal Interview with Murali, Srirangam, December, 2000.
through they would prefer Sanskrit. Since Smarthas, as a social group, were never involved in the administration of temples, the debate was not important to them from a religious point of view. However, politically, Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt as the most powerful religious institution in the country, they cannot remain totally indifferent to the debate. Only Adi-Saivas, and not Smarthas who are a different class of Brahmans from Smarthas, are priests in Saivite temples. The Vaishnavite Orders are accommodative in their responses.

The chapter has two sections: In the first section, a general introduction to religious orders in Tamil Nadu is given with profiles of some of the more important orders. Also we have tried to understand the varied nature of activities of the religious orders, like education, propagation of religious philosophy and social service. We have also tried to understand how the religious orders have adapted to modern changes to fulfil their historical role as a seminary by establishing new educational institutions with secular curricula.

In the second section, the relation between language and religious orders has been analysed. Specifically, our attempt has been to understand the role of religious orders in the language resurgence that took place in the later and early decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively in Tamil speaking regions. The resurgence has to be politically contextualised, for the emergence of the non-Brahman movement posited
the 'Tamil identity' as a major tool in its conflict with Brahmanism and Brahmins. The attempt to construct such an identity usually tries to obfuscate the differences among the probable constituents and the internal contradictions come to the fore. While the Brahmin-based Vaishnavite and Advaitic religious orders could not be expected to the reforms brought by the Dravidian movement, the differences among the Saivite religious orders indicates the plurality of religious practices and also the role played by context in influencing the actions of various orders.

When 'language of liturgy 'a domain which was conflict free, became a point of contention in the twentieth century, the religious orders were forced to reorient their positions and the reorientation and adaptation has used both context and history in choosing from the various choices available to them. Even while indicating the dynamic nature of religious orders, the chapter has tried to capture the limitations within which the religious orders operate.