CONCLUSION
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Particular moments in history open up complex possibilities and at the same time circumscribe our actions. However, those moments are never static or rigid, but have a dynamism of their own, which demand that we act not in a pre-conceived fashion or invent what is not possible. It has to be a negotiation of what was and what is. The terms of negotiation are not open ended. There is a range that gives us choices, but limits us within those ranges. Identity articulation in such junctures is much the same thing. There is nothing static about it. It is a negotiation of history and context as much as a negotiation of culture and context. And neither history nor culture is singular. Among the many histories and many cultures that are available, it is our reading of that history and culture that determines our position in it. And that moment passes and another one arrives. Again we enter into negotiation, again we read history and culture afresh and we take a fresh position. And the process goes on.

Religious orders in Tamil Nadu are negotiating with a particular moment in their history and they are reading history and culture afresh. Multiple possibilities are open to them and the way in which they are going to read their history and culture from a new vantage point would provide us with the answers. We try to understand what they would be from what we know. They have a range to select from, and the range includes, at this moment religion, language and caste. They can be Hindu, Tamil, and
Brahman or non-Brahman or a combination of any of these. They had already negotiated a moment. They had the choice to be Tamil, Brahman or non-Brahman and Hindu or a combination. But their perspective on history and culture was different then. The socio-political culture of Tamil Nadu has passed from a stage where the society organised itself on the basis of caste and language to a stage where religion has emerged as a contender for the basis of organisation. However, language and caste may refuse to fade. Also, different Orders may make different choices.

The emergence of the Hindutva movement in Tamil Nadu in the past two decades has radically altered the socio-political landscape and it has given the religious orders new choices to negotiate and sustain themselves. From the long history of religious orders in Tamil Nadu, they have a variety of choices to choose from and the study has been an attempt to understand the nature of choices available and why some choices are being made and others are not. From secluded centers of learning, various religious orders have evolved into powerful and influential institutions or faded away into oblivion or have managed to survive reasonably well.

Recently the head of the Kanchi Kamakoti religious order made several trips to New Delhi to negotiate in the Ram Janmaboomi conflict, a conflict which political parties and the civil society have failed to resolve. That the efforts of the religious leader are being taken seriously under such a situation is a combination of both the political environment as much as
the dynamism that the institution to which he belongs has exhibited in recent history. Hindu as an identity category has assumed great importance following the activities of the Hindutva forces in the country. The society is being organised in terms of religion, involving an aggregation and segregation of different social forces. In Tamil Nadu, Hindutva forces are trying to construct a new collective Hindu identity by trying to bring together different social groups, which had hitherto been in conflict with one another. One of the main strategies in the construction of Hindu identity has been the attempt to bring different religious orders in a common Hindu platform and fudge the sectarian, caste and other differences among them. The construction of Hindu collective identity is attempted through two processes: politics of inclusion and politics of exclusion.

However, to arrive at this moment, one has to understand the history and the particular ways in which this history is understood by the different actors. The evolution of religious orders in Tamil Nadu can be traced to the temple and Bhakti culture of the region and the codification of religious philosophies of various sects. Both Vaishnavism and Saivism, by the fourteenth century, had emerged as powerful socio-religious forces. Using the temple culture in the region, religious orders had emerged as influential and wealthy institutions. Bhakti movement and the codification of Saiva Siddhantha and Vishishtadvaita had resulted in a fine flowering of Tamil devotional literature and the fact that language was one of the tools
of popular mobilization by the Bhakti saints ensured that Tamil acquired important symbolic value in both the sects. Tamil, along with Sanskrit came to be used in the worship and ritual practices of the religious institutions. The temple culture of the Tamil-speaking regions ushered in complex and contested co-ordination between the elites of the society and the emergence of non-Brahman religious institutions as alternate centres of sacral power ensured that the contestation and co-operation would go on in the religious arenas too.

However, colonialism and emergence of state structures had started seriously eroding the authority and influence of the religious orders in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The complex relation that had evolved between land and the religious institutions was steadily breaking down and with alternate centres of power and legitimation emerging, the religious institutions were forced to cultivate these forces in order to survive and prosper. Also, religious orders had played a central role in some of the changes that were to determine the course of history in the region. Since their inception, religious orders were traditional centres of learning, where, as custodians of religious culture, several kinds of symbolic resources were preserved. Religious orders had also preserved the ancient Tamil manuscripts. The discovery and publication of the manuscripts provided a new moment in the region's history, as the knowledge derived about the social life of Tamils, and the range, beauty and depth of the literature discovered provided the non-Brahman
population new ways of looking at themselves. The extent of antiquity, the range, beauty and sophistication of Tamil literature gave a new sense of pride in the language. The whole process unfolded in the context of historical tensions between Brahman and other elites of the society which had entered new arenas.

Colonialism ushered in radical changes in the social structure of the region and altered the relation that existed between various social groups in the society. The new opportunities provided by the colonial administration intensified the competition between Brahman and non-Brahman elites. Colonial race theories of 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' had identified Brahmans as alien intruders, who invaded and subjugated the native Dravidian people. Also linguistic researches by Christian missionaries revealed that Tamil is a Dravidian language and was not derived from Sanskrit, as was generally assumed. Also, complex linkages between language and caste were made, in which it was argued that Tamil was the exclusive possession of non-Brahmans and so were identified with Dravidians. Historically, Brahmans were the custodians of Sanskrit language and so were deemed to be Aryan 'outsiders' in what is a Dravidian homeland.

The relation between language and social group as something 'natural' and 'given' and its relation to culture provided new ways of identity construction. The construction of Tamil identity and its relation to
caste were popular tools in Dravidian movement. Also, Sanskritic Hinduism, now identified with Brahmans, was deemed to be inherently hierarchical and discriminatory. Since Tamil had already emerged by the fourteenth century as an important vehicle of religious devotion, Tamil's relation with divinity was asserted and was sought to be distanced from Sanskritic Hinduism. The relation between language and religion became another factor in identity construction. Saiva Siddhantha religious philosophy was based on Tamil texts and was now identified as the proper Tamil religion, distinct from Sanskritic Hinduism of the Aryan Brahmans. Such constructions were contested by Brahmans. The consequence of all these developments was that complex relation between language and social group at one level and between religion and language at another level provided fresh opportunities for the religious orders to reorient themselves to the drastic changes in the social structure of Tamil society.

The encroachment of state on religion, based on notions of socio-economic and religious reforms, however, had seriously affected the religious orders and their resources to continue their historical activities of education, temple administration and propagation of religious philosophy. We have seen in the study how the religious orders have reoriented themselves to the differentiation of institutions - new educational institutions were established to continue their historical connection with education. Also, resource mobilization strategies depended more on clientele-cultivation rather than depending on the endowments and the
resource generated through them. The social and religious reforms, in the context of Tamil Nadu, had acquired a hostile antagonism to religion, as it was identified as an impeding force to the reform measures. The antagonism to religion was a direct threat to the existence of religious orders as much as the limitation brought to their financial survival by the socio-economic reforms.

It is in this context that the first moment in history for the religious orders arrived. However, the moment did not mean the same thing for all the religious orders – different as they are, in their reading of both history and culture. There are three strategies that were adopted to negotiate the historical moment and the choice depended on the particular readings of history and culture of each religious order. They were co-optation, contestation and withdrawal. The rise of Kundrakudi Adigalar depended upon the co-optation model. Even while contesting the atheism of the Dravidian movement, the Kundrakudi order co-opted the many motifs that the Dravidian movement had used in their identity construction project. Dravidian movement, whose basic philosophy was to contest the Brahman supremacy in various spheres of the society, was attempting to mobilize people on the basis of language and caste. As the Brahmans had been identified as the ‘cultural other’, all those existed outside the Brahman rubric, either by language or caste were qualified to be ‘pure Tamils’. So the basic question in the Dravidian movement was ‘Who is a Tamil?’ Muslims, Christians, Vellala, and all others who existed outside the
Brahman fold became Tamils in the discourse of Dravidian movement. In the religious sphere, the movement attempted to purge those elements which it regarded as 'alien and hostile' to Tamil identity. However, the Dravidian movement's reading of history and culture was different from the reading of the various religious orders.

Dravidian movement in forging a 'collective Tamil identity' had attempted to define it in very narrow terms – a Tamil culture that is independent of larger Indian culture, other languages and what it regarded as alien Hindu practices. Such narrow construction, even when accepted by Saiva Siddhanthins outside the fold of religious orders did not correspond with the understanding of eminent Saiva religious orders. While acceptance of Dravidian movement's strategy of fighting Sanskritic Hinduism on every front would have meant a deviation for what the Saiva orders regarded as their 'tradition', rejection would mean that the status-parity they aspired with the Brahman Orders and practices would become impossible. So, as far as the religious orders are concerned, their identity is not determined by language alone – tradition played an important role, and the tradition included Sanskrit too. So it was the different reading of Saiva history that reflected in the ambiguity the religious orders displayed in the question of identity. Any attempt to forge a collective identity based on a narrow reading of history is bound to fail because it fails to take into account the plurality and difference that marks the various forces that they seek to unite. We have to understand the difference between the Saiva Orders like
Kundrakudi and Perur, and Thiruvavaduthurai and Dharmapuram: While Kundrakudi and Perur did not carry the reputation of traditional and prestigious orders, which allowed them to innovate and co-opt the programmes of Dravidian movement, Dharmapuram and Thiruvavaduthurai carried the baggage of 'tradition' and the historical links they had with various cultural forms and rituals.

Orders like Kanchi Kamakoti mutt, which historically has used Sanskrit, shared nothing with the ideals of the Dravidian movement and so it was easier for them to contest the readings of history of the Dravidian movement. Vaishnavite Orders have a long tradition of using Tamil. From its inception their philosophy was a complex synthesis of both Tamil and Sanskrit. They too, like the Kanchi Kamakoti mutt, did not share the cultural marker of 'non-Brahman', which was one of the defining features of Dravidian Tamil identity.

Fleeting as history is, the moment passed as the Dravidian Tamil identity in monolithic terms came to be challenged both from inside and outside. A case in point is the rise of Dalit movements in Tamil Nadu, which while questioning the primacy given to Tamil over caste, did not reject Tamil identity. Rather they argued that caste should be primary candidate for mobilization and identity. Thus the myth of a monolithic Tamil community with no internal differences soon collapsed. The basic problem in the construction of any monolithic collective identity is the fudging and
de-legitimizing of the internal differences. The Hindutva movement which had its origin in a particular understanding of Indian history and construction of a collective identity based on the slogan ‘Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan’, soon made inroads into Tamil Nadu by adopting an inclusive approach towards Hindu religion. The Viswa Hindu Parishad, an allied organization of Hindutva, which has articulated the one language, one culture and one nation theory as the basis of Indian polity, when it tried to expand in Tamil speaking regions, Tamilised many of the names of the fronts it used to float. Marga Darsha Mandal became ‘Aanrorval Kattum Arav Vazhi Peravai’. Thus they try to unite disparate Hindu social forces by a politics of accommodation and assimilation and a politics of exclusion of Muslims and Christians. In trying to project a homogenized Hindu culture, they provided a common Hindu platform for all the religious orders by consistently articulating a concern for the issue which has affected the religious orders most. Also by appealing to the village priests through a platform dominated by religious orders, they attempt to unite village religious practices, which is very different from the religious cultures the different Orders propagate and practice.

The overall objective of the project is to create a single Hindu culture to which all sections of Hindu society can relate and identify. While there is no doubt that their version of religious culture is consciously modeled on Sanskritic Hinduism, they try to accommodate interests of various religious practices even while changing it. However, the common
platform has attraction for the religious orders because of its links with the Hindutva forces. Even while negotiating on the question and nature of collective identity that the Hindutva forces are trying to project, the cooperation extended and grant of legitimacy to the forces, is because of the leverage they acquire with the state. The Association of Village Temple Priests was able to extract from the then DMK government, one of its main demands, that is the constitution of a separate board for the village priests in Tamil Nadu. It is exactly this kind of success that the Hindutva forces have achieved in Tamil Nadu, which impels the religious orders to cultivate them.

On the question of Tamil, which has an important history in the context of recent politics, Hindu Munnani (literally Hindu Front), an allied organization of the Hindutva forces has consistently projected the Hindu nature of Tamilians. So the question of 'Who is a Tamil?' is answered in totally different terms from the Dravidian movement. If Dravidian movement answered that a Tamil is one who is not a Brahman, the Hindutva movement in Tamil Nadu answers that 'only a Hindu can be a Tamil'. If the Dravidian Tamil identity includes religion (Muslims and Christians) and excludes caste in its answer, the Hindutva forces in Tamil Nadu include caste, but exclude religion. This inclusion and exclusion of various social forces in identity construction draws upon particular versions of history, but denies legitimacy to others. That is why such projects are
bound to fail, for they do not take in to account the plurality that marks culture and the lack of respect for difference.

To sum up, the study endeavours to understand the impact of the changes that took place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on religious orders. During the period, the Tamil speaking regions witnessed language resurgence and the religious orders were a catalyst in the resurgence- with their function as custodians of ancient Tamil texts. Not only, did the religious orders preserve ancient Tamil manuscripts and other symbolic resources, they also actively patronised Tamil scholars and were themselves a major creators of Tamil literature. They actively encouraged the discovery and publication of these texts. The language resurgence that took place paved way for the construction of Tamil identity, which was later appropriated by the Dravidian movement to articulate its reformist tendencies and anti-Brahmanism.

During all this period, religious orders lost their control over land and were forced to reorient themselves to the expanding state structure. Religious orders, which were closely linked to temple, subsequently lost control of the administration of temples. The various orders with their competing philosophies of Saiva Siddantha and Vishistadvaita had used the land and temple control to influence the society and compete with Shankara's advaita.
With the loss of control over land and temple, the religious orders tried to forge a common platform transcending sectarian and caste loyalties. The common platform was a form of negotiation with the encroaching state structure. On the other hand, the political parties tried to engage the religious orders in their bid to further their agenda.

Initially the Dravidian movement through its active support to the 'Deiveega Peravai' tried to further its agenda of social and religious reforms. The language of liturgy and the reformation of religious culture were problematised by the Dravidian movement. However, tradition and culture were not homogenously defined by the religious orders. In addition to such differences, the power relations between the various orders were the contextual factors which prevented a monolithic response from the religious orders. Religious orders had their own agenda and the engagement of the political structure was an attempt on the part of religious orders to reorient themselves to the changed socio-political situation.

However, the early nineteen eighties witnessed another development in Tamil society. The emergence of Hindutva movement using conversion threats as a basis of constructing a homogenous Hindu identity presented another opportunity for the religious orders to forge a common platform. The role of religious orders as custodians of religious culture made them sensitive to the conversion issue and this sensitivity provided
them an opportunity to move closer to Hindutva forces. Also, the Hindutva forces have consistently articulated the need for creation of an autonomous board for temple administration, a demand which addressed a core concern of the religious orders. Hindutva forces try to utilise the legitimacy of religious orders as custodians of religious culture in its bid to promote a homogenised Hindu culture through platforms like Grama Koil Poosarigal Peravai. The Associations initiated by the Hindutva forces have also brought the heads of various religious orders into a new and continuous interaction with other elements of the Hindu society, especially the village priests. However, the varying interests and historical legacies of the orders are likely to resist any attempt at creating a homogenous Hindu identity.

The study has argued that religious orders play a major role in the preservation and propagation of religious culture and it is this role which brought about the language resurgence. The language resurgence also, solidified the relation between language and religion- and different religious orders variously conceptualised the relation. Depending upon their conception, the religious orders have used different adaptive strategies to reorient themselves to the changing situation.

Identity construction projects generally tend to assume that identities are 'given and singular' and attempt to mobilise communities based on this perception. But in our study we have argued that though
certain identities are given, attempts to project a particular identity as the most important one need not succeed. However, identity articulation cannot be tied to any one single marker, but there are also identities which assume salience depending upon the reading of history, culture and context. It is in this context that the attempts of the Dravidian movement and Hindutva to construct identities on narrow interpretations of history and culture have to be located. This would explain the dilemmas of identity faced by the religious orders in their interaction with these identity-based movements and the failure of reformist agenda of the Dravidian movement and the homogenisation project of the Hindutva movement to accommodate or assimilate the religious orders on the basis of a single overarching identity.