CONCLUSION
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In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to study and survey the development of Tamil identity consciousness as expressed through a variety of socio-cultural and linguistic initiatives. The idea of identity, the question of difference, the meaning of the past, and the passions of the tongue constitute the bulk of the central concerns of this work. This thesis is a series of microanalyses converging on a central concern namely the formation of Tamil identity consciousness. The emergence of social consciousness became an issue of historical importance in the late nineteenth century when it began to challenge the established social order and the dominant functional worldview. It further gained momentum in the second quarter of the twentieth century as a result of intense political activities. Central to the issue was the role of intellectuals who were instrumental in transforming the rising discontent into an apt social category for political and cultural use. Locating intellectual enterprise at the intersection of social and cultural history, this work seeks to narrate, explain and contextualise the formation of social consciousness and the contribution of intellectuals towards it. This interrelationship viewed in the light of ideas and movements impinging upon a variety of issues forms the core of this work.

The basic conceptual and thematic problems pertaining to this study were set forth in general terms in the introduction. Then, each chapter focussing on a particular area was devoted to their elaboration and empirical elucidation. The multiple thematic approach was adopted here to illumine the pluri-dimensional and complex character of the cultural and intellectual pursuit. Construction of the past as a historical activity figured prominently in the intellectual endeavour to modernize Indian society. Their efforts to valorize the past, to grapple with the present and to conceive the future met with a series of ruptures and impediments. The colonial enterprise selectively appropriating and expropriating the cultural past had delegitimised Indian history. The intellectual inquiry into the past was necessarily an attempt to contest and contain the claims advanced by Colonial and Oriental historiography. However this process was not unilinear and undifferentiated but riven with ruptures, disjunctures and contradictions.
The intellectual commitment to reconstruct the cultural past of Tamil Nadu in the late nineteenth century evoked a poignant response leading to the divergence of opinions about the cultural self-sufficiency, civilizational primacy, language uniqueness and social pedigree. In the field of Tamil literary history or in situating the Sangam age, the 'native' historians made a remarkable advancement by tactfully deploying corroborative sources in dating the Tamil classics. P.Sundaram Pillai, the father of modern Tamil historiography set an example by establishing *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature* as early as 1891. Following his footsteps, a team of scholars worked out reasonably a reliable time framework for Tamil classical works.

Rediscovery of Tamil literary works and the subsequent mass production aided by printing technology was undoubtedly a watershed in the modern history of Tamil Nadu. It took place at a time when Tamil society was at its crossroads, grappling with the new historical possibilities and political opportunities. Aided by printing technology, language became a prominent cultural issue during this period in the public sphere leading to the formation of Tamil associations and organisations. Mention must be made, in this regard, of the dissemination of European ideas and English education, which were indeed critical to the development of Tamil intellectual activism. Questions about caste observance, commensal contacts and gender rights were brought to discussion for the first time in the Tamil public sphere. The nascent press facilitated by printing technology opened its columns subsequently for the debates on various social and cultural issues leading to a mass awakening. Many caste associations, cultural societies and language organisations started their own journals and magazines to promote their views and ideas on various issues and thus print capitalism played a pivotal role in generating new consciousness in colonial Tamil Nadu. Given the critical nature of literacy rate during this period in Tamil Nadu, one would tend to ask whether print media did play such a decisive role? The answer to this question lay embedded in the facilitating role played by the print culture in disseminating new ideas through local functionaries viz caste leaders, village school teachers, national movement activists and newly educated youth. It functioned as a potential link between centres of ideas and its promoters in the public sphere, thereby
accentuating the formation of social consciousness. Crucial to this development was not the depth of the reading culture or the massive circulation of printed matter but the role of social functionaries who were responsible in creating awareness among ordinary masses about their fundamental rights.

The intellectual awakening that occurred during this period was not only confined to the spheres of language, caste, history and cultural issues but also spread over to other domains of art and music to recover more space for a capacious identity formation. The ideological base of the identity formation was always associated with the question of heightened difference. Focussing on the instrumental values of equality, liberty and dignity, each one of the interest groups were actively engaged in retrieving the lost identity, status and privilege by forming associations and other networks. However these processes were not unilinear but beset with contradictions, conflicts and tensions. To sum up, the emergence of identity formation cannot be simply explained in terms of its ideological and intellectual commitment. In fact, the question of identity formation must be assessed and evaluated in the backdrop of the material conditions from which it emerged and the socio-political and cultural milieu in which it developed. That is to say, “Men make their own history, but they do not just as they please. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”.

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