CHAPTER – I
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CONSTRUCTION OF THE PAST

The construction of the past as a historical agenda was a part of the intellectual activities of the late nineteenth century. It figured prominently in the attempt of the intellectuals to modernise Indian society. They realised the importance of being sensitive to their past which was mis-represented by colonial rule. As a result, the investigation of the past to perceive the present and to conceive a future became integral to their intellectual endeavour. To use K. N. Panikkar’s words, “The intellectual quest in colonial India, engaged in an enquiry into the meaning of the past and thus in an assessment of the relevance to contemporary society, was an outcome of this awareness” (This refers to the mis-representation of the past). 1

The necessity for the construction of the past, though initially viewed as prerequisite to reform the society, subsequently turned out to be part of an anti-colonial agenda to retrieve the lost identity. 2 This increasingly became very vocal when the national movement reached its mass phase. In this chapter, I would make an attempt to assess and critically examine the emergence of various historiographies in colonial Tamil Nadu. It further seeks to explain how the retrieval of history laid the foundation for the ideological genesis of the Dravidian movement and Tamil identity. 3

Each one of the schools of historiography developed their own discourse to locate and comprehend the history of India. Perhaps, the needs of the present were at times over-read or imposed into the past. 4 The ideological basis of this historiography was necessarily to disown and delegitimise the cultural rhetoric of Indian history. The Oriental school, sympathetically treating the Indian past as a conglomeration of events devoid of historical contingency and chronology, indulged in “piling conjecture upon

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2 R. Guha, An Indian Historiography of India: Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications, Calcutta, 1988, p. 11.
4 Romila Thapar, The Past and Prejudice, New Delhi, 1996, p. 3.
conjecture” to construct their own ‘cloud lands’. Similar to this line, the colonial historiography dictated by its material interest, systematically denied the validity and misappropriated Indian history. Missionary school contribution may be premised upon a different material plain, their romanticisation of the past at least in Tamil Nadu kindled the atavistic feelings of native scholars. On the other hand, the ‘native school of historiography’ undertook the task of constructing the past, precisely to retrieve their damaged and lost identity from the womb of the past. However, their process was not a unilinear or undifferentiated progression. It was riven with contradictions, contentions and ruptures. Consequently, it led to the emergence of conflicting historiographies under the aegis of colonial authority.

Oriental Construction

In the imagination of Europe, India had always been the fabulous land of untold wealth and mystical happening, with more than just a normal share of wise men. This imagination propelled the European scholars to probe into the mysteries of India’s past. In their attempt to illuminate the obscure and the unread Indian past, they paid more attention in lighting up certain portion of Indian history leaving the rest in steep darkness. The unconscious attempt of the Orientalists’ construction of Indian antiquity had caused aspersions and suspicion, which in the passage of time paved the way for the prejudicial treatment of the past.

The discovery of Indian past and its revelation to Europe in the late eighteenth century was largely the work of Jesuit scholars, the European travelers and the civil servants of the East India Company. Soon the number of those interested in the study of classical language and literature grew and the nineteenth century saw some considerable achievements in the area of linguistic ethnography, philology and other

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5 P. Sundaram Pillai, Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tiruvnana Sambandha, Madras, 1909, p.14. Also see P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar, The Past in the Present, Madras, 1924, p. 11. Professor Sundaram Pillai (1856-1897), a distinguished scholar in philosophy, history and Tamil literature made a valuable contribution towards Tamil historical research. Nul-Thokai-Vilakkam and Manonmaniyyam were some of his notable works. He was conferred the title Rai Bahadur in 1896 for his outstanding contribution to the field of Tamil literature and history.


7 K. A. Nilkanta Sastri, Sources of Indian History: With Special Reference to South India, Bombay, 1964, p. 50.

8 Ibid., p. 51.
disciplines of Indology. Though the initiative came from the Jesuit scholars, the real break-through was made by a small band of East India Company civil servants.

Sir Williams Jones, a versatile genius polyglot and Charles Wilkins, who had mastered the Sanskrit language, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784,\(^9\) with the aim of promoting the study of ancient Indian civilisation and culture. Wilkins’ translation of Bhagwadgita (1784) and of Hitopdesa (1787); and Jones’ translation of Shakuntala (1789), the Gita Govinda (1792), and Manu-Smriti (1794) was a watershed development in the field of translation. At the same time, French orientalist, Anquetil Duperron translated four Upanishads\(^{10}\) from a seventeenth century Persian version. Colebroke and Wilson followed Jones and Wilkins.

Subsequently, in the nineteenth century chairs were established in various universities of Western countries to promote the study of Indology.\(^{11}\) George Buhler, James Burgess, John Faithful Fleet, Ernest Hultszch, Kielhorn, William Burnouf, Fredrick Max Muller, Christopher Lassen and Alfred Weber, James Fergusson, Macdonnel, Rhys Davids, Lanman and Bloomfield were just few great names in Western scholarship of the last century who held these chairs in Sanskrit and Oriental studies. The outcome of the research along different lines were succinctly summed up in the first scientific treatise published in 1904, *The Early History of India* by Vincent A. Smith, an I.C.S officer.\(^{12}\) Thus, Orientalism as a branch of study premised upon a different set of ontological and epistemological values to comprehend the history of India for the benefit of colonial bureaucracy.\(^{13}\) The Oriental project was primarily initiated by the imperial power to unlock the mysteries germane to its cultural past and classical traditions.

The oriental discourse applied its own categories, vocabularies, imageries, scholarships and doctrines to survey the civilisation from its origin to its prime and its decline.\(^{14}\) During this period, more and more Europeans came to define the uniqueness of Indian civilisation, as they perceived it. This definition included the development of an apparatus for the study of Indian languages and texts,

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\(^9\) A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Delhi, 1967, p. 9.
\(^{10}\) Nilkanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p. 16.
\(^{11}\) Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, p. 11.
\(^{12}\) Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p. 58.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 52.
standardising and making them authoritative for both Europeans and Indians. As Bernard S. Cohn rightly points out, "through the encouragement of the production by Indians of school books, Indians began to write history in the European mode, often borrowing ideas about the past of India".\(^{15}\)

In the 1980s the Archaeological Survey was established with a view to safeguard the monuments and architecture of India, what was thought fit for preservation by them as part of Indian heritage. Viewed in the same perspective, census operations and ethnological survey were conducted in order to prepare monographs about the culture and society. Photographic description and statistical tabulations were also prepared for the academic and administrative requirements, so that India could be part of the 'laboratory of mankind'.\(^{16}\)

Sir William Jones laid the outline for the Oriental historiography in the late 1780's. Jones, who came to Calcutta as a civil servant, showed keen interest in the study of ancient laws, manners, customs, habits, literatures and institutions. Within a short span of a decade he proved to be a promising scholar in the field of Indology. His monumental piece of translation had revitalised the religious order and gave new currency and fixity to the political identity of the Hindus.\(^{17}\) William Jones was responsible for the induction of uniform civil code for all caste Hindus - whose translation of *Manu-smriti* published under the title of *Institutes of Hindu Law* in 1794, became the Magna Carta of the Hindu Judicial System.\(^{18}\)

Conceiving language as a carrier of culture, Jones boldly postulated a well-cultivated Sanskritic civilisation of hoary past. According to him, the Hindus who were first to settle down in the Indus and Gangetic plains had evolved an independent culture under the stimulus of the existing Indian environment. They handed down their culture to the succeeding generations in the East as well as the West.\(^{19}\) Their contribution in the ancient and modern times was something original, arresting and impressive.

\(^{15}\) Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 171.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 184.

\(^{17}\) Nilkanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p. 31.

\(^{18}\) Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, pp. 5-6.

\(^{19}\) Nilkanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p. 14.
Jones paid considerable encomium to the exactness and logical structure of Sanskrit. Rejecting the Semitic origin of Sanskrit, he had placed it on par with the classical European languages. He pronounced, "the Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is a wonderful structure; more perfect than Greek; more copious than Latin and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the form of German, than could possibly have been produced by accident, so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine all three of them without believing them to have sprung from some common source." Thus he established indissoluble ties between Indo-European languages, which had a far-reaching political fall out. In the footsteps of Jones, many Western scholars came forward to reinterpret and reconstruct the Indian past. Prominent among them was Fredrick Max Muller (1819-1906), who held the chair for Sanskrit at Oxford University and made valuable contributions towards the retrieval of Oriental literature.

Max Muller applied the term 'Aryan Race' in the socio-linguistic context in 1853. Subsequently, it struck a firm root and evoked an enormous response in Europe. It reached its logical culmination in India with the foundation of the Theosophical movement. Muller’s excitement about the cultural affinity between Indo-European groups was reflected in many of his works. The study of philology resulted in the vision of a vast Aryan race which was regarded as the originator of Indian culture. He held the view that the study of Sanskrit was also the discovery of a lost wing of early European culture. Max Muller, in his book, *India, What Can it Teach Us?* confidently exhibited the philological ties between Europe and India—"...our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryans of India, the framers of the most wonderful language of Sanskrit, fellow workers in the construction of our most fundamental concepts, the fathers of the most natural of the natural religions, the makers of the most transparent of mythologies, the inventors of the most subtle philosophy and the giver of the most elaborate laws..." Muller’s exalted description of the Aryan culture stirred up the atavistic pride and the sense of cultural superiority among caste Hindus got articulated in many

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20 Quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 79.
ways. Some intellectuals went to the extent of claiming fraternity with European culture. Keshab Chander Sen, an early social reformer, spelt out "...in the advent of the English nation in India we see a reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race..."23

Assiduous adulation of Sanskrit culture and the Aryan system of philosophy crippled the nationalists to revive the golden past from its miry clay. Some of the hard-core nationalists strongly believed that the restoration of Hindu culture to its pristine glory would be the only way to achieve the national regeneration. They advocated nationalism as the religion's programme and galvanised the masses around religious symbols, idols and festivals.

The Oriental scholars who were engaged in unearthing the Indian past had constituted a political India with fractured identities and conflicting historiographies. Orientalism as a set of created theories and practices aided by its own institutions, imageries and vocabularies comprehended the history of the Orient, and transformed them into imagined categories. It developed the culture of the Orient into well-knit categories and imposed it upon the orient for colonial administrative needs.24 Consequently, the local groups were to perceive their society through the official spectacles, such as Brahmans and non-Brahmins, Muslims and Hindus, to obtain favours and privileges.25

European initiative in constructing South Indian History

Culture, language and literature are the integral part of a society. They were central to the formation of an ethnic identity and consciousness of a group of people.26 The construction of an identity and a historical consciousness of a society largely grew out of the political necessity. Amateur evangelists and English administrators initially undertook the modern scientific study of South Indian history. The Jesuit missionaries, who came to South India in the late sixteenth century, evinced keen interest in the local manners, habits, customs and institutions. They realised the need to acquire language proficiency in order to propagate the Gospel. Some of the Catholic monks like Robert De-Nobili (1577-1656) adopted the local Saivite life style

23 Quoted in Romila Thapar, The Past and Prejudice, p. 9.
24 Edward Said, Orientalism, p. 28.
and other missionaries like Ziegenbalg (1682-1719), C. J. Beschi (1680-1743) and G. U. Pope showed command over local customs and language.\(^{27}\) Constantius Beschi, an Italian monk, who came to South India in the late seventeenth century mastered Tamil in a decade. He himself authored a number of works in Tamil such as \textit{Vedavilakam} (explanatory work on the Bible), \textit{Vethial-ozhukkam} (work on religious discipline for monks), \textit{Paramarthagurukathai} (fiction) and initiated the preparation of a Latin-Tamil lexicography. Besides this, his notable work \textit{Thempavani} an epic about the birth of Jesus Christ earned him a worthy place in the lineage of Tamil erudite scholars in the modern period.\(^{28}\) His works are said to have established a new literary tradition for the promotion of Christian literature in the Tamil language. He had undertaken the study of Tamil orthography and published a work in Latin called \textit{A Grammar of the High Dialect of Tamil language, termed Shen-Tamil} to which he has added an introduction, wherein he delineated the basic principles of Tamil poetry. Later in 1822, Benjamin Guy Babington had translated it into English for the benefit of Madras civil servants. Many other missionaries, sent by various churches, were actively involved in restoring Tamil literature from its oblivion. As a result they subscribed to the currency of hoary past and the autochthony of Tamil.

Language and cultural rhetoric generally constituted the ideological premise for the germination of an ethnic or a racial consciousness. Missionary scholars who were involved in Tamil research were impelled by the exact logic and copious nature of Tamil. The well-grounded ethics, systematic, territorial classification and the invocation of the egalitarian principles found in Tamil literature provided the ideological content to conjure up a well founded civilisation which got transmitted into the domain of historical antiquity.\(^{29}\)

Robert Charles Caldwell (1819-1891) a putative Dravidologist epitomised the quality and the direction of the missionaries’ linguistic enterprise. Efficiently putting his knowledge of epigraphy, philology and hagiography, he expounded on a theory of

\(^{27}\) M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, \textit{Tamil Literature}, Munnirpallam, 1929, pp. 317-19, 330-32, 347-49. M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866-1946), a famous Tamil scholar was instrumental in starting a movement to urge the government to establish a Tamil university. ‘Tamil literature’, ‘Ravana-The Great’ and ‘Tamil India’ were some of his remarkable treatises. He advanced the theory of “Lemuria” (the original land of Tamils).


the golden past of Tamil civilisation in the early period of the Christian era. Critically evaluating the Aryan civilisation’s impact on Tamil life, he challenged the established functional worldview of caste system.\endnote{30}

Caldwell came to India with a modicum of education to serve the society for the propagation of the Gospel. Like William Jones, within a short span of time, he mastered all the native languages, manners and customs. He was known in Madras as a man of some authority in matters of Indian history, culture and ethnology. He published monographs, manuals and pamphlets on various social aspects. The Tinnevelly Shanars published in 1849 and A political and General History of the District of Tinnevelly published in 1881 earned him considerable repute. However, Caldwell was remembered in the political and academic circles as a pioneer in the field of philology for his noteworthy publication A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages.

Bishop Caldwell, if not more than Max Muller, was mainly or partly responsible for the propagation of a racial myth based on linguistic affinity by providing political invective for the emergence of Dravidian rationalism in the early twentieth century. K. Sivathambi rightly points out the period between 1856 – publication of Caldwell’s work – and 1916 publication of Communal Manifesto was the gestation or incubation period for the genesis of the Dravidian movement.\endnote{31} Caldwell’s theory had transformed the conflict of social-genic into philologenic conflagration by pointing to geno-typical and pheno-typical difference.

Caldwell constructed a Tamil past purely based upon the literary evidence by corroborating to Sanskrit sources. He propounded a logical theory that, “Tamil culture had a separate and independent existence before the Brahmins invaded South India.”\endnote{32} It was this outline that later provided valuable ammunition for those who sought to prove the antiquity and purity of Tamil. He categorically repudiated that the Dravidian languages were derived from Sanskrit as some, including the noted Oriental scholar H. H. Wilson had suggested.\endnote{33} On the contrary, he contended that, “Sanskrit

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] K. Sivathambi, Understanding Dravidian Movement: Problems and Perspectives, Madras, 1995, p. 32.
\item[32] Robert Caldwell, A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages, p. 4.
\item[33] Ibid., p. 33.
\end{footnotes}
has not disdained to borrow... from its Dravidian neighbours.” He prepared a long list of words, based on their etymology and use and contended that Sanskrit also had freely borrowed the ideas and terms from its Dravidian neighbours. Paying rich tribute to Tamil linguistic elegance he said, “Tamil the most highly ‘ab-intra’ of all Dravidian idioms can dispense with its Sanskrit if need be, and not only stand alone, but flourish without its aid.” The hostility between Tamil and Sanskrit was not a new phenomenon and Tamil tried to keep herself from Sanskrit influence from the very inception. The classic nature of Tamil was viewed by the purity. Caldwell opined, “a Tamil poetical composition is regarded as in accordance with a good taste and worthy of being called classical, not in proportion to the amount of Sanskrit it contains, as would be the case in some other dialects, but in proportion to its freedom from Sanskrit.”

Caldwell was one of the first missionary scholars to address the social conflict with definite categories. He dwelt deeply into the issue of Brahmin non-Brahmin religious dichotomy and pointed out that it was the Brahmins who injected their ‘Puranic-Vedic’ superstitious culture into Tamil life. He categorically mentioned that Brahmins had contributed nothing significant to Tamil culture. “Native Tamilians called Sudras by the Brahmins, who were never conquered by the Brahmins”, had cultivated the language. Caldwell strongly advocated that the term ‘Sudra’ should be dropped and the name of each Dravidian caste according to the locality should be used.

Caldwell propounded his theory of Dravidian antiquity independent of Sanskrit culture on the basis of philological, linguistic and ethnological evidence. He made a careful study of the Tamil way of life and character and pointed out their propensity to philosophy, knowledge and entrepreneurship. He stated that, “wherever money is to be made, wherever a more apathetic or more aristocratic people is awaiting to be pushed aside, thither swarm the Tamilians, the Greek or Scotch of East, the least superstitious and the most enterprising and persevering race of the Hindus.” Such emotive statements coupled with eulogy and appreciation instilled the mind of

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34 Ibid., p. 7.
35 Ibid., p. 5
36 Ibid., p. 79.
37 Ibid., p. 60.
38 Ibid., p. 7.
the non-Brahmin scholars to peruse their cultural pedigree. These later became the
watchword of the Dravidian movement.

Following the line of Bishop Caldwell, another Scottish missionary G. U.
Pope (1820-1908) made a valuable contribution towards the elevation of Tamil
literature and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study. If Bishop Caldwell’s
work provided the ammunition for the emergence of the political identity of the non-
Brahmins on the basis of their linguistic pedigree, it was G. U. Pope’s sedulous
English translation of Thiruvasakam which extended the ideological backdrop for the
revival of the Saiva Siddhanta movement in Tamil Nadu. Thiruvasakam is one of the
major works of the Saivite canon perhaps intended to take the place of the
Upanishads, and there is decidedly no work in the Tamil language deserving that
reputation. The whole work is known for the profundity of thought, earnestness of
feeling and child-like trust in the divine grace of God. Pope greatly enhanced the
arguments in favour of antiquity and sophistication of Tamil culture by placing the
Saiva Siddhanta religious system in a high position among world religions. He argued
that Saivism was “the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect...and undoubtedly
the pre-historic religion of South India.”

Rev. G. U. Pope contributed a number of meticulous articles to leading
journals such as Royal Asiatic Quarterly, The Indian Antiquary, The Indian Magazine
and the Indian Review, which provided valuable information to both European and
Indian scholars to pursue historical research in Tamil Nadu.

The cultural and historical antiquity of the Tamils were constructed
predominantly with the aid of the Tamil literary sources, as a result, it necessitated
English translation in order to enhance the course of research. Rev. G. U. Pope was
instrumental in translating many Tamil works into English. Besides his notable work
Thiruvasakam he translated a number of works such as Tirukurral, Naladiyar,

39 J. M. Nallasamy Pillai, “Fundamental Elements of Hindu Civilization”, Saiva Siddhanta Deepika,
vol. 8, 1904, p. 313. J. M. Nallasamy Pillai (1864-1920), took the study of the Saiva Siddhanta in 1894
and translated the Sivagnana Bodham with valuable notes in 1895. Two years hence he did like service,
to Tiru-Arul Payan and started the ‘Saiva Siddhanta Deepika’ in 1897, which has irradiated the Tamil
World with brilliant articles and translations. Besides this, he translated many Tamil literary works into English and started a movement for the propagation of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

40 G. U. Pope (tr.), The Tiruvacagam, Oxford, 1900, p. iii. G. U. Pope (1820-1908), another Scottish
missionary scholar, contributed much to the elevation of Tamil studies and Tamil religion as legitimate
subjects of study for Oriental scholars. He advanced the theory of Celtic origin of Tamil and considered
Latin and Greek were her sisters.
Manimekalai and some selected portions from Purananurru and Purap Poral Venba Malai.

Many other missionary scholars like Rev. Loeventhal, Rev. Rottler, Rev. Hosington, have done a commendable job in recuperating Tamil antecedents from the muddied past. Missionary scholars came to South India primarily to win souls for Christ, through preaching the Gospel. In the course of time they acquired the knowledge of the local culture and showed an assiduous interest in decoding and constructing the social history of the Tamils. History writing is necessarily endowed with the purpose of reading the need of the present into the past. Evangelists evolved a process by which the Tamil history was appropriated through literary sources. The Evangelists’ construction was intended to provide an alternative historiographic agenda by giving a new rigour to it. Challenging the oriental conceptualisation about the cultural antiquity of South India it established an alternative paradigm within the Oriental historiography. It elevated the status of Tamil to that of Sanskrit and strongly advocated that Tamil can dispense with Sanskrit. In fact it went to the extent of claiming a universal status for Tamil. The Evangelist school of historiography liberated the Tamil past and claimed autochthonous status for Tamil. By doing so it had created a new critical consciousness among the local intelligentsia about their cultural antiquity. The missionary school of thought had provided ample political invective to the nascent local historians to look back at their culture and civilisation with pride and dignity. However, such a historiographic construction cannot stand the test of time and scientific principles. Moreover, such type of discourse, based upon literary sources, cannot provide the chronological rigour since the ancient Tamil literature was deeply buried in the coils of mythological imagination. A bare historiographic outline of the cultural antiquity gave the local intelligentsia a right direction to construct a history of their own. Colonial intervention and missionary perception about the local social categories politicised the ethnology of Tamil history. Consequently, the history of modern colonial Tamil Nadu was dominated by the contending hegemonies for cultural superiority.

41 Eugene F. Irschick, Tamil Revivalism in the 1930s, p. 78.
Colonial Initiative

The colonial understanding of the Tamil culture and the conception about their social life was very much interwoven with the material reality of the colonizer. The colonial authority had undertaken the project of constructing the history of the South, in order to establish their supremacy over the cultural life of the society. The Oriental school of historiography had already appropriated the history of the northern part of India in the late eighteenth century for its colonial benefit. However, subsequent historical research has revealed the mystery concerning the cultural antiquity of the people. Tamil literature and the puranas supplied the relevant basic information about the culture and social life of the community. But they lacked a sense of history and chronological accuracy.\(^{42}\) They also failed to provide sufficient data concerning the crucial aspects of civilisation. As a result other scientific methods of research were required for the construction of South Indian history.

The early archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic research gave ample proof to establish the cultural antiquity of the South. They confirmed the fact of the possibility of human existence in the Neolithic age in the South. The study of prehistory with the notice of Panducoolies by Marria Graham (1811) and Babington (1833) set the research on a firm footing.\(^{43}\) Congreve’s report on graves and geologist Newbolds’ 1836 report on Bellary mounds instilled the hope for further progress. The advent of Bruce Foote accelerated the process of archaeological excavations and topographical observations in South India.

Bruce Foote was a palaeontologist cum geologist, familiar with the developments in Europe and reached India in 1858. His discovery, five years later of stone implements in laterite deposits near Madras opened a new epoch in India’s prehistory. He continued his work for thirty-three years, making important discoveries wherever he went. Excavation played little part in his work and his method comprised topographical observation, surface collections on a large scale, and topological analysis. His “Notes on the Ages and Distribution of Antiquities” (Madras 1916) based on many years of study of his vast collection offers a monumental reconstruction of the various stages of pre-historic culture of India.\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 17.
\(^{44}\) Nilakanta Sastri, *Sources of Indian History*, p. 64.
Bruce Foote examined, along with William King Jr., the most important prehistoric burial places covering over hundred and fourteen acres of land at Adichanallore on the southern bank of the Tamraparni in Tinnevelly district. These graves at Adichanallore are to be dated to the early Iron Age that succeeded the Neolithic age in South India. However, Nilakanta Sastri argues that “Many of the sites and objects he (Bruce Foote) assigned to later Iron Age now seem to belong to the early historic or medieval periods.”45

J. W. Brooks, another English scholar made a startling discovery in the Nilgiris plateau by opening many old cairns and described them in his important work entitled “Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris.” Alexander Rea of Madras Archaeological Department also worked extensively and collected a number of artifacts of the pre-historic antiquities for the Madras museum.

In the field of epigraphical research, considerable progress was achieved by the 1860s. Hultzsch and A. C. Burnell, pioneers in the field collected a number of inscriptions and collated them for historical research. Fleet, Burgess, Buhler were some of the leading epigraphists who collected thousands of inscriptions and brought out a ‘Volume of Inscriptions’ containing valuable information.46 Kielhorne published a volume of *Epigraphic Indica* in which he made a comparative study of the chronology of the early ‘Pandyas’ on the basis of inscriptive data and astronomic calculations. ‘Numismatics’ as a genuine branch of scientific historical research also attracted due attention. Prof. E. Hultzsch, Nelson Wright, Richard Burn and Rev. Loevanthal collected a number of coins and prepared a periodical catalogue of coins ranging from second century to twelfth century A.D. Coling Mackenzie’s manuscript collection of seven volumes also provided valuable information about the coins of early ‘Pandyas’.

A new approach evolved in the late 1880s in constructing the chronological sequence of various dynasties that ruled South India on the basis of recently acquired historical evidences. A. C. Burnell prepared a ‘South Indian Inscriptions’ volume where he made an attempt to chronologically organize the information culled out from

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45 Ibid., p. 68.
many Chola Inscriptions.\textsuperscript{47} Hultzsch in his volume extensively used inscriptional records to construct the chronology of various South Indian Royal dynasties. However, many of their historical conclusions, germane to the chronological tables were subsequently proved wrong since they relied too much on conjectures and assumptions to fill the gaps wherever they occurred.\textsuperscript{48} In the late nineteenth century a new thrust was given to historical research by establishing the Tamilian Archaeological Society and instituting a ‘chair’ for archaeological studies at the University of Madras in 1912.\textsuperscript{49} This facilitated many native scholars to undertake sedulous research in unearthing the ancient past.

The colonial undertaking was largely predicated on establishing the imperial hegemony over the native society by denying the legitimate access to their ancient past. Its primary agenda was not only to appropriate the history of the colony but also to emphasise the necessity for colonial control thereby denying the validity of indigenous history. It developed a rationale based on certain ideological underpinnings for colonial social engineering, which created, in turn, a base for colonial perception of the ‘self.’\textsuperscript{50} As a matter of fact the natives viewed their own history through the colonial prism. A culture without vitality, a language devoid of virility, a religion replete with credulity, a society marred by the caste system and a past without meaning constitute the contours of colonial historiography. Indeed, the colonial historiography was a history of turbulence descended as a benign gift of metropolitan liberal culture, which subsequently transformed the conquest into a historical necessity for the emancipation of the East from its cultural stagnancy.\textsuperscript{51}

The colonial construction of Indian historiography was not a product, which emerged out of its commitment to the progress of the colony. On the contrary, it was evolved in a bid to meet the administrative needs and to create an ideological currency to maximize the profit through effective mechanism.\textsuperscript{52} It was a concerted effort on the

\textsuperscript{49} Calendar of University of Madras, 1913 and 1914, pp. 48-53.
\textsuperscript{50} Partha Chatterjee, \textit{The Nationalism and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post Colonial Histories}, New Delhi, 1984, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{52} R. Guha, \textit{An Indian Historiography of India}, p. 5.
coloniser's part to vindicate the necessity for re-structuring the native society on the European model. By doing so it could do away with all intermediary interference in the administrative system. Discussing the nodal point of the colonial historiography agenda, R. Guha laconically opined that the knowledge, which the colonial masters were so eager to acquire was basically concerned with information about "the volume and value of agricultural produce, the rules for appropriation of the producer's surplus by landlords and the state, the nature of land tenures and proprietary institutions, the technicalities of estate accounts and above all, the laws and traditions governing the relationship of peasants, landlords and the state." The colonial production of various social and administrative categories was so effectively put into use that the natives were finally forced to seek redress from the metropolitan idioms. Yet another ideological vantage point was that the natives were imagined, within the colonial domain, to be morally bankrupt, who were to be tamed and trained along European lines. Based upon this imperial hegemonic discourse the colonial bureaucracy, army and judiciary were hierarchically organised on racial lines by denying the natives their legitimate rights.

The political use of historiography can be considered as crucial to the colonial agenda. It equipped the colonial authority to divide the society by divesting upon them various categories and labels, thereby creating social tension in the country. This invariably went into its aid to justify the colonial presence. Moreover, the state apparatus was effectively used in aiding the emergence of communal perception on the basis of their imagined categories. This can be demonstrated by pointing to the communal functioning of the administrative machinery. Paddison, the collector of Madura district, based on past record, issued an order declaring the caste men of the Kallar community as a criminal tribe (numerically a preponderant caste group in the southern districts). Therefore, they were asked to give their fingerprints to the colonial authority. Finally, the colonial perception about the society was effectively mediated by official reports, school textbooks and the census reports, which led to the social

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53 Ibid., p. 7.
55 Panikkar, Culture, Ideology, Hegemony, p. 4.
56 Swadesamitran, 27 November 1915.
resurgence as a result of which the dilemma of cultural crises began to erupt in the intellectual milieu.

**Indigenous Intellectual Response**

The intellectual base and the ideological premises were inextricably linked with their perception of the material reality and their concern for social issues. The colonial intelligentsia, the product of Macaulay's mechanism, began to view their society through the colonial prism. Strongly impelled by modern ethics and scientific principles they realised the social practice and religious beliefs prevalent in the nineteenth century were responsible for cultural stagnancy. The diffusion of European knowledge and ideals, the missionary contact and the self-awareness of their social backwardness created an intellectual quest among the youth educated in English. A spirit of critical thinking in them generated a new impetus and vigour to revitalise their society. In grasping the regenerative development Majumdar points out:

> A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religious ideas and social convention. It gave birth to a critical attitude towards religion and a spirit of inquiry into the origins of the state and society with a view to determining the proper scope of the function.\(^5^7\)

They strongly believed that their social redemption lay in reforming their religious and social customs. As a result, they evolved a strategy of cultural defence in order to make their society more viable to the onslaught of European strictures.

During the same period, the intellectual reaction in Tamil Nadu to social evils was qualitatively and cumulatively different from the situation in Bengal.\(^5^8\) Owing to its unique cultural and social differences, the region witnessed a new upheaval based on ethnic and linguistic affiliation. Instilled by Tamil consciousness and Dravidian identity, the intellectuals embarked on rediscovering their pristine glory as it was embedded in Tamil literature. Their comparative analysis of the present with the past provided a nascent ideology for the genesis of a cultural appraisal, which in the course of time was transformed into a political movement.\(^5^9\) The intellectuals created a sense

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\(^5^7\) R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, vol. 10, pt. II, Bombay, 1965, p. 84.


of community consciousness by invoking their antiquarian symbols and cultural rhetoric of their golden past. They invented necessary traditions and created 'deliberate artefacts' which were capable of withstanding the historical inquiry and partly to rouse sheer imagination of their ancestral pride.

Integral to the ongoing cultural revival there was a deep cry and urge from intellectual quarters to reconstruct the history of Tamil on scientific lines in the light of available evidences. Many Tamil ideologues that were trained in the European model of education got involved in unearthing the Tamil past. Prominent among them was P. Sundaram Pillai, who made a sedulous attempt to organise a group of historians who would undertake the task of restructuring the history of the Tamils. He proposed a plan to go to Ooty along with other avowed historians for a couple of months to do their job. Emphasising the desideratum in his epistle dated March 15, 1895 to J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai, he wrote:

...I don’t hope to make converts soon, but is well to make a start...Please instruct how I could make impression upon them. I trust you can write to such of them as you have influence with, so as to prepare them to give me learning. I want to do my work in a quiet, silent and private fashion. It would be enough if they were led to think that I have paid some attention to the history of the Tamils, and feel keenly on their fallen condition. The rest will follow in due course when I shall have matured my scheme.60

He shared his early historical findings, through correspondence, with his friends and earnestly sought their opinion in pursuing his efforts. Many scholars who corresponded with him like V. P. Subramania Mudaliar, T. Ponnambalam Pillai and J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai published his opinion about various historical aspects germane to Tamil society, from his letters and manuscripts.

Sundaram Pillai, one of the founders of Tamil historiography, gave a new momentum, life and impetus to the chronological order of early Tamil history. He was perhaps one of the pioneering epigraphists who widely used minute information derived from inscriptions to construct a social and cultural history of Tamils. He had no parallel in collating and corroborating various sources to establish the authenticity of the historical evidence. Born in 1855 at Alleppey in Malabar district, he graduated in philosophy from Madras University and dedicated most of his spare time in

recuperating the Tamil past from various sources.\textsuperscript{61} Rai Bahadur Sundaram Pillai was held in high esteem by both European and Indian scholars for his erudite scholarship and integrity of thought. He contributed a number of articles to the \textit{Madras Educational Review}, \textit{Madras Christian College Magazine}, \textit{Indian Antiquary} and \textit{Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland}, pertaining to ethnology of Dravidians, elements of Hindu civilisation, cultural anthropology of Tamils and chronology of Tamil literature. Besides this, his monumental work ‘\textit{Manonmaniyam’}, a Tamil drama and the historiographic treatise on ‘\textit{Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature’} were some of the splendid works in their respective fields.

Sundaram Pillai initiated the process of critically evaluating the various historiographic works brought out by Oriental scholars. His reading revealed many inconsistencies, historical fallacies and misinterpretations of facts made by many colonial scholars. Sentimentally moved by the fallen state of the Tamils and their long forgotten historical traditions, he paid individual attention in formulating his theories in a calm fashion. However, his premature death at the age of 42 precluded him from completing his task. Many of his views on historical aspects were published posthumously from his manuscripts by his friends.

He strongly refuted the Oriental charge that ancient Indian literature is completely devoid of historical spirit and developed an instrumental rationale and explains the critical state of Tamil historiography. The idea of history in ancient times was for universal application; therefore they never bothered to give the names of authors and the date of publication. Sundaram Pillai opined, "Tamil writers, like Hindu writers in general, hide their individuality in the shade of their writings. Even the names of most of them are unknown. They seem to have regarded individual celebrity, like individual existence, as worthless and absorption into the universal spirit of classical literature of their country as the highest good to which their composition could aspire."\textsuperscript{62} He strongly refuted the allegation that, "Old and true Tamil literature is as barren of historical import as is generally assumed." He strongly believed that Sangam literature was the treasure of reliable historical evidences with which the entire Tamil cultural and social history can be constructed beyond the pale

\textsuperscript{61} M. S. Pumalingam Pillai, \textit{Tamil Literature}, p. 322.
\textsuperscript{62} P. Sundaram Pillai, \textit{Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujana Sambandha}, p. 27.
of controversy. He rightly pointed out that old Tamil literature "furnish us with much historical information which is waiting only to be gathered up and collated, to yield the most reliable data for reconstructing extinct societies and social conditions." 63

Emphasising the fact that the historical approach and antiquarian spirit, to a great degree even critical outlook are developments of modern times, he stressed the need for high scholarship and proficiency in the classical languages to assign the data and chronology to various historical events. He categorically stated that "a critical study of this dialect (Tamil-classical) and of this literature would certainly, under ordinary circumstances be held as a prerequisite for conducting South Indian antiquarian researches." 64 He was very apprehensive about Hultzsch's views about South Indian historical research, as it would lead to misgivings and wrong conclusions. Hultzsch held that, "a colloquial knowledge of one of the vernaculars with a slight smattering of one of Sanskrit is sufficient for editing successfully the record of bygone times." 65 Mastery over its literature was too extensive and complicated to be composed without years of patient study and prolonged attention. As a result, many of the foreign scholars felt that these literary records are utterly devoid of historical implications. Owing to their poor acquaintance with the language they sometimes made veritable mistakes in their historical analysis. Sundaram Pillai pointing out a passage from the eleventh edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica on Tamil literature written by A. C. Burnell wrote thus, "a work supposed to contain nothing but reliable matter. But the passage in question is a veritable nest of errors." 66 In his passage about Versoliyam, Burnell added a curious list of books which was "its own best condemnation.... It is full of enigmatic conundrums." 67 A. C. Burnell mistook Kaliveruttam as a work for metre; Kandigai for mode of exposition; Manipravalam for poetic diction and Tirumaniu-valaru for an initial phrase of a particular stanza.

What were central to the argument were the choice of evidence and the method of scrutiny; all the historical facts cannot be obtained on the basis of a single

63 Ibid., p. 28.
64 Ibid., p. 25.
66 Ibid., p. 7.
67 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
The authenticity of the fact must be deduced from composite study of various sources relating to the matter. Implicit reliance on a particular source would lead to ineluctable historical distortion. Burnell had committed the same mistake while writing about Tamil literature. Having heavily relied upon Hieun Tsang’s statement that Tamils were indifferent to literature worthy of preservation before the eighth century (Hieun Tsang’s visit), and he emphatically wrote in Encyclopaedia that Tamil literature arose under North-Indian influences and “it is nothing more than exact copy, if there be any originality, it is in some of the similes and turns of expression only.” In support of his dogmatic statement A.C.Burnell had nowhere given any proof. Pointing to all inconsistent fanciful conjectures, often employed by foreign scholars owing to their lack of in-depth knowledge, he strongly made an appeal to native scholars to undertake the task of retrieving Tamil history from the clouds of imagination, and warned that “if they fail to imbibe the historical spirit of modern times, and do not stir themselves to help forward the researches made regarding their own antiquities, they will have themselves to thank, if their favourite language and literature are condemned and thrown overboard.”

Sundaram Pillai set precedence by involving himself in reconstructing the chronological order of the South Indian history. He widely used the so-called collateral evidences like Tamil literature, temple edicts and popular oral tradition. In his small treatise Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Tirujnana-Sambandha (posthumously published in 1909), he set out to establish the age of Tirujnana Sambandha who was responsible for the Hindu revivalism in the medieval period. However, it is difficult to establish the age of Sambandha beyond the pale of controversy created by ambiguous sources. Opinion among the scholars about his age ran between 1320 BC and 1292 AD which created a confusion and

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70 P. Sundaram Pillai, Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the age of Tirujnana-Sambandha, pp. 10-11.  
72 Ibid., p. 14.
according to Sundaram Pillai “this is certainly very curious: and I am not sure whether we can find the like of it in the whole range of history.”

In the course of arguments he gives a broad outline about Tamil literature of the Saivas in a chronological sequence. He also made an attempt to trace an outline of the religious history of Southern India with a view to fix the relative ages of the Sambandha, Sankara and Ramanuja. He concludes that Sambandha, after careful deduction, could not have lived in any period later than the early years of the seventh century.

Sambandha was a prominent Saiva saint and a lyric poet, whose age marked the revival of Hinduism with new vigour and the decline of Buddhism. Fixing a definite date for Sambandha would certainly enable the historians to situate South Indian history in a firm chronological footing. Sundaram Pillai in his arguments systematically proved the unfounded nature of the hypothesis advocated by various scholars based upon their own evidences. However, Bishop Caldwell and Nelson’s theory deserves special mention for they have premised their arguments upon more judicious and reliable evidences. Caldwell’s theory was based on two assumptions—first that Kun Pandya’s name was Sundara Pandya, who was converted to Saivism by Sambandha, which has not been contested. But his second assumption that Sundara Pandya is identical with the Sender Bendi of Marco Polo who reigned in 1292 was challenged. Sundaram Pillai held the view that the deity at Madura is called Sundara, and Sundara Pandya was a common appellation to all the kings who ruled Madura as that of Sri Padmanabhadasa the rulers of Travancore. He had complained about Caldwell’s theory as it distorted the historical contingency and the fact did not correspond to the reality. The fact of the matter was that during the rule of Kun Pandya, Buddhism was the prevailing religion, though on the verge of decline as borne by the hymns of Sambandha. On the whole the theory attempted to comprehend the great span of historical changes within a period of 32 years before the invasion of Malik Naib Kafur in the year 1324 A.D. Sundaram Pillai, contending Caldwell’s postulate, declaimed “within a short space of thirty two years, the Buddhist religion with its widespread organization, half a dozen holy orders and thousands of monks in each, all disappeared as if by magic, and the ready made Saiva religion stepped into its place, with its richly endowed temples with golden images, and outer walls having fourteen towers! If such a theory does not violate all the analogies of history, I wonder
what can!” He further dismissed Nelson’s theory on the same ground as it violated all the norms and logic of historical contingency. Thus he made a path breaking attempt by discovering a few milestones in setting the chronology of South Indian history beyond the pale of conjectures and speculations.

Sundaram Pillai was perhaps the first native scholar who went into the imperatives of Aryan-Dravidian polemics to retrieve a unique identity for Tamils. Strongly intoxicated with Tamil Saiva pride he argued that the Brahmans through their cunning and diabolic process were injecting their own ideals to ‘Aryanise’ the ‘Dravidian’ religion. Subsequently, Tamils were alienated from their own religious practices. To use Sundaram Pillai’s words “... most of what is ignorantly called Aryan philosophy, Aryan civilisation, is literally Dravidian or Tamilian at bottom. The idea of Jenmana, of Karma, of Maya and of Arul or divine grace, can be directly proved to be ours, and most of the great thinkers and philosophers and even poets who pass for Aryan are our men, as Europeans are now beginning to find out.”

A careful study of the elements of Hindu civilisation certainly confirms the fact that what was known as Aryan on the surface was actually the ‘choicest product of the Dravidian intellect’. Therefore, the real historical research should begin from South in order to ascertain the fact for the construction of Indian civilisation from its original place rather than from Indus or Gangetic plain. He emphatically exhorted that “…The scientific historian of India, then, ought to begin his study with the basin of the Krishna, of the Cauvery, of the Vaigai rather than with the Gangetic plain as it has been now long, too long the fashion.”

A search for a unique identity in the hoary past created an ethnic and cultural consciousness among the people. Questions about one’s own identity came to dominate the construction of history such as, ‘Who were the Tamils? To which race did they belong? Were they autochthonous of Tamilzhagam of historical times, or the immigrants from outside India? If they were migrants, where did they come from? And with what races of people did they co-mingle in the early stages of their history? With whom did they have commercial ties? And at what point of time did they come under Aryan influence? Scholars who studied these questions by giving free flight to

73 Ibid., pp. 17-19.
75 Ibid., p. 4.
their fanciful imagination postulated ‘grand theories’, which adumbrated a very distant past of their ancestors. On the other hand many modern meticulous historians totally discard all these ethno-centric theories as being too fantastic and speculative in its character. The political and cultural need of the late nineteenth century India instigated the indigenous intellectuals to evolve a strategy of cultural defence. The spirit of investigation already kindled the atavistic spirit among the English educated intelligentsia. The caste ridden Tamil society haunted by cultural identity began to react sharply under the aegis of colonial authority. This first got articulated on the academic plain and subsequently it spread to other areas as well.

Following the footsteps of Sundaram Pillai many other indigenous scholars developed the Tamil historiography through their writings on the same lines. V. Kanakasabhai’s The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago published in 1904 had extensively dealt with the origin and spread of Tamil. Following ‘Whig’ model of historiography, he developed his arguments on the lines of Tamil ethno-centricism. Rejecting the European scholar’s opinion about the Sangam of the ninth century, he situated the third Tamil Academy (Sangam Age) between 50—150 A.D. He arrived at his conclusion on the basis of ‘Gajabahu synchronism’.

V. Kanakasabhai forcefully argued, “From a careful study of ancient Tamil poems, I am led to think that some of the earliest works were undoubtedly composed more than two thousand years ago, and that the Tamil people acquired wealth and civilisation of this early period by their commercial intercourse with foreign nations such as the Arabs, Greeks, Romans and Javanese.” On account of political stability and material prosperity, there was a spurt in the literary activity throughout the Tamil kingdom. About fifty literary works of this age have thrown a ‘flood of light amidst the gloom and uncertainty in which the ancient history of the country is shrouded.’ Kanakasabhai widely using the corpus of Tamil literature had constructed the dynastic history of three Tamil kings. Central to his argument was the prudent postulate about

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77 V. Kanakasabhai Pillai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, Madras 1904, p. 3. Kanakasabhai Pillai (1847-1905), a noted historian contributed a number of articles to Madras Educational Review, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society and Indian Antiquary. He translated many Tamil literary portions pertinent to antiquarian research under the title Tamil Historical Text which subsequently appeared in the columns of Indian Antiquary.
78 Ibid., p. 7.
the Mongolian ongm and the spread of Tamil from central Asia via Bengal to peninsular India. Mongolian theory holds that “the Dravidians had lived somewhere on the plateau of central Asia along with the Mongolians before they entered India by the north-eastern passes from Tibet or Nepal, or by the way of Assam and the Tennaserim provinces.” According to him the aboriginal inhabitants of South India were the Villavas (bowmen) and Minavas (fishermen). They were conquered by a highly civilised race called the Nagas who hailed from Central Asia. They were very good weavers and from them the Aryans learnt their alphabets, which thenceforth was known as Dev-Nagari.

Kanakasabhai was of the opinion that the Marvas, Eyinas, Oliyas, Aruvalas and the Paratavars mentioned in the Tamil works of the Sangam period belonged to the above Naga race and they had always been hostile to the Dravidian Tamils. Subsequently, these Nagas were in their turn conquered by a Mongolian race called Tamilitti or the Tamils migrated from the place called Tamralipti which lies on the bank of Rupnarayan river twelve miles above its junction with the Huglu mouth of the Ganges. They came to the south of India along the east coast in four bands. The earliest of whom were believed to be the Marar who founded the Pandya Kingdom. The second were the Thirayar tribe of the Chera Kings and the Vanavar a mountainous tribe from Bengal, who were the ancestors of the Chera Kings; and the fourth and the last the Kosar tribe of the Kongu country. In this way he accounts for the origin of the four ancient Tamil Kingdoms.

Kanakasabhai further went on to explicate the cultural synthesis created by Nagas and Dravidians. As the Tamil immigrants came into southern India at distant intervals of time and in separate tribes and were fewer in number than the aboriginal Nagas and Dravidians, they had to adopt ancient Dravidian language and in the course of time they modified and refined it into the language now known as Tamil.

Kanakasabhai strongly argued that Tamil had attained a high degree of civilisation long before the advent of the Aryans in South India. They developed their language without borrowing any idea from Sanskrit, which can be adduced by the

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81 V. Kanakasabhai, Pillai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, p. 41.
82 Ibid., pp. 44-45.
copious and exact nature of Tamil. They cultivated the art of music, grammar, astronomy and even abstract philosophy and metaphysics with the help of Mongolian tribes. They borrowed the ideas of philosophy and natural sciences from China since they had direct intercourse with them. Moreover, pointing to philological affinity, he argued that the Tamil language unlike other Dravidian dialects abounds in words with nasal letters such as nga, nja and nna; which reflect the Chinese influence in Tamil. The peculiar letter Rzha (La) found in Tamil alphabet does not appear in any one of the Indo-Aryan or Dravidian languages. Therefore, Tamil migrants might have brought it from Trans-Himalayan region. Kanakasabhai developed his hypothesis on the delicate literary, linguistic, pre-historic and anthropometric evidences. However, no reliable historical evidence supports the theory of Mongolian origin of Tamils, as suggested by Kanakasabhai.

Kanakasabhai’s theory was contested by various scholars as it had violated all historical cannons of logical consistency. Quoting from various Tamil literary works, M. Srinivasa Aiyangar argued that Nagas were merely a martial tribe and not civilised and the term ‘Naga’ was given by Aryans to any aboriginal tribe in southern India. Echoing the same sentiments Captain Forbes also opined that the scattered remnants of the black aboriginal race (Nagas) were either exterminated or found a last refuge in the most inaccessible forests and mountains. Sir H. Risley, an ethnologist, also denigrated that long headed people with black complexion could not have come from one region of the earth which is exclusively peopled by races with broad heads and yellow complexion.

Kanakasabhai’s theory of Tamil race provided valuable ammunition for the construction of caste history. Various caste historians claim Kshatriya or high status for their community on the basis of Kanakasabhai’s argument. His theory became crucial for the creation of political myth in the early twentieth century. Integral to the part of construction of the past, questions about the early abode of the Tamils and the origin of their ethnic stock were widely addressed. Many Tamil intellectuals developed sophisticated theories to display a distant past of Tamils. Somasundara

84 *Census Report*, vol. 1, Madras, 1891, p. 112.
Bharati, Maraimalai Adigal, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai and some European scholars adumbrated a golden past based upon anthropometry and literary evidences. Prominent among them was Limurian theory, which at least antedated the Tamil past around 10,000 B.C. No dependable historical canon has spelt about it. However, the hoary past advocated by the Lemurian theory was effectively put into use for the creation of Tamil identity-consciousness by Dravidian ideologues.

Brahmin Reaction

Identity crisis and ideological differences are crucial to any social conflict. Contesting identities and conflicting ideologies cannot arrive at a consensus unless considerable compromise is made on the cultural terrain. Unlike other Indian provinces the Brahmins (only twice born caste) in Madras presidency failed to evolve a strategy of cultural defence in order to meet the new social requirements. Their indifferent attitude to social reform generated a reactionary attitude among other social groups which resulted in cultural conflict on the social terrain.

Brahmin scholars made a significant contribution to the growth of Tamil language and the promotion of history research in South India. Generally, they followed an approach of cultural development of Tamil within the paradigm of pan-Indian civilisation. Their identification with the Northern Aryans and Sanskrit considerably precluded them from aligning themselves with the native caste Hindu scholars to conjure up a hoary past. Consequently, they had to dissociate themselves from subscribing to Dravidian ideology, which created an indissoluble cultural dichotomy culminating into a power struggle in political arena.

M. Srinivasa Aiyengar in his putative work *Essays on the History of the Tamil People, Language, Religion and Literature* published in 1914, alluded to have given a new interpretation to the term Dravida. He begins by saying, “According to Sanskrit Pandits ‘Dravida’ was the name of a particular tract of country in South and it is so defined in the ‘Sabdokalpadruma’ on the authority of the Mahabharata.” He went on

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86 K. K. Pillai, *A Social History of the Tamils*, vol. 1, Madras, 1975, pp. 43-44.
to explain the term ‘Dravida’ to denote the land in which Tamil is spoken, an inhabitant of the land and finally a class of Brahminical tribe of South India called ‘Panja Dravida’.

The Tamil speaking non-Brahmins have always called themselves Tamilars but never Dravidas. And the Tamil Brahmins who called themselves the ‘Mahajanam’ or the ‘great men’ were, and even now are known to the other Brahmins of India as ‘Dravida’. The appellation of Dravida was always used to denote Tamil Brahmin. Sankaracharya, who was a great Sanskrit scholar and religious reformer referred to Trigana Sambandha a Brahmin Saivite Saint and Tamil poet as Dravida Sisu (Dravida child).90

The South Indian Brahmins developed an elaborate social ritual code called Dravida-Sampradayam to maintain their caste purity and cultural supremacy over other castes. M. S. Aiyangar further went on to question the validity of Caldwell’s use of the term Dravida as a corruption or sanskritised form of Tamil. Literally the term Dravida in Sanskrit means a retreat. Therefore, such a term could not be used on a well-cultivated language. C. Damodaram Pillai also pointed out “Is it possible for a language to have no native name until one was given to it by Aryans, especially when it was the mother tongue of a tolerably civilised race.”91 Srinivasa Aiyangar was of the view that Tamils initially migrated from Central Asia had entered by the North-western passes to the Indus Valley. In the latter period the non-Aryan races again pushed them from the north to the present Dravidian country after the Mahabharata war in the eleventh century B.C. He maintained that the Tamils and Aryans never came into a head on collision for the territory. ‘Dasyus’ (enemies of Aryans), mentioned in the Rig Vedas as ‘Dravidian non-Aryan’ who were later subjugated by Aryan settlers and designated them as ‘Sudras’. On the other hand, the Dravidas of south were friendly forest folk who helped the Aryan hero Rama in his expedition in Ceylon.92

Srinivasa Aiyangar strongly disapproved the theory of Aryan colonisation as propounded by non-Brahmin scholars. Aryans and Dravidians maintained a peaceful relationship since the period of Ramayana. Aryan settlers contributed their religious

90 Sankaracharya, Soundharya Lahri, Benaras, 1948, iii, 4.5-6
92 Ibid., p. 24.
and philosophical ideas to Tamil. It was more of a cultural assimilation than colonial subjugation. He strongly criticised the newly emerged Tamil ethno-centric historiography for its alleged attack on the Aryan Sanskrit culture. To quote his words, “Their object was to disown and disprove any trace of indebtedness to the Aryans, to exalt the civilisation of the ancient Tamils, to distort in the name of historic research as in current traditions and literature and to pooh-pooh the views of former scholars which support Brahminisation of the Tamil race.”

Brahmin scholars, no doubt, equally contributed to the growth of Tamil culture and literature and made it one of the classical languages of the East. He opined that “It is enough for the present to remind them (inventors of new Dravidian culture devoid of Aryan influence) that the earliest grammarians of Tamil were Brahmins, their first spiritual instructors were Brahmins, and their teachers of philosophy were also Brahmins.”

Maintaining Brahminisation as the major force in making Tamil civilisation S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar held the view that South India was mere marshy jungle and the reclamation was started by the Aryans who migrated there at a later period. He categorically stated that, “The history of peninsular India begins...somewhat later than that of Hindustan, for the Dravidian civilisation of the South though much more ancient than its history, owes its history to Aryan immigration, as much as does North India.”

Many other Brahmin scholars strongly believed that the use of Sanskrit was detrimental to the growth of Tamil. Tamil cannot function without taking recourse to Sanskrit. Echoing the similar view, another Brahmin scholar R. Swaminathan Aiyar wrote, “What are known as Dravidian languages are in all their present essential features a creation of Aryan and Aryanised immigrants from the North...It also follows...that the tradition about Agastya’s immigration to the South is not a mere

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93 Ibid., p. 46.
94 Ibid., p. 42.
95 S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Ancient India*, Madras, 1911, p. 5. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (1871-1943) was first to be appointed as the Professor of Indian History in the University of Madras. He authored a number of books - *History of Ancient India* (1911), *The Beginnings of South Indian History* (1918), *Some Contributions of South India to the Indian Culture* (1923), *South India and her Mohemmedan Invaders* (1926), *Manimegalai in Its Historical Setting* (1928), *The Evolution of Hindu Administrative Institutions in South India* (1930) - besides which, he also contributed number of scholarly articles to *Indian Antiquary, The Quarterly Journal of Mythic Society, Modern Review* and *Sentamil.*
myth and that what is known as Dravidian civilisation of the South is merely the
civilisation of the Aryanised immigrants. 96

P. T. Srinivasa Aiyangar, a strong advocate of cultural and even racial
continuity of the people of India, elucidated that the dialect spoken during the
neolithic age throughout India was akin to the Dravidian family of languages 'and not
to Sanskrit or Prakrit and which might have been evolved from the holophrastic
dialect of very primitive people. 97 According to him the Dravidian race and Tamil
people were indigenous to the peninsular India. Their language was evolved where it
was spoken. It was cultivated by the native Tamils and reached its high water mark
during the Sangam age. Emphasising the exclusive character of Tamil, PTS Aiyangar
observed, "Of the languages now spoken in India, Tamil reached a high stage of
development in very early times. It grew uninfluenced by Sanskrit and its speakers
reached a high level of culture long ago."98 He further stated a careful perusal of
Tamil sources to enable us to construct the history of whole of India in general and
South in particular for more than five millenniums ago.

Many of the Brahmin scholars in the early twentieth century tried to slough-off their identification with Sanskrit and established themselves as the joint partners of the Tamil research along with the non-Brahmins. Suriyanarayana Sastri was perhaps the first scholar to advance the idea of de-Sanskritisation of Tamil. He was one among the pioneers who initiated pure Tamil movements along with Maraimalai Adigal. He made a concerted effort to coin new Tamil terms and equivalent words to expunge the Sanskritik terms from Tamil prose. His love for Tamil can be attributed from the change of his own name to a Tamil equivalent 'Parithimakalaingar' from Sanskrit. Following the footsteps of Sundaram Pillai, he made an attempt to revive the Tamil drama to its pristine glory. He wrote a number of plays including 'Rupvati', 'Kalavati' and 'Mana Vijayam' which heralded a new era in the Tamil theatre. His treatise dramaturgy, a grammar on the drama introduced a new pattern and vigour in

96 Quoted in N. Subramaniyan, "Emergence and Eclipse of Tamil Brahmins", Economic and Political Weekly, vol.4, Nos.28, 29, 30, July 1969, pp.1133-34. R. Swaminathan Aiyar, (1879-1943), a well known legal luminary, was the first scholar to systematically challenge Bishop Caldwell's views on Dravidian civilisation. He aired his views about the Aryan origin of the Tamil civilisation in the pages of the Tamil Nesan (An organ of Tamil educational society in March 1923. Later his views were published in a book entitled as Dravidian theories,1974, Madras Law Journal Office.
98 Ibid., p. 18.
line with the modern drama. S. Sastri’s *History of Tamil Language*, was the first work in the direction of Tamil Philology, which created a new enthusiasm among the native scholars.\textsuperscript{99} U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942) another Brahmin scholar did meritorious service by retrieving the Sangam works from its imminent destruction. After making a careful study of the various mutilated and fragmented manuscripts he brought out the first printed editions of eight major works in 1892, which contributed a corpus of information for the construction of Tamil antiquity. He assiduously urged the government to grant classic status to Tamil thereby making it a compulsory subject in the university curriculum. In spite of Brahmin scholar’s noteworthy contribution to the growth of Tamil research and history, they were unable to break the cultural barrier, which beset them from the bulk of the Tamil population for the past two millennia.

Brahmins’ identification of themselves with the Aryan culture, Sanskrit language and Pan-Indian civilisation virtually isolated them from the Tamil society. Crucial to the cultural crisis in Tamil Nadu was the indifferent attitude of Brahmin intellectuals in reforming the society on modern lines in order to accommodate the aspirations of the newly emerging identities. Indigenous scholars (both Brahmins and non-Brahmins) failed to evolve a consensus in unearthing the past on a unified line. Lack of interaction, want of historical spirit, and over dependence on internal literary evidence led to the conflicting historical assertions. The contending groups claim for cultural self-sufficiency in the realm of history under the aegis of colonial authority created a political dichotomy.

In summing up it may be said that this chapter was an effort to study and survey the emergence of identity consciousness through a variety of categories as unleashed by colonial and historical forces in situating the Indian past. Undoubtedly the Oriental school as a pioneering enterprise set the tone and tenor of the development of Indian historiography along modern scientific lines. The school had entailed a set of assumptions, categories, theories and discourses to comprehend the Indian antecedents which became over the period the established norms, standards,

\textsuperscript{99} Suryanarayan Sastri, *History of Tamil Language: A Textbook of Philology in Tamil*, Madras, 1909, pp. 17-19. For biographical sketch see M. S. Purnalingam, *Tamil Literature*, pp. 353-56. V. G. Suriyanarayan Sastri (1871-1903) who was the Head of the Tamil Department of Madras Christian College made a startling attempt to establish a modern common literary styles through his writings. He was the first native scholar to venture into the field of Philology. He was one of the pioneers in establishing the Tamil prose in modern context.
models and conventions to be emulated. Consequently each one of the schools developed their own critique vis-a-vis the Oriental construction. The valourisation of the past by the indigenous intellectuals was largely an attempt to contest and contain the claims of colonial historiography. However this process was not unilinear and unvariegated but riven with tensions and ruptures which have been delineated in this chapter extensively. The main charge that was leveled against the 'native' school of historiography was that it lacked time framework and chronological order, which will constitute the core issue of the ensuing chapter.