CHAPTER – II
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SITUATING THE SANGAM AGE

The discovery of the past, as a historical activity, constituted the core value of intellectual agenda of the nineteenth century colonial India. The significance of the past, its present meaning and its future relevance became an issue of central focus, heralding an era of introspection among the modern ‘social functionaries’. As a result, the investigation of the past to comprehend the present and to visualize a future became imminent to the intellectual commitment.¹

The rise of the historical sense, modern social consciousness and identity aspiration had inspired them to engage with the question of historical antiquity. It was an effort to resuscitate the forgotten past and thus study its relevance to contemporary society.² It became important to recognize the socio-cultural necessity for the invocation of literary heritage of Tamil especially its antiquity, uniqueness and copiousness against the other linguistic traditions in the colonial context.

The intellectual quest for an historical antiquity became so indispensable at the turn of the last century on account of political necessity and cultural crisis that the native scholars had embarked in retrieving historical truth from the tangle of mythological conundrum and hair splitting fables. In the name of preliminary findings, the Tamil atavistic pundits giving flight to their imagination came up with their fantastic theories and fanciful stories often backed by poetic imagination and epic references as reliable evidences.³ Articles such as ‘Tamils: The Architect of Human Civilization’, ‘Lemuria: The Land of Tamil’, ‘Tamils: The Authors of Modern Mathematics and Astronomy’ and a host of other hair splitting matters were published as historical facts.

Almost all the journals without exception opened their columns for such indulgence from the beginning of the twentieth century. Interestingly, many historical articles appeared in the columns of ‘Kaalaaraychi’ (Chronological research). It was an

¹ Bernard Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge, Princeton, 1996, p. 27.
abstruse task in the conspicuous absence of reliable evidence to fix the period of a poetical work or ruling monarch. However, given the facts and circumstantial evidences many scholars, not excluding European experts employed their fertile brain, in the fissure wherever they occur and thus setting an unhealthy precedence in the field of chronological research.4

It may be asked at the outset, ‘why was there a sudden urge for rescuing the past from the debris of historical antiquity? What historical issues were given utmost importance? Who were the pioneers who took part in this social process? What was their social origin and why did the question of chronology assume greater significance’ are some of the underlying tensions that lay embedded in their intellectual enquiry.

This chapter is the extension of the historiography debate of the *construction of the past*, exclusively committed to the question of periodisation and dating of the Tamil literary works. Chronology has been slippery, hazy, elusive and still a matter of great controversy concerning the Sangam age. In spite of enmassing a rich corpus of literature, the Tamil academia failed to evolve reasonably a reliable chronological framework to serialize the literary document and periodically arrange them.5 While describing the plight of Tamil literary historiography, K. N. Sivaraja Pillai remarked as late as 1932, “The History of the Tamils, their language, and their literature cannot be said to have even started its existence for the sufficient reason that a correct chronological framework to hold together and in right order the many facts enshrined in their ancient Sangam literature has not yet been got at. Various have been the attempts made till now to utilize the facts gathered from that literature for edifying narratives, descriptions and exhortations; but a genuine history, none of these, it must be regretfully acknowledged, has been able to evolve.”6

He long decried that Tamil scholars and pundits had failed to imbibe the sense of modern historical research and cultivate scientific temperament and continue to work on the archaic fashion. He observed that “Lacking the indispensable initial time-frame, the so-called histories of Tamil literature and the long-winded introductions to

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the various editions of the Tamil classical poems remain to this day inane and vapid of real instruction inspite of their tedious parrot-like repetitions of fictions and facts culled from tradition and the poems themselves. The learned authors of these dissertations have been only trying to make bricks without straw, or rather to raise a structure with only bricks without the connecting mortar of chronology.”

One of the major strictures leveled against the native historians was their insensitivity to the concept of a set time-framework for occurrence of historical events. Despite the conspicuous absence of definite date about any historical events, a scientific time-framework was almost evolved for North India in the middle of nineteenth century on the basis of collateral evidences. With regard to the events about South India, nothing certain about time-framework was established until 1850s. The question of the historical chronology became a poignant issue, right after the publication of Rt. Rev. Robert Caldwell’s A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages (1856), who has assigned a much later period of ninth century to Sangam age. James H. Nelson, the author of The Manual of Madura Country (1868), E. Hultzsch, the author of South Indian Inscriptions (1891) and Mclean, the author of The Manual of the Administration of Madras Presidency (1885), also echoed the same sentiments in their writings. However, it was Prof. A. C. Burnell’s unpalatable remarks about Tamil literature, which proved to be the point of culmination. He wrote in the Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. XI that Tamil literature was “nothing more than the exact copy of Sanskrit...”, “no literary work was worthy of preservation”. This invited a volley of criticism from various intellectual quarters.

Prof. Sundaram Pillai, writing in 1891 in the magazine of Madras Christian College and article entitled On the Age of Tirujnana Sambandha, strongly repudiated such unfounded claims and argued that the ‘choice of evidence’ and ‘method of scrutiny’ must determine the reliability of the facts. He urged the native scholars to embark in historical research along scientific lines to dispel all pretentious claims which may come from such sane quarters, otherwise their literary heritage and historical traditions may be thrown over-board.

7 Ibid., p. ix.
8 For detailed discussion see Chapter I of this study.
In the subsequent period, V. Kanakasabhai Pillai, Prof. S. Krishnaswamy Iyengar and Prof. Seshagiri Sastri have located the Sangam age at the dawn of Christian era on the basis of various corroborative evidences. Their contentions and claims seemed to have weathered the test of historical scrutiny. The rediscovery of Sangam literature in the late nineteenth century and the ‘mechanical reproduction’ thereafter marked the commencement of Romantic Age and an epoch of cultural enthusiasm leading to an array of historical activities. Scholars from diverse background had spun their own theories and advocated unfounded thesis about the social formation, literary heritage, material life and political history of Tamils. The art of history writing had been transformed into a genre of ‘myth making’ with a view to accommodate various antiquarian claims. The idea of chronology, the question of compatibility and the possibility of synchronism were not given adequate attention in their delineation. Glorifying the past, and equating literary quality with the dynastic eminence, which forbade them from arriving at a clear view about the social development of Tamils. The imposition of the notion that the literary expression of a community was best understood in relation to the rulers of the community and the dynasty to which they belonged could lead and had lead literary deductions which run counter to verifiable truths germane to the genesis and social relevance of literature. Literary products became effective tools in the hands of the intellectuals to arouse the passions for historical antiquity and cultural self-sufficiency, thereby promoting a sense of social consciousness in the minds of people. Consequently, the ‘cold cynicism’ or ‘pseudo-scientific negativism’ began to dominate the course of historical research.

The primary task of this chapter is to explain and elucidate how chronology suffered at the hands of the patriotic ‘megalomania’ and ‘prejudicial micro-mania’ who saw the literature as merely an ideological product rather than cultural artifact. Finally, in situating the Sangam Age, the opinion among the scholars ranged from 10,800 BC to 300 AD, which transcended all canons of historical truth.

Philological Assertions and Ethnic Identification

The nineteenth century Europe had witnessed a seminal paradigm shift in its intellectual outlook as a result of rapid industrialisation and market driven imperialism. Based on the newly acquired social experience about the cultural variety and human differentiation, the western intelligentsia made an attempt to grapple with new situations. Baffled by the sheer vastness of diversity, they soon came up with the classificatory schema of cataloguing them for final analysis, as it will serve their interest in the long run.\textsuperscript{15}

The Taxonomical classification of human species on the basis of colour, culture, skull and tongue became a prominent discipline. Consequently, exclusive departments and endowment chairs were established throughout Europe to study the customs, habits, manners and cultural traits of the communities of Afro-Oriental world.\textsuperscript{16}

Their initiative was an effort to quarantine the rest of world from the West by indicating their debilitating values and despicable life style and lay claim for moral supremacy. Imbued with the sense of imperial aspiration they emphasized the need for categorizing the nationality on the basis of their genotypical and phenotypical characters. Many scientific and quasi-scientific principles, doctrines and postulates were promulgated as a justificatory mechanism to sustain their argument. Philology, ethnology, cranialogy, anthropology and climatology had sought to gain greater currency in portals of academia. Special projects were undertaken to unravel the mysteries concerning the language, life style, literary text and ethnic stock of the colonized world.\textsuperscript{17}

New theories, formulations and theses were brought into circulation about the genetic character of the people group. Prominent scholars like Max Muller, George Muir and William Jones (proponents of Aryan theory) and Rask, A. Sayce and Hunfalvy (proponents of Turanian theory) had shattered the world with their new racial findings. In spite of their withdrawal of many of their opinions, the theories have already struck a firm root across in the vortex of cultural politics.

\textsuperscript{15} Thomas R. Trautman, \textit{Aryans and British India}, Berkeley, 1997, p. 27.
It was in this context that history of British rule in India and its cultural rhetoric needs to be re-located. Imbued with the racial superiority, the oriental scholars initiated the process of reconstructing the forgotten pasts of colonial India for material purpose. However, in the case of Tamil Nadu, the onus was taken up by a band of missionaries whose initiative was confined to largely linguistic and philological studies. Their preliminary findings, though wanting in many respects, had the potency to arouse the passions of native intelligentsia to undertake further research.\(^{18}\)

The first band of missionaries came to South India as early as late sixteenth century. They were mainly from the catholic nations – Portugal, Spain and Italy – followed by the Protestant nations – Germany, Denmark and Britain. They initially were involved in the programme of religious conversion and social action. They almost followed a policy of social neutrality with regards to caste practices. They did not encourage the local converts to give up their caste loyalty as it may endanger their social existence. But things got radically altered with the arrival of Scottish missionaries in the late nineteenth century.\(^{19}\)

They realized the need for changing their approach to press forward the mission to make further gains. They undertook a series of campaigns, published a host of pamphlets indicating the inconsistent practices of Hinduism and actively engaged in dialogue with the local intelligentsia to impress upon the need for a spiritual salvation as prelude to material well being.\(^{20}\)

Rev. Caldwell and G. U. Pope made a significant contribution in arousing the passion of local intelligentsia through their findings. They not only widened the scope of missionary activities, but also undermined the very foundational system of Hindu society by exposing the inner contradictions of the caste system.\(^{21}\)

Robert Charles Caldwell (1814-1891), an Irish from Glasgow University, came to Tinnevelly, the southern most district of British India, for pastoring. He had

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possessed a keen sense of perception and an innate skill for observation – the essential qualities of an anthropologist – to conduct an in-depth research along with his pastoral commitment. Unlike other missionaries, he did not prepare simple annual report with regard to the work done in his diocese. Instead, he worked out a detailed monograph covering all aspect of life of the people whom he was ministering.22

Caldwell brought out a seminal pamphlet entitled *Shanans of Tinnevelly* wherein he delineated the social origin, ritual practice, cultural trait, marital customs, funeral rites, superstition, mental toughness and intellectual acumen of the community. This work indeed, in course of time, became a specimen for the preparation of the manuals of various caste groups. For missionaries, India became a land of communities whose history, culture and sociology could only be understood by reading about various caste groups and social organisations. However, Caldwell’s pamphlet was withdrawn from circulation in 1856, as it became a matter of controversy owing to its remarks about ‘Shanans’.23

As it had already been indicated Rev. Caldwell was known for his contribution to the study of Dravidian Philology and problematised it for further research. The general conviction about Dravidian radicalism – that the subjection of non-Brahmin Dravidian peoples and cultures was based on the Aryan conquest of the Dravidian South – was no doubt, in large part an invention of Robert Caldwell. Caldwell who laboured for fifty years was unable to carry out his proselytising mission among the upper caste groups especially the Brahmins and this had frustrated him. Focusing on the failure of proselytisation, Nicholas B. Dirks argued that “Caldwell developed a theory of cultural hegemony that was predicated on the ascription of foreignness, difference, and domination to Brahmans, who were affiliated with Aryan languages rather than Dravidian, northern India rather than southern, Brahmanic preoccupations with caste purity and ritual process rather than Dravidian receptiveness to devotional religion, and ultimately with racial attributions that, for the late nineteenth century, made the ultimate argument about difference.”24

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However, this stricture did not correspond to the fact that as Caldwell had advanced his thesis on the basis of sound philological principles of that period. Nevertheless, the fact cannot be brushed aside as there was an element of exaggeration in his treatment with regard to communal dichotomy. He overlooked the possibility of cultural harmony between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins in the Hindu civil society. Much current scholarship — from nationalist history to general anthropology — continued to accept Caldwell’s philological sociology of Southern India, accepting that the Brahmins and non-Brahmins occupied fundamentally different cultural spheres and that the roots of the anti-Brahmin movement could be found in the social facts of South Indian adherence, in the absence of extensive Islamic influence, to primordial forms of Hindu hierarchy and social structures.25

Caldwell was generally regarded as instrumental in establishing Dravidian philological studies on scientific lines thereby arousing the passions of the local intelligentsia to carry forward the linguistic assertion into the vortex of ensuing mass politics. He was not only responsible in advancing linguistic studies but was also pioneer in promoting a central Asian origin to Tamils on the basis of their linguistic affinity. Writing in 1875 in his revised edition A Comparative grammar of the Dravidian or South India Family of Languages he opined, “From the discovery of these analogies — grammatical — we are led to conclude that the Dravidian race, though resident in India from a period long prior to the commencement of history, originated in the central tracts of Asia — the seed-plot of nations; and that from thence, after parting company with the Aryans and the Ugro-Turanians, and leaving a colony in Baluchistan, they entered India by way of the Indus.”26

While recognizing the idiomatic structural similarity of Tamils with Indo-European languages especially of Sanskrit, he strongly believed that Tamil must be grouped with the Scythian languages. He further continued this supposition on the basis of the Behistun tablet, particularly with regard to the comparison of grammars and vocabularies, and tried to distinguish Tamil from the Turkish, Ugrian, Mongolian and the Tungusian group of languages. Finally he dubbed Tamil with “Finnish or Ugrian, with special affinities, as it appears, to the Ostlak Brauch of that family.”27

25 For detailed analysis of this argument, see Meenakshi Sundaram, The Contribution of European Scholars to Tamil, Madras, 1974.
26 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
27 Ibid., p. 73.
While his theory about grammatical perfection of Tamil idiom generated a sense of cultural pride among the Tamil savants, his postulate about the ‘Scythian-Turanian’ origin of Tamil caused a serious resentment in the intellectual quarters as he had denied their rightful autochthonous status. Challenging Caldwell’s theory of Finnish cum Tartar origin of Tamil, many hard hitting articles were published specially emphasizing the ‘Lemurian’ origin of Tamil and also advance the claim of the autochthonous status for them.28

It must be emphasized that many of Caldwell’s assertions and claims were discredited subsequently in the light of modern linguistic principles. However, the central thesis regarding the characteristic features of Dravidian languages still continue to attract greater attention. Whatever may be the case, Caldwell is long remembered for his ability to break the Sanskrit-centric study of Indian history and advance the cause of non-Aryan aspects of Indian culture and civilization. During the same period another well-known Irish missionary G. U. Pope came to India on a similar cause, also advanced the study of Tamil language and culture.29 George Ugo Pope (1820-1908), the much-celebrated translator of ‘Tirukural’ and ‘Tiruvasagam’ did not show much interest in the vexed issue of Tamil – Sanskrit dichotomy. Instead, he saw a civilizational unity between these two great cultures of humanity. Those two cultures should have flourished geographically in close proximity in forgone days as both have borrowed from each other freely without any resentment.30

Totally rejecting Caldwell’s Turanian affiliation of Tamil – lineal or sisterhood relation – argued for Indo-European affiliation of Tamil. Writing as early as 1859 in his Tamil Hand-Book he stated “The more deeply they (the South Indian languages) are studied, the more close will their affinity to Sanskrit be seen to be, and the more evident it will appear that they possess a primitive and very near relationship to the languages of the Indo-European group. Yet they are certainly not mere Prakrits, or corruptions of Sanskrit.”31 They were probably the ‘Disjecta membra’ of a language coeval with Sanskrit and almost having the same origin.

29 See for biographical information, Meenakshi Sundaram, The Contribution of European Scholars to Tamil, Madras, 1974, pp. 173-82.
In his work entitled *Sermon on the Mount*, in four Dravidian languages with comparative vocabulary and in flexional tables, he expounded the ‘deep seated’ and ‘radical affinity’ between Indo-European and Dravidian languages. According to him the Dravidian family of languages has a close connection with Greek, Gothic, Persian and other Celtic and Teutonic languages. He argued that Tamil has closer affinity to Greek and Latin than Sanskrit. A careful study of Tamil grammatical structure would reveal the underlying similarities between these languages.\(^32\)

G. U. Pope was of the opinion that Tamil and Sanskrit should have followed a similar path of cultural progress and social development. The elaborate Sanskrit philosophy with its score of Puranas and the extensive Tamil Bhakti literature were complimentary to each other and a vibrant source of the existence of Hindu way of life as a dharmic order. He saw a strong logical culmination of an ideal Sanskrit–Tamil compositeness in *Saiva-Sidhanta* philosophy. While Sanskrit offered an esoteric framework to the practice of *Siva Agamaic* ritual, Tamil gave a pliable explanation to the performance of it everyday and bestowed a popular idiom to express their palpitations.\(^33\)

The philogenic investigation of India undertaken by Oriental and Missionary school of historiography was not one of academic exercise. It was mediated by ideology, interest and aspiration. It was an effort to appropriate the past, tended to privilege the present and fetishise the future. The interest generated by initial efforts in the field of comparative philological studies did not die down; instead, it grew by leaps and bounds. The newly established universities (in the mid-nineteenth century) along western lines evinced keen interest in this direction. Colonial bureaucracy too showed keen interest in the antiquarian research. Questions about the ethnic identity, historical antiquity and philological affinity continued to dominate in their agenda.\(^34\)

Gustav Oppert, Professor of Comparative Philology and Dravidian Studies, in Madras University (1894–1897) undertook the grand task of investigating the social origin of Indian people. He published his findings in a series of articles entitled *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatvarsa or India* between 1878 July to 1881 April in


\(^{34}\) Dipesh Chakraborthy, *Who Speaks for India’s Past?*. pp. 11-26.
Madras Journal of Literature and Science. Later it was published as a monograph under the same title by Archibald Constable and Company, Westminster, in 1888 and 1893. Following the pattern set by Bishop Caldwell, he argued that the original authors of Indian civilization was the Bharatas – Dravidian and Gaudas – who set to have migrated from the tracts of Central Asia long anterior to the historical development. They shared the linguistic affinity with the Turanian or Scythian group of languages which can even be explicated in their current ‘idiomatic’ practices.

Prof. Oppert’s main contention in this work was to explore and explain the non-Aryan antiquity with all its possibilities. He wrote, “The main object of this work is to prove from the existing sources so far as they are available to me, the original inhabitants of India, with the exception of a small minority of foreign immigrants, belong all to one and the same race, ....”35 Oppert was of the view that the Dravidians and the Gaudas ruled India with a rich culture until the advent of Aryans. They were subsequently pushed back to the East Coast and beyond the Vindhya Range. The country they lived in was named after their tribal leader Bharata.

Oppert argued that Aryans the latest entrants to this sub-continent had contributed nothing significant to the expression of Indian civilisation. Their ‘abstract’ and ‘synthetic’ idiom Sanskrit attained its refinement with the agglutinative Dravidian tongues. He stressed the importance of restoring the ‘lost glory’ or the ‘fallen status’ of the non-Aryan races of India for the regeneration of its culture and society. It may be observed in his words, “Though much of what I have written may be shown to be untenable, I shall yet be satisfied if in the main, I establish my contention and I shall deem myself amply repaid for my labour, if I succeed in restoring the Gaudians and Dravidians to those rights and honours of which they have so long been deprived.”36

Oppert had problematised the sociology of Indian history by endorsing all mythic claims as foundational source for historical reconstruction. His valourisation of the past was essentially an effort to stimulate the atavistic passions of the local intelligentsia to restore the non-Aryan historical heritage to its pristine glory.

Colonial perception about control was largely predicated on the power relation and material interests. Accumulation of facts, figures and statistics were always useful

36 Ibid., p. ix.
in sorting out social problems, maintaining law and order and taking pre-emptive action against any recurrent events. Assessment of land revenue, fixing up rent, and estimating overall output could be worked out accurately based on the information gathered through various reports.\textsuperscript{37} Preparations of manuals, conducting ethnic and linguistic survey, enumeration of census, enlisting of criminal tribes, recording of public opinion, maintaining register of printed materials and a host of other activities must be viewed as part of the colonial endeavour to maintain its grip over local administration.\textsuperscript{38} It has become integral to the colonial system in spite of a huge expenditure, as it would go in assisting the day-to-day running of the administrative machinery. And thus appropriation of local knowledge became the natural corollary of colonial enterprise.

Crucial to the formation of colonial ideology was the appropriation of local knowledge, which could be gleaned from a pile of colonial records gathered by its agencies. These records not only provide information germane to administrative purpose, but also offer fresh insights and clues for colonial social ordering. District administrative manuals played a significant role in culling minute details about various aspects of local social life with specificity. Information about social customs, marital practices, funerary rites, caste history and a fund of other snippets were carefully collected and compiled by the competitive civil service authority for colonial use. Thus district administrative manuals came to be recognized as a source book of colonial knowledge. As an official document, it had a say in almost every issues concerning the district and often reflected the colonial point of view. As a result, its opinion about caste history, social values and land revenue assessment became critical to the general colonial administration.

The preparation of district manual for all nine Tamil districts was undertaken between 1865 and 1890. Prominent among these were the \textit{Manual of Madura Country} by J. H. Nelson in four volumes (1868); \textit{Manual of the Administration of Tinnevelly District} by H. A. Stewart in two volumes (1879); \textit{Manual of the Administration of Chingleput District} by C. S. Crole in three volumes (1879); and \textit{Manual of the Administration of Salem District} by F. Lefano in three volumes (1883). James


\textsuperscript{38} Bernard S. Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India", in Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (eds.), \textit{The Invention of Tradition}, Cambridge, 1983, p. 183.
Nelson's *Manual of Madura Country* was indeed a mine of information concerning the district in all walks of life, ranging from past histories to future possibilities. He devoted one full section of 200 pages for the enumeration of the ethnological issues, a branch of knowledge considered critical to colonial administration. Nelson applied all the philological and ethnic theories to enumerate various caste histories and attempted to appropriate the social behaviour of 'people groups' within the domain of colonial knowledge. Interestingly Nelson went on to furnish a crime record of each caste group, their physical character and proclivity to violence and theft. He gave a detailed record about the crimes committed by the Kallar community—a marauding caste group accounted for one-fifth of the population of Madura district. The Kallar community was reported to be involved in 91 per cent of the cattle theft cases that took place between 1863 and 1865 in the district. His detailed analysis of the social behaviour of various caste groups aided the colonial authority to categorise people for administrative purpose. The Kallar community was subsequently declared as a criminal tribe, whose fingerprints and other personal details were collected by the area police stations. Further, various judiciary and legal authorities regarding caste conventions, social rights and land disputes also consulted these manuals. James Nelson extensively delved into the literary traditions and cultural practice and Sangam-Bardic corpus, but did not enter into the vexed question of Tamil ethnicity, antiquity and communal dichotomy. This aspect was however taken up by Mclean, the author of the *Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency*, who went into the imperatives of civilizational theory and advanced the hypothesis of Tamil antiquity which was readily appropriated by the atavistic scholars for the public consumption.

Mcleane categorically argued that Tamil is far superior and more anterior to Sanskrit. He opined, "As far as present evidence goes, however, they (Tamils) are indigenous to India, and perhaps specially indigenous to Southern India. As to their (Tamils') language, no other is known to which it can be affiliated. It stands alone, without any immediate predecessor. In origin, it must be long anterior to the Sanskrit, which has subsequently played so important a political part with regard to it. Its

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40 *NNR*, Madras, for the weeks ending November 30, 1915; *Swadesamitran*, November 27, 1915.
original strength is shown by the great persistence of its grammatical formations through all the vicissitudes of history.”

Like many other ICS officials of the Madras Presidency, Mcleane held the view that Dravidians in general and Tamils in particular were the victims of historical exigencies. They were deprived of their historic honour through diabolic means and made them to “look small in their eyes”. He wrote, “There is little doubt that the Dravidian languages are incomparably older in point of time than the Sanskrit. It is not an unreasonable supposition that they once occupied the whole of Hindustan and have been driven to their present position to the south and along the coast by the encroachment of other languages coming from the North-West.”

Mcleane went further deep into the sanskritisation of Tamil and perhaps was the first scholar to indicate Tamil’s imperviousness to other linguistic influence. Imposition of Sanskrit was always from above, it was a result of political fall out and Sanskrit never caught the imagination of Tamils. Sanskrit always remained as a foreign learned language. While referring to the enmasse sanskritisation of Tamil person and place names, it was an Aryan effort to appropriate the culture of the Tamils. Unlike the Greeks, the Aryan travelers went on for total translation and making it clear that it was nothing but a mere imitation of Tamil tradition. No argument can be further advanced as Aryans were in the habit of indulging in intellectual appropriation. “It is a very common error to suppose that because none but Sanskrit names are found in the ancient literature of the country, it was therefore a country occupied by an Aryan people, and that all the places mentioned were founded by the Aryans. But in fact as the Aryan visitors to India had the monopoly of literature, the indigenous names could only appear in a Sanskrit form; and no argument is to be thence deduced in one direction or another as to the extent of Aryan colonisations. In later times Aryan influence has undoubtedly given current names to geographical places even in Southern India.” It may be observed that Mcleane was

42 Ibid., p. 49.
43 Ibid., p. 51.
44 Ibid., p. 133.
the first Western scholar to advance Lemurian theory with regard to the origin of Tamils.  

The oriental initiative to retrieve the history of Tamils reached its logical culmination with the re-discovery of Tamil literature from its oblivion by the native scholars in the late nineteenth century marked an era of intense intellectual activity. Undoubtedly European technologies of knowledge and scholarship played a key role in the process of shaping, standardising and homogenizing the archaic Tamil for public use. The effort to sanitise Tamil emerged from the fact that command over native language, is detrimental to the stay whether for colonial or proselytizing purpose. Colonial ideologies were driven by the motive that “mastery” of India’s languages would secure the “mastery” of India; it would enable British “command” and “native” obedience; and it would ensure “the vast and noble project of the Europeanisation of the Indian mind. The “grand work” of British rule was thus inevitably accompanied by the colonisation of Indian languages, a project involving “descriptive appropriation” and “prescriptive imposition and control”. Further, it may be described in S. Kaviraj’s words that “India’s numerous languages were collected, classified, standardized, enumerated, and thus dramatically transformed from ‘fuzzy’ and ‘uncounted’ entities into nearly bounded, counted, and mapped configuration.”

The Question of Ethnicity and Native Response

The oriental construction and colonial appropriation went on, almost, unchallenged until late nineteenth century. Their assumption and understanding was largely borne out from the fact that the ‘process of modernisation’ ushered-in with the advent of European technology and colonial British rule had radically altered the social world view of native society and salvaged it from the predicament of cultural interregnum. It was believed that colonial presence was crucial to the amelioration of native society and to bring national re-generation. Colonialism was projected as a

46 Ibid., p. 13.
modern liberative ideology that came to rescue the oriental world from its imminent destruction.49

Colonialism as a ‘process of modernisation’ set the terms on which the colony henceforth negotiates with itself and its ruler, with its past, present and the future. It was not an act of subjugation but an ideological process of re-orienting the colony by moulding its political hope, of structuring economic order and drawing up charter for political reconstruction. Besides this, the appropriation of the past was critical to the question of hegemony to which the colonial authority showed a keen interest in capturing the grand history of the colony.50 “They – British – wrote about their own conquest; they wrote about the people they conquered – told them what they were before they came under the protective British wings, and what they would be.” The colonial rule gave India its past as well as its present. It was only the ‘modern’ India, which would have its history, capable of shaping its future. India was under-rated as having no acumen for historical sense or such knowledge of chronology that can be equated to the modern understanding of ‘scientific history’.51 In reconstructing India’s past and making sense of it, the colonial ruler was setting up the norm as to what should qualify as authentic or historical, and dismiss as ‘myths’ or ‘farrago of legendary nonsense’.

In course of time the colonial monopoly on native historiography was slowly but steadily broken. Many of the colonial constructs, opinions and assumptions were challenged in the light of fresh evidences. The native scholarship was very much forthcoming in re-ordering the historical development on the basis of corroborative (internal and external) evidences. The rise of indigenous intellectual aspirations for an objective native historiography was largely the result of dissemination of European ideas and English education, which contributed to the growth of historical consciousness.52 Trained in the portals of universities along the western line, the first generation of English educated nascent intelligentsia mastered the trait for the scientific research. They initially started their apprenticeship as subordinate assistant

49 Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and Its forms of Knowledge, p. 35.
52 K. N. Panikkar, Culture, Ideology, p. 17.
and scribe under the European masters. Over the period they mastered the art of scientific research and made an indelible impression in many fields.

C. W. Damodaram Pillai, the first graduate of the University of Madras (1831–1902), pioneered the Herculean task of collecting, collating and compiling many classical Tamil literary works from various manuscripts for mass print production and paving the way for culture of book publishing. M. Seshagiri Sastri published a seminal Essay on Tamil Literature as early as 1884. By applying ‘Gajabahu Chenguttuvan Synchronism’ he pushed Tamil literary activity to the heels of Christian era. It was his assumption about the establishment of Sangam Academy on the model of ‘Jain’s Sankha’ that had triggered a series of debate about the chronology of the Tamil literary development. Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai set out a chronology map on reliable sources for the delineation of Tamil literary development by pointing to some ‘historical mile-stones’ in the history of Tamil literature.

V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri made an enduring contribution in the field of the history of Tamil philology. He drafted a fine manual entitled “Tamilmoliyin Varalaru” (The History of Tamil Philology), wherein he has given fundamental definition to the science of philology as the emergence of sounds to express thoughts, and the formation of words, speech and its development into language; alphabets and their use in waiting; grammatical conventions and language formation; word conventions and textual traditions. Followed by, M. Karthikeya Mudaliar made an extensive study of the linguistic theories of Tamil whose monumental work, the Molinool (a treaty on linguistic principles), was considered to be a veritable storehouse of Tamil philological principles. The Molinool is divided into three major parts – Exordium, Grammar and Derivation – of which the third part the ‘derivation’ is unique and significant wherein he has “derived all Tamil words from the primal significant sound-letter (Su) and its derivatives (Sul etc.).” And also explained that all words, nouns and verbs are casual and are traceable to the heat of the sun.

These pioneering efforts in the field of scientific research – philology, history, comparative linguistics and the history of literature by the native scholar have brought home the fact the need for re-looking many of the historical assertions, theories and the claims established by the colonial ideology in the light of fresh evidences and

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warranted a new emphatic deal. Obviously it was not an attempt to re-interpret or read motives into the colonial agenda. But it was sheer passion and an aspiration for objective historical truth as reflected by the primary sources.\(^{54}\)

However, in course of time the terrain of the historical research became a battleground wherein various interest groups and identity cliques fought against one another to advance their claim on the past. The contest for cultural claim between these identity groups initially was fought on the intellectual plain. Subsequently, it turns into a bitter rivalry between communal groups for the “loaves of jobs” and “fishes of posts.”\(^{55}\) Proliferation of printed matter and press activities have virtually transformed this vexed question into an ‘ideology of locomotive’ for the ensuing communal movement by galvanizing millions of people for a mass struggle.\(^{56}\)

It may be plausibly argued that the question of ethnicity and identity of difference largely remained as issues of culture and history. It became, over a period, a tangle of communal dichotomy and a matter of national pride during the intense politicization of Dravidian movement. The idea of ethnicity became critical at the dawn of the twentieth century, as it lay embedded in the very historical construct of the Tamil community. So to speak, the ethnic uniqueness became crucial to the privilege of historical antiquity that the Tamil community was vying ever since.\(^{57}\)

No doubt, that Bishop Caldwell’s suave description about Tamil exploits did help them in breaking some ground at improving their historical status. But it denied the possibility for them from joining the galaxy of superior races since they were already designated as people of Turanian origin.\(^{58}\) While Caldwell, recognizing the philological perfection, linguistic elaboration and grammatical exactness of Tamil language, he did not see in them a race par excellence or a community endowed with inimical intellectual quality. Turanio-Scythian group of people was generally regarded as possessing no speculative philosophy of lofty order, civilizational traits of

\(^{54}\) Kate Curri, *Beyond Orientalism: An Exploration of Some Recent Themes in Indian History and Society*, Calcutta, 1996, p. 58.


recognizable quality and versatile literary tradition, to which Tamils obviously belonged. In his analysis Tamils cannot be clubbed in any of the ethnic stocks other than Turanian group. He also dismissed the plausible evidences indicated by G. U. Pope in support of Tamil’s affinity with Indo-European languages as flimsical, superficial and untenable. He wrote, “At the very outset of my own inquiries, I thought I observed in the Dravidian languages the Indo-European analogies to which I have referred; and, reflecting affinities which are unreal and which disappear on investigation.... Notwithstanding the existence of a few analogies of this character – numerals and cognitive roots – the most essential features of the grammar of the Dravidian idioms seem to me to be undoubtedly Scythian.”

Caldwell’s assumptions and assertions about the Turanian origin of Tamils attracted serious criticism from the Western scholars. Rev. G. U. Pope, Prof. Gustav Oppert, Mcleane and Bleake have strongly repudiated Scythian-Tamil affinity as an unfounded thesis. Prof. Julien Vinson lampooned the theory as ‘inadmissible hypothesis and absurd’. Prof. Farrar also dismissed the theory as a farrago of theoretical nonsense. But the strongest and stentorian criticism mainly emanated from the native intellectual quarters.

As it had already been indicated the awareness of ethnic consciousness became a matter of great concern at the dawn of twentieth century with the penetration of print and press into public sphere and private life. The question of Tamil revivalism was the main focus of vernacular journals and periodicals. Emotive questions like who is Tamil? Where did he come from? What was his past? How it is concerned to his present predicament? And the topography of Tamil civilization was all discussed and deliberated threadbare. The problems of esoteric nature like ethnic affinity, philological identity and craniological inference were delineated mainly in the English journals and periodicals and which were later transformed into a staple of mass ideology for communal politics.

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59 Caldwell, Comparative Grammar, p. 70.
In the meantime a score of erudite scholars and intellectuals like D. Savariroyan (1859-1923), J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai (1864-1920), Maramalai Adigal (1876-1950) and Somasundara Bharathi (1879-1960) emphasized the need for emancipating Tamils from the quagmire of intellectual mis-representation and historical distortion. Realization of 'self-worth' and sense of 'honour' became critical to the emergence of Tamil personality in the public sphere. No society can afford to march forward in this age of progress without a ‘past’ worth of appreciation. It is an apposite time for Tamils to retrieve their historical legacy from their embalmed literature failing which they would be de-claimed as a nation without a ‘past’, a society without a heritage and a community devoid of cultural sensibility. D. Savariroyan founded the *Journal of the Tamil Antiquary* with the sole purpose to highlight the cultural achievements, civilizational features, and the glory of the ‘Tamil past’ so as to gain a rightful place in the comity of nations.

*Tamil Antiquary* was established in 1906 at Trichnopolly (sic) by a band of Tamil atavistic scholars who were trained in the Western academia under the able guidance of D. Savariroyan. *Tamil Antiquary* started along the lines of *Indian Antiquary*, remained committed to the cause of restoring and re-constructing the forgotten past through meticulous research on the scientific lines. The *Tamil Antiquary* in spite of its high quality was unable to evoke mass readership as the matter was in English. It also could not sustain its circulation owing to pecuniary reasons and thus had a natural death in 1914. Nevertheless the journal succeeded to a large extent in stimulating love for historical research among the young intelligentsia.

Savariroyan picked up the most sensitive topic ‘ethnicity’ as maiden article for his journal and set the ball rolling around the idea of identity for at least next three decades. In an essay entitled “The Bharata Land” or “Dravidian India” he proposed the historical agenda for the coming days by posing three major questions concerning the cultural past, its present predicament and future possibilities – who were the Tamils? Where did they come from? What was their ethnicity? And with which race did they co-mingle?- were central to the question of Tamil identity.

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It may be argued that the culture of ethnic difference, attracted a greater intellectual treatment but was never seen as a fundamental issue to the formation of Tamil identity at least until the entry of E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker into the scene in 1920s. Scholars like D. Savariroyan saw no ethnic incompatibility between Brahmin and non-Brahmin in Tamil Nadu. Instead he proposed Chaldea as a place of origin for both – Tamils and Aryans – who migrated to this sub-continent at different time intervals. He saw strong unity of purpose in their cultural practice, which was complimentary to each other in promoting the values of Hindu civilization.\(^{65}\)

Savariroyan vehemently disapproved the Turanian affinity to Tamil. It was ridiculous to compare a race of people who have attained tolerably a very high degree of civilization from the historical time to the peoples belonging to the lowest ‘Paleozoic’ strata of humanity which neither had pride in the past, nor hope for the future.\(^{66}\) It was antinomical and untenable to associate the “Greeks or Scotch of East” with the “Ainos of Jesso or the Veddhas of Ceylon”.

The English educated intelligentsia which grew in the Victorian cultural environment some how developed a fashion for ethnic uniqueness endowed with historical antiquity as a prerequisite for the civilized race. Moreover, ethnicity, community, nationality and race were inter-changeably used without the sense of long attachment. D. Savariroyan had expounded a theory of Elamite origin of Tamil. According to it, India was originally occupied by two batches of Elamite invaders, one taking the sea route by the Persian Gulf and settling on the West coast of India and the other choosing the land route through the Bolan Pass and occupying North India. The theory is based on the ancient myths – Vayu, Bhagvata, Matsya, and Agni Puranas – of the deluge and the Ark common to India and Elam, on the so-called philological and sematological identity of works in Tamil and Acadian tongues and on the fancied oneness of the Sanskrit Elavirtam in Mount Meru, Elmond of the Bible and Elam.\(^{67}\) The theory accounted to Manu the Chaldean Viking and Bharata as Elamite chief, who respectively led the expedition from Mesopotamian to the subcontinent. While the sea-faring Dravidians led by Manu occupied the Peninsular India, the latter occupied the Northern part of India.\(^{68}\) He argued that the Aryans were

\(^{65}\) Ibid., pp. 7-8.  
\(^{66}\) Ibid., p. 16.  
\(^{67}\) Ibid., pp. 3-4.  
\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 5.
the offshoot of the Tamilians or ‘Elamite’ race, and the Aryan civilization was a mere outgrowth of the Tamilian, and Sanskrit was a product of this endeavour. The theory of Mesopotamian home enjoyed considerable intellectual recognition as it offered a distant past for Tamils to claim high civilizational status. It was also believed, in accordance with the Christian Cosmology that the cradle of human civilization should have somewhere sprung up from this region, which also reinforced it.

J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai, a well-known Saiva Siddhanta scholar has also advanced a theory of similar nature, with minor modifications, under the title “Admixture of Tamilians with Aryans”, wherein he had dealt with the origin of Saivism and Sanskrit along with Tamil tradition. V. J. Thambi Pillai, another well-known scholar from Sri Lanka, also buttressed the theory on the basis of architectural techniques and aesthetic values.

Ethnicity as a problem of culture did not remain throughout in the corridors of academia but was also brought to by-lanes, bazaars and market places by vernacular journals and pamphlets. It soon caught the imagination of ordinary masses as an emotive ideology. Many caste groups and cultural organisations put these theories into use in cementing their primordial ties. With the widening of the political space, the social use of these theories began to change significantly. They were no longer considered as a genuine product of scientific theories and principles. Instead they were created, modified and developed by native ‘social functionaries’ to meet new social requirements and cultural needs. Myth-making, ethnic reconstruction and re-writing of caste history had thus become the integral feature of modern Tamil intellectual life.

Somasundara Bharathi, the defender of Tamil language rights during the Anti-Hindi Agitation in 1940s and 1950s was perhaps the first native scholar to advance the ‘indigenous theory’ against all ‘new-fangled’ assertions. Writing in the journal of ‘Siddhanta Dipika’, as early as in 1912, he had outlined the main features of his so
called ‘indigenous theory’ buttressed by tangible evidences. 73 According to this theory, “the Tamils were not aliens, but are the ‘Indigene’ whom no Ainos of the eastern Aryans could either vanquish or dislodge. The peopling of Tamilakam with this chosen tribe transcends all history, all legends within the memory of man.” 74

Emphasizing on the immutable relevance of the natural evidences – climate, fauna, flora and geographic – topographical features he vehemently argued, “The first Aryan stranger, who swam south across the trackless jungles was dazzled with the splendour of the Royal Pandyan courts, and was not too proud to seek shelter in the hospitable Tamil land that smiled to a sunny clime.” 75 History finds the Tamils in their present abode before the Romans conquered Egypt or Christ was born in Bethlehem; before Porus met the Greek or Darius lost his crown; before Plato wrote his dialogues and Solomon made his songs. 76 In short Tamil people believe (and tradition supports their belief) that from the start of their existence they lived and thrived in the land watered by the Palar on the north and the sea swallowed Pahruli in the south. Thus Somasundara Bharathi fixed his arguments on the basis of beliefs and traditions. Since literature being the part of social expressions, the Tamil literature was sufficient enough to reconstruct the history of the bygone days of Tamil.

Treating literature as bearers of aesthetic or intellectual novelty, he saw literature as an apt and appropriate tool to understand the mind of ancient society. As a result, the classical works must be seen as a source of enlightenment and thus as a mirror of society’s attachment to the past. 77 He forcefully argued, “If the earliest records of all nations are preserved in their national poetry, the early Tamil poems must be counted on for sources of reliable information about the original abode of the Tamils in the south and the extent of their civilization.” It may be asserted, on the basis of long literary traditions of Tamil, their civilization must be one of considerable antiquity. A cursory glance over the literary products of Tamil would reveal its exquisitiveness, copiousness and its archaism.” Even Caldwell, generally averse to admit any antiquity to the great Tamil writings, finds himself compelled to say that

74 Ibid., p. 3.
75 Ibid., p. 6.
76 Ibid., p. 9.
"The civilization of the Tamil people together with the literary cultivation of their language, commenced probably about the sixth and seventh century BC."\textsuperscript{78}

Somasundara Bharati stressed more and more on the choice of evidence rather than the mode of approach. As a positivist, he looked for more facts than its applicability, reliability and verifiability and thus essentialised the high use of literary sources as a reliable data. Through the textual analysis of \textit{Tolkappiyam} he tried to establish the beginning of Tamil civilization and their abode. "There are no traditions, no indications, nor any hints in them, pointing to a home outside the Tamilakam."\textsuperscript{79} He also further stated, "There are no passages in them that might be the remotest parallels of the Rig Vedic hymns or the Lonian legends, which unmistakably point to a pre-glacial foreign abode for the forefathers of the Aryan Tribes." Somasunadara Bharathi's main contention was to show that no literary record could afford to belie the basic fact concerning the society it stands for. \textit{Tolkappiyam}, the oldest extant of Tamil classic has no reference that may indicate Tamil home away from Peninsular India. They indicate an atmosphere, a climate, topography, biology and a mineralogy that fits well within the geographical features of Southern India. He further pointed out that no evidence can be adduced as antithetical or antinomical to the torrid features of Southern India as found in \textit{Tolkappiyam}.\textsuperscript{80} When there were words for dew and mist, none was found for ice and snow. Nowhere in Tamil literature reference can be found as to the celebrations of warmth-ness or hot sun (Vemmai), and coolness (Tanmai) was welcomed everywhere.\textsuperscript{81} The oldest Tamil classics speak only of the "vertical sun; while they know nothing of the 'low sun that makes the colour', which, according to all philologers, warmed the original Aryan home of Ice." By no means of evidence the original home of Tamils can be situated either in the frigid arctic zone or in the Mediterranean-Mesopotamia. As far as Tamil literature is concerned nothing was found as indicative of Tamils home away from Peninsular India.

Theories about Tamils and their origin continue to proliferate in number and stature and reached its logical culmination with the flamboyant Lemurian theory, which envisaged a putative past much anterior to historical time.\textsuperscript{82} The unique feature

\textsuperscript{78} S. S. Bharathi, "Tamil Classics and Tamilagam", \textit{Siddhantha Dipika}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{82} Nakkirar, \textit{Commentary to the Irayanar Agaporul}, Madras, 1964.
of this theory lies in the fact that it was handed down by Tamil literary tradition at least thousand years ago.

According to this theory there existed a landmass beyond the southern coast of Tamil Nadu, extending from Australia to Africa that was the original abode of the Pandya rulers. It was engulfed by sea in due course. The idea of ‘extended land mass’ and subsequent ‘diluvial theory’ first found in the commentary to the *Iriyanar Agaporul* written by Nakkirar in about eighth century A.D. He also advanced the idea of the existence of three Tamil academies in the land of Lemuria. Certain legends, coupled with stray references to the deluges in the past, have been skillfully woven into a full-fledged theory. Geological facts and anthropometric myths together created a new fangled theory adumbrating a much hoary past for Tamils. Though the theory was a product of Tamil imaginative ingenuity, it assumed a new scope, shape and significance in the skillful hands of Europeans. It was finally promulgated by the Western academia as a part of their new geological and palaentological revelation. It was readily appropriated and pressed into mobilization politics by the native intelligentsia. The Lemurian theory constituted a core of their intellectual propaganda against the alleged Aryan civilization, which was said to have given a culture to the Bohemian Tamils at the dawn of the historical time.

Several European ethnologists, geologists, and palaeontologists have formulated certain views buttressed by scientific data, which provided the foundation for the so-called Lemurain theory. The term “Lemuria” was said to have been introduced by an English geologist Philip Slator while referring to the submerged land of southern ocean. The term Lemuria was referred to the monkey-like animal species found in that part of the world. Even today the term “Lemur” is used to refer monkeys in Madagascar.

The central thesis of the theory, as outlined by its exponents, was that in the bygone ages a huge mass of territory connecting India with Ceylon, Malaya, Indonesia and the distant Australia on the one hand and Madagascar and South Africa

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on the other. Their main contention was that the land of Lemuria was the cradle of human civilization from which the mankind migrated to the other parts of the world in subsequent times. Sir Walter Raleigh, a well-known protagonist of this theory stated, “India was the first planted and peopled country after the flood.”

Prof. Ernest Haeckel, in his History of the World, as well as in his The Pedigree of Man, advanced the view that the Indian Ocean formed originally a continent, which extended from the Sunda Islands, along the coast of Africa and holds that men appeared on the earth’s surface somewhere in this region.

Sir John Evans, speaking in the British association in 1897, pointed out that South India could have been the ‘seed plot’ of the original home of mankind.

Emphasizing the similar view, Scott Elliot, in his book Lost Lemuria, expounded the theory with vivid description and held that the original home of mankind was somewhere in the southern ocean.

Sir J. W. Holderness with much confidence argued in his Peoples and the Problems of India, “Peninsular India is geologically distinct from the Indo-Gangetic Plain and the Himalayas. It is the remains of a former continent which stretched continuously to Africa in the space now occupied by the Indian Ocean.” Subsequently, similar opinions that were expressed about the Lemurian theory were published in the Science of Man in December 1900 from Sydney.

Though it may be seen at the outset that some minor discrepancies in their assertions with regard to the exact size and structure of the Lemuria, but all held a firm opinion about the existence and the subsequent subsidence of a huge land mass in the Indian Ocean which was the result of a major geological activity in the throes of Paleozoic age. Besides this, Father Heras, Cerve Fowler, Steiner, Holdiche, Langton and a host of geologists endorsed these postulates in principle and urged for further research.

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87 A. Kondratov, Riddle of the Three Oceans (Indian Ocean), Moscow, 1972, pp. 123-27.
88 Cited in M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, Tamil India, Munirpallam, 1927, p. 17.
89 Cited in M. Abraham Pandithar, Karnamirtha Sakaram, Tanjavur, 1917, p. 52.
90 Scott Elliot, Lost Lemuria, London, 1907, p. 46.
91 J. W. Holderness, Peoples and the Problems of India, New York, 1915, p. 93.
92 See for extensive debate on Lemurian Theory, Abraham Pandithar, Karnamirtha Sakaram, pp. 39-102.
Prof. V. R. R. Dikshitar and Prof. K. K. Pillay have argued that the theory of Lemuria can neither be accepted nor rejected, as it was skillfully interwoven with facts and fables. Before dismissing the merits of this theory, Dikshitar had perused the possibility of linking it in support of his claim for autochthonous status to Tamil. But K. K. Pillay viewed it as contesting claims for appropriation of cultural past.\(^93\) As Walter Benjamin observed history is a subject of a structure whose site is not a homogenous empty time which needs to be filled by the ‘presence of now’. The theory of Lemuria by no means can be upheld as a historical possibility since it did not fall into the chronological framework. Nevertheless, the fact cannot be brushed aside as “geology looks farther than history”. The land subsidence had taken place in the Paleozoic Age of geological time. Hence it cannot be considered as a \textit{prima facie} evidence to an event occurred in much later historical time. The origin of mankind or human civilization has yet to be established by verifiable historical evidence.

However, this theory continued to attract scholars' attention leading to new claims and counter claims.\(^94\) Research work was undertaken to study the possibilities of the submergence of the land “Lemuria”. While writing about the result of the recent ‘Under-water Archeological Expedition’ conducted by the scientists of USA, USSR and France Alexander Kondratov observed in his \textit{Riddle of the Three Oceans} (Indian Ocean) that what was once a belief, what was once a myth and what was once a fable now becomes a fact of history. With the evolution of the plate tectonic theory, the story of mankind has to be rewritten and the cradle of human civilization will have to be located in Indian Ocean.\(^95\) Lemurian theory played a significant role in arousing the passions for antiquarian research and reconstructing the history of Tamil culture. Articles about Tamil antiquity locating its primeval home in Lemuria appeared in plenty ever since 1904 in Tamil. \textit{Sentamil}, the journal of Madurai Tamil Sangam, initiated the argument by publishing a small write-up delineating the existence of Lemuria and thereby promoting the debate about Tamil ancient home.\(^96\) M. Karthikeya Mudaliar, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, K. Appadurai, Arsan Manikkanar, Abraham Pandithar and a host of other scholars contributed to advance the Lemurian


\(^95\) A. Kondratov, \textit{Riddle of the Three Oceans}, p. vii.

theory. Even today this theory continues to command popular imagination and ideological support from the atavistic intellectual group.

Situating the Sangam Past

The period about Sangam had throughout been proved to be enigmatic puzzle and an elusive chimera of the chronology of South India. The subject continued to elicit greater attention since the modern historical research set it roots in Tamil Nadu. The opinion about the period of Sangam widely varied, creating a matter of controversy with respect to dating of the ancient historical event. The difference of opinion, as it had been already indicated, kept ranging between 9690 B.C. and 300 A.D. However, in the light of modern historical research with the new sources, most of such lofty theories, spurious postulates and farrago of legends have been rejected as untenable historical truth. Nevertheless, there were no possible concerns in sight with regard to the vexed question of chronological conundrum. But the fact of the matter was that the recent findings have bridged the hiatus and almost an agreeable serialization of historical sequencing arrived at. It may be asked at the outset Why there was an urgent need for situating Sangam age in proper historical time?, What is its past significance?, How is it relevant to the present?, and what are its future possibilities?, were some of the crucial issues that kept emanating from the intellectual quarters.

The consciousness of a literary heritage is necessarily a consciousness of a past activity of the group and any evidence of a concern for that literary past should be taken as constituting an activity concerning its history. Past literature is studied for its past significance, present meaning and its future relevance. Therefore, any

97 M. Karthikeya Mudaliyar, Moli Nool, Madras, 1912; M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, Tamil India, Munirapallam, 1927; K Appadurai, Ten Nadu (Southern Land), Madras, 1955; Arasamanikkkanar, Marinta Nagaram (Lost City), Madras, 1944; Abraham Panditar, Karnamirtha Sakaram, Tanjavur, 1917.


101 Similar questions were for the first time posed by K. G. Seshaiyar, A Problem of Ancient South India History", The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, Vol. XVI, No. 3, 1926, pp. 143-57.

redaction, compilation and codification should be seen as a natural corollary of the emergence of literary consciousness for both past and present. In an effort to locate the history of Sangam in its proper chronological framework, it is relevant to study the literary developments as a part of historical understanding i.e., the emergence of community consciousness must be viewed as an intellectual response to growing awareness to its own history. Such a type of development of historical sense should be viewed as a form of consciousness relating to the history of literature i.e., history mediated through literature.\textsuperscript{103} It was an awareness of the literary heritage, propelled by social consciousness, that the Tamils made an attempt to collect their historical past for the future consumption at a very early age: Anthologisation was not done as a mere academic exercise; indeed it was done with a purpose to preserve the past for the future. If so, what was the main motive behind such a grand task? Why was there a need for anthologisation? Who were involved in the work and what were the criteria for anthologisation? These were some of the elementary queries, which must be answered threadbare. Undoubtedly anthologisation was undertaken to transmit the literary heritage to posterity thereby legitimizing the royal lineage. As Vansina pointed out, the need for oral poetry in stabilizing royal pedigree and legitimizing the rule of the monarch. The socio-political relevance of the redaction was obviously an effort to appropriate the past for the consolidation of future prospects.\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, the Sangam period reflected a change in the mode of literary preservation from memory to writing. It marked a significant development in the literary activity by providing new opportunities for collection, compilation and redaction. The important task was thus of checking out the present responses to the past literature through the process of anthologisation. Compilation of Sangam poems was largely a matter of literary and historical interest.\textsuperscript{105}

The pertinent questions one would tend to pose are: When did Sangam come into existence? How many Sangams were established? What actually constituted the Sangam corpus? And what were its main historical sources? The principle source of information for the history of Tamil Nadu particularly down to the sixth century was Tamil classics, designated under the umbrella name Ettuttogai (Eight anthologies),

\textsuperscript{105} K. Sivathamby, \textit{Literary History}, p. 37
Pattuppattu (Ten Idylls) and Padinenkilkanakku (Eighteen minor works). The twin epics – Silappadikaram and Manimegalai – and the well-known grammar Tolkappiyam were also referred as reliable source for the period. Though all these classics are traditionally described as Sangam works, strictly speaking, the former two collections were regarded as belonging to the Third Sangam. At present the Sangam commonly denotes the epoch of the Third Tamil Sangam. The periodisation about Sangam was baffling the world of scholars for a long time, and widely varying dates were assigned to it.¹⁰⁶

It may be observed that in about 33,000 literary lines of so-called Sangam classics, nowhere mention was made about Sangam, its existence or any other collateral details. Nevertheless, the idea of Sangam continued to loom large in the intellectual circle since seventh century A.D. The traditional account of the Sangam appears for the first time in the commentary to the Iraiyanar Aggapporul.¹⁰⁷ According to the author of this commentary, there were three Sangams or literary academies. The earliest one was held at south Madurai, the original capital of the Pandyas, which was believed to have been located in the land of Lemuria. The first Sangam is stated to have consisted of 549 celebrities including the God Siva, Murugan, the Hill God, and Kubera, the Lord of Treasure. The literary celebrities who constituted the first Sangam included Aggatyanar (Agastya) and Mudinagarayar of Muranjiyur. It is said that as many as 4449 poets produced their compositions on various topics ranging from medicine, astrology to aesthetic sensibilities in this Sangam. The Sangam lasted for 4440 years and was patronized in the aggregate by 89 Pandyan kings beginning from Kaysina Valudi and ending with Kadungon. Of these Pandyan kings, seven were themselves poets. Agattiyanam is said to have been the grammar followed by them during the age of the first Sangam.

As the southern Madurai was engulfed by sea owing to the flood, which was said to have occurred in 3660 BC, the seat of the Sangam was shifted to Kapadapuram, another coastal town. The members of the Second Academy were fifty-nine in number including erudite scholars like Agattiyar and Tolkappiyar. This Sangam is said to have lasted 3700 years, and curiously enough, the number of poets who presented their compositions to this academy was also 3700. During this period

¹⁰⁷ Iraiyanar Aggapporul, Madras, 1964.
very many grammatical works and literary genres were composed and none of them withstood the vagaries of time except Tolkappiyam.

When the second Pandyan capital, Kapadapuram, shared the fate of the first, another shift to the north was found necessary, and this time Madurai, where the modern city of that name stands, was chosen. The Third Sangam was composed of 49 members and the poets who submitted their poems to this academy were 449 in number. The poetic works of this Sangam included eight anthologies, Sirrisai and Perisai of which most of them withstood the ravages of time. During the 1850 years of its existence, 49 Pandya kings patronized the Sangam. The Pandyan monarch who shifted the capital and founded the Third Sangam was Mudattirumaran, while its last patron was Pandyan sovereign, Ukkirapperuvaludi.

Apart from the account furnished by the commentary to Iraiyanar Agapporul, many other works, which came later, also carried various versions of the same story, which might have come from different traditions. These accounts were produced essentially at a time when Saivism was consolidating its position against the heterodox sects. Myth making as a way of producing history came to play a crucial role in their endeavour to re-order the Tamil society along the lines of Hinduism. Thus, ideological appropriation went hand in hand with political consolidation. Major Jain centres of worship were gradually transformed into hallowed Saivite temples. It may be observed in the Sangam legend, all the three academies were established in Madurai, which was obviously a conscious effort to establish Saivite supremacy over Jain ideological centre. Prof. V. I. Subramoniam argued that the very association of Madurai with the Sangam legend was inescapable because of its Jaina connections. Subsequently, many other Jain centres like Tirucherapalli, Tiruchenture, Chidambaram and Palani were developed into holy Hindu towns.

Another important feature of the Sangam legend was the belief that some of the poets who participated in the proceedings were the Hindu deities. Lord

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108 For detailed explanation about Sangam story see A. Chidambaranar, Tamil Sangangalin Varalaru (History of Tamil Associations), Madras, 1948.
109 N. Subramanian, Sangam Polity, Annamalai Nagar, 1966, pp. 72-76.
Subramania, Kubera and Siva were alluded to have taken part in the Sangam activities. Moreover Lord Siva was credited to have been the fountainhead of Tamil language. The account also had testified to the fact that the process of Aryanisation was started around this period with new vigour and force.\textsuperscript{113} Agastya, the celebrated Rishi of the Rig-Veda, was alluded to have received Tamil from Lord Siva and caused it to grow around the Mountain Potiyil in South India. He was also credited to have authored the first Orthography for Tamil.\textsuperscript{114} The main focus of this legend was to Hinduise Tamil, especially to make it appear as an integral part of Saivite tradition.

The idea of Sangam was originally a Jaina Institution, which was established in 470 AD by a Jaina monk Vajranandhi at Madurai under the name Dramila Sankha. It may be recalled, Jain monks who came to South India in about third century BC slowly but steadily gained popular acceptance through their vast network of Sankha.\textsuperscript{115} The manner in which the Jaina religious establishment operated and the use it made of the literary corpus produced by them constituted a radical departure by unfolding new vistas for the development of Tamil language and culture.\textsuperscript{116} Jainism was the first religious order to use Tamil for wider dissemination of a message enriched with the corpus of literary work and transformed Tamil into a venerable idiom on par with Sanskrit.\textsuperscript{117}

Language command and command over linguistic pedigree was integral to the ideological hegemony. The dominance of a particular discourse might be expressed through a network of institutions that could bring in turn a new fixity to the cultural practice.\textsuperscript{118} Sangam legend was obviously an effort to appropriate the cultural hegemony and the institutional network of Jaina order. It was an ideological mechanism to secure political legitimacy and state patronage for further expansion.\textsuperscript{119} The Pandya rulers, being part of the Sangam proceedings, was yet another attempt to essentially secure royal recognition and social acceptance.

\textsuperscript{114} K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, \textit{Agastya in the Tamil Land}, Madras, 1929, pp. 27-33.
\textsuperscript{116} K. Sivathamby, \textit{Literary History in Tamil}, pp. 33-35.
\textsuperscript{117} Mayilai S. Venkatasamy, \textit{Samanamum Tami/um (Jainism and Tamil)}, Madras, 1952.
\textsuperscript{119} David Shulman, “First Grammarian, First Poet”, pp. 353-73.
It may be observed, from the Saivite point of view, that the Sangam legend was a formal attempt to lay claim over the history of Tamil. Their effort was to impute a Saivite origin to Tamil so as to gain a liturgical status on par with Sanskrit. The Saivite endeavour to monopolise the language of Tamil and its cultural heritage was not a unilinear progression and met with considerable resistance from the heterodox sects. Myths and counter-myths, stories and instrumental explanations were produced in course of time to establish each one of their legitimacy over the cultural heritage of Tamil. However, the rise of militant Hinduism, with the Chola patronage, made the things much tougher for the heterodox sects and eventually they disappeared from the cultural landscape of Tamil society forever.

The Sangam account was not only rejected as a historical fallacy, on account of its affiliation to Saivism, but also was discredited as ahistorical on the basis of its contradictory nature with regard to the facts. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, writing as early as 1932 in his *The Chronology of the Early Tamils* picked up the Sangam legend for a thorough analysis and proved it point by point as a figment of imagination. He not only dismissed the historical possibilities of the earlier two Sangams, but the Third Sangam must also be treated as a ‘barefaced forgery’ and ‘farrago of legends’. While recognizing the grain of historical truth as found in the legend, the account was nothing but solely a fabrication of misconstrued details without a sense of chronology.

He vehemently argued that “The story of the Third Sangam is in itself, as has been pointed out already, a clear fabrication in many details. It is true that the author or authors of Sangam legend did not wholly spin out an imaginary tale with imaginary characters created for the occasion. They seem to have utilized the names of certain historic personages of a past time and constructed a pure legend from which the time element was wholly expunged and characters belonging to different ages brought in as members of one literary body. The grain of historical truth contained in the account of the Academy lies in the historicity of the individual poets brought into it and not in the fact of the Sangam itself as such. These accounts are little better than historical

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123 Ibid., p. 198.
romances.” He was of the opinion that the redaction or anthologisation of Sangam works attributed to the patronage of different kings was all a later manipulation with the names of the earlier sovereigns for heightening the antiquity and authority of various collections. In his analysis, the internal evidences of the collections themselves militate against any chronological supposition. It may be explained that these works that were composed by different poets with various motives, at historical intervals should not be treated as in one ‘lump’. Instead, each work must be judged in its proper historical milieu. Moreover, arrangements of works or compilation, on the grounds of prosody or rhetoric are definitely not an appreciable method to facilitate any historical handling.

On the other hand, the Sangam account was not totally thrown overboard as a fund of fanciful conjectures. In spite of its incongruous and contradictory nature, the legend continued to elicit scholarly attention for further research. The account was not wholly rejected as an historical anachronism either by Tamil atavistic academia or by the English educated intelligentsia. While the former aimed to prove the theory in its spirit and letter, the latter engaged in sifting facts from the rubble of fictitious claims. On the whole, the legend by no means, in its present shape, as found in Iraiyanar Agapporul and other extended versions, can be accepted as historical fact. At the same time, it cannot be summarily rejected as a figment of imagination; it could not have arisen without a historical basis and is could hardly have been based simply on an assembly of Jaina or Buddhist monks. As K. V. Zvelebil pointed out “normative and critical activities in the field of early Tamil bardic and classical literature are no fiction but a hard fact.” In course of time the ‘fact and fiction’ about the academy got mixed up and created a worst story confounded.

With regard to the existence of the Sangam, many more stray references even can be cited from Saivite and Vaishnavite canonical literature particularly alluding to the idea of Tokai (Association) Avai (Assembly). Besides this, there were two important epigraphical sources also that can be cited in support of the Tamil

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124 Ibid., p. 199.
125 Ibid., p. 200.
academies. The larger Sinnamanur Plate of the tenth century eulogized the dynasty of Pandya for their exploits including getting Mahabharata translated into Tamil and for having established an Academy for the promotion for Tamil in the city of Madurapuri. The Irukkaangudi inscriptions of ninth century also faintly attested the fact.

While the two early Sangams (primeval and medieval) were rejected as historical impossibility on account of their exaggerated details, the Third Sangam was largely considered as being very close to the historical possibility. Kamil Zvelebil in this regard remarked that “coming to the last academy, we at once find ourselves on almost historical ground since most of the works Nakkirar quotes have been preserved; seven intact, or almost intact, two in great fragments, and one only as minor fragment; four have disappeared entirely.” K. K. Pillay also attested to the fact that academy of Tamil poets should have flourished for a time under the royal patronage of the Pandya rulers in their capital city. The account of the Third Sangam was also not fully endorsed as a hard historical fact. Most of the collateral information such as the duration, the number of royal participants, was rejected as an element of exaggeration. Nevertheless, the number of the poets mentioned in the Sangam account 449 was strikingly closer to the truth.

The literary product of this period as available today was in about 2881 lines composed by 473 poets, which bear testimony to its historical and chronological milieu. The idea of association for the promotion of Tamil language was not an uncommon phenomenon. Mention was frequently made about the establishment of academies and institutions for the development of Tamil from the very early period. It assumed new significance and importance in the modern period particularly under the aegis of colonial rule. A score of institutions, academies and centres were established throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu to popularize and publicize Tamil language and literature.

The question about Sangam period not only continued to be a matter of controversy on the basis of ideological line but also on the basis of some of the

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130 Ibid., p. 93.
131 Ibid., p. 98.
134 See Chapter IV of this study for a detailed discussion on the subject.
research findings of which the latter required a cursory glance. L. D. Swamikannu Pillai (1861–1928) a well-known ephemerist argued that the Sangam period must be located at the seventh or eighth century in accordance with the astronomical details as found in Silapathikaram and Paripadal. However, he was not able to buttress his contention with other reliable corroborative sources. Though his analysis was based on a sound astronomical data, but the frame of reference, as found in the work, was slippery and ambiguous.135

Pandit Raghava Aiyangar (1878–1960), a well-known member of the Lexicon Committee, also made a similar mistake on account of his frame of reference with respect to his analysis. Raghava Aiyangar had suggested fifth century for Sangam Age in his monograph *Cheran Chenkuttuvan* and his argument had been largely influenced by a ‘mislection’ of the Samudra Gupta inscription on the Ashoka Pillar at Allahabad, for which Dr. Fleet was originally responsible.136 The term “Kunala Maharaja” was mistaken for “Kerala Maharaja” and based on this assumption Aiyangar corroborated it with Mantaram Cheral of Sangam literature who was said to have ruled after Chenguttuvan, therefore the climax of the Sangam Age must be located in about fifth century.137 Subsequently, Dr. Kielhorn dismissed this theory with correct reading of the term “Kunala Maharaja”.

In the meantime, many more attempts were made to push the age of Sangam as far back as possible on the basis of newly acquired sources. M. Seshagiri Sastri made a maiden attempt to locate the Sangam period in the second century on the grounds of Gajabahu and Chenguttuvan synchronism.138 Similarly, V. Kanakasabhai Pillai had situated the Sangam period in the second century on the basis of his excellent corroborative internal and external evidences.139 However, his reading of Sangam Age through *Chilapathikaram* proved wrong as the work was written much later (fifth or sixth century AD). S. K. Iyengar also attempted to study the Sangam age as delineated in the epic *Manimegalai*, a work written much later to Sangam period.140

Literary texts undoubtedly provide a plethora of information for the construction of

139 V. Kanakasabhai, *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*, Madras, 1904, pp. 73-77.
social history of any given time. However, constructing a historical account of a society solely on the basis of literary texts may not meet all the canons of historical research. While commending about the reading of a society through textual analysis P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar emphasized the fact that literary texts are written for aesthetic and not for historical purpose.\textsuperscript{141} Attempting to study the history of the ancient society through a Tamil text amounts to studying the medieval history of Denmark through Shakespearian \textit{Hamlet}. Literary texts, as a historical source, have their own limitations. Excessive use of any source beyond its capacity may tamper the quality and authenticity of a historical account.\textsuperscript{142}

In the conspicuous absence of direct chronological reference to Sangam works, many more ingenious methods were pressed into service to arrive at a consensual time framework. Attempts also were made to work out a historical sequence or serializing of literary corpus, which was facilitated with arrival of new data, sources and knowledge input. University scholars who were equipped in western knowledge system and in native culture and language also began to show keen interest in the 1920s in this direction.\textsuperscript{143} Simultaneously efforts were undertaken to harness various initial findings and the results of independent research. In this regard, the role played by the modern Tamil associations, institutions and academies with their organs was by no means an ordinary task.

All the Tamil journals during this period came up regularly with special feature articles on "Kaalaaraychi" (Chronological Research), "Noolin Kaalattai Kanittal" (Dating of a literary work). V. Kanakasabhi Pillai made a seminal attempt in this direction by publishing an article entitled as 'Tamil Historical Texts' in \textit{Indian Antiquary}, 1889 wherein he discussed the historical allusions, possible periods, state of society and monarchy as indicated by the medieval Tamil literary genres like Ulaa, Koovai, and Kalambagam.\textsuperscript{144} In course of time many more well known scholars like Ira Raghava Aiyangar (1870–1946), P. Narayana Iyer (1862–1920), A. Muthuthambi Pillai (1853–1917), T.A.V. Gopinatha Rao (1863 – 1914), Somasundara Desigar, T. V. Sadhasivapandarathar (1882–1954) and Na. Mu. Venkatasami Nattar (1877–1947)

\textsuperscript{141} P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, \textit{History of Tamil Literature}, Madras, 1929, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{142} JR. De J. Jackson, \textit{Historical Criticism and the Meaning of the Texts}, London, 1989, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{143} K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, \textit{A History of South India}, p. 115.
\textsuperscript{144} V. Kanakasabai Pillai, pp. 259-66.
made a scintillating contribution in this field whose preliminary findings were proved to be immense help for final analysis.

It was shown, by a collective textual analysis of Eight Anthologies and Ten Idylls of Sangam corpus, many historical and quasi-historical events identified, if they were corroborated with other sources may constitute the kernel of historical truth.\textsuperscript{145} On the basis of such historical synchronism it may be possible to set up a relative sequence of events to create a historical continuity. Of course, their inferences are highly speculative and conjectural which warrants further authentication. Based on the historical allusions Avvai S. Duraisamy cogently argued in an article entitled "Paranar" published in \textit{Tamil Polil}, 1931, that the famous Sangam trio – Paranar, Kabilar and Nakkirar – might have lived in the same period stretching from 150-250 AD.

It may be observed that in few cases some of the mere historical and quasi-historical allusions can prove to be potential corroboration with other evidences. Given the Tamil historical contexts, many such criteria can be manipulated for historical analysis, as there was a rich corpus of quasi and semi-historical sources. Indeed they were, as Sundaram Pillai pointed out, "waiting to be gathered up" for ensuing historical research.\textsuperscript{146} K. N. Sivaraja Pillai also indicated on similar lines that "this lack of a scientific chronology is, however, due not to any paucity of relevant materials in which the Sangam literature is apparently rich but to a failure to apply to them the correct mode of manipulation – their valuation and arrangement."\textsuperscript{147}

Linguistic pattern, usage of rhetoric, internal testimony of thought pattern, relative chronology and leitmotif were some of the indicators through which the literary periodization can be worked out.\textsuperscript{148} Prosody proved to be a useful method in this regard. The simpler the metre and other prosodic properties, the older the poem, since there existed a clear tendency for formal complexity to increase steadily with the passage of time in Tamil; hence poems composed in simple patterned Akaval

\textsuperscript{146} P. Sundaram Pillai, \textit{Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature on the Age of Tirujana Sambandha}, Madras, 1906, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{147} K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, \textit{The Chronology of the Early Tamils}, Madras, 1932, p. v.
\textsuperscript{148} K. Sivathamby, \textit{Ancient Drama}, pp. 120-23.
metre are probably earlier than poems composed in combined metres, and certainly earlier than poems composed in the *kali* and *venba* metres.\(^{149}\)

It is highly possible to work out a relative chronology on the basis of formulae and motif through a delicate analysis ‘within identical structural levels’, the movement is from a simpler to a more complex pattern.

In the linguistic pattern it was very much discernible, the old clichés yielding place to new innovations and terms, especially the more Sanskrit loan words, the later the text; loan words from Prakrit and Pali are probably older than Sanskrit loans.\(^{150}\)

It was also possible to workout a time framework on the basis of thought content and the development of ideas, which were generally from natural, ethical to spiritual. Fighting, mating and natural descriptions received greater attention in the earlier period. In course of time, speculative, didactic and reflective genres of poems with pessimistic undertones were said to have received prominence with the overarching influence of Sanskrit. The situations and themes like *Kanchi* and *Vakai* of *Puram* category, *Perunthinai* and *Kaikkailai* of the *Agam* genre were also developed in due course. Similarly, in the realm of religion an ideological shift was also discernable from Animism, Buddhism, Jainism to Saivism and Vaisnavism and the concept of Bhakti and Bridal Mysticism were undoubtedly the result of later phenomena.\(^{151}\)

In the absence of direct and indirect chronological reference to early Tamil historical events, it became necessary to work out a time framework through other possible means of sources. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai of Government Oriental Manuscripts Library of Madras made an innovative attempt in this respect by tactfully manipulating the internal literary evidences to construct a chronological framework for early Tamils. He came up in 1932, with a treatise entitled as *The Chronology of the Early Tamils* (pp. xvi – 284), exclusively committed to the cause of situating the Sangam age and to serialize its literary corpus.

According to the synchronic table furnished in the book, the rulers mentioned in the classical Tamil works where assigned to a period of 25 years equally for 10 generations to arrive at a tentative chronological framework, commencing from 50

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\(^{149}\) K. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, pp. 88-89.


BC to 200 AD. The rulers who were assigned in the table were selected through a perusal of collective textual analysis of Eight Anthologies, Ten Idylls, Ashokan inscriptions and Greco-Roman literary evidences. The table had accounted for nine Pandya rulers including Palsalai Mudukudumi Peruvaludi (75-100 AD) and Kanapperayiltanta Ukkirapperuvaludi (150-175 AD), 13 Chola rulers including Povaikko Perunarkilli (25 BC-1 AD) and Karikalan the Great (75-100 AD), 16 Chera rulers including Adukotpatu Cheralathan (75-100 AD) and Yanaikkan Cey Mantaram Cheral Irumporai (125 – 150 AD). He also serialized within the time framework all the early classical works ranging from 50 BC – 200 AD. Some of them were dismissed by him as barefaced forgery on account of their language structure and thought pattern, which should have been written much later than the period assigned to the table.

The uniqueness of this table was that it provided a bare chronological outline to the history of ancient Tamil society. Most of the claims that the table advanced were authenticated by the subsequent historical evidences. His views about Tamil academy, redaction of Sangam corpus, Aryan-Dravidian acculturation and the dating of literary works evoked a serious condemnation from various Tamil quarters. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai was long strictured for his selective use of historical facts and dismissing the unpalatable one as “barefaced forgery”. Nevertheless, his contribution to the study of Tamil chronology was an unambiguously remarkable departure, which paved the way for new revelations.

Tamil chronological research reached its watershed development in the 1940s with the coming of K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, V. R. R. Dikshitar and S. Vaiyapuri Pillai. Vaiyapuri Pillai was the first Tamil scholar to work out a holistic chronological time framework for Tamil literature on scientific lines. He categorically stated that Sangam literature could not be carried to any date anterior to the second century AD, and that the period of development of the Sangam works might be put as three centuries (upto 350 AD) and that Tolkappiyam should also be given a date posterior to that period. Though his research findings with respect to literary dating became highly controversial, his serialization to a large extent was accepted.

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152 Refer page nos. 166 and 185 of The Chronology of the Early Tamils, by Sivaraja Pillai.
153 Vaiyapuri Pillai, History of Tamil Language and Literature, Madras, 1956, pp. 43-49.
154 Ibid., pp. 7, 17.
He followed a topological analysis in fixing date for various literary works. After furnishing basic details about the work he went on to fix the *terminus ad quo* (starting point) and *terminus ad quem* (the terminating point), the period within which the work could have been written, arguing that it could not have been before a particular time or author or after a particular time or author. While setting up criteria or principles for literary analysis he argued that the truth must be the sole aim and the facts must guide our steps and govern our conclusion. His meticulous corroborative analysis with respect to thought content, language possibilities, rhetoric usage enabled him to identify analogous features of various texts before fixing a date for a work. However, his law background and his positivist approach in relation to historicism led him to look at the development of literary activities in a unilinear progression. His *a priori* notion about the uniqueness of Sanskrit became sheet of anchor and he virtually negated the possibility of cultural exchange of ideas, and chronology of Tamil works always must succeed Sanskrit and not otherwise.

While *Tolkappium*, the principal grammatical work of Tamil was largely viewed as a literary fountain head, he slated it to the late fifth century on the assumption that it has borrowed 32 basic techniques from Chanakya, caste rules from Manu, and *nava rasas* from *Vatysayana*. He also cited similar reasons for locating *Tirukkural* (the gem of Tamil wisdom) in about seventh century AD. However, subsequent research had belied his assumptions. Vaiyapuri Pillai’s dating of *Silapathikaram* had also met with similar stricture and condemnation. In support of his dating of *Silapathikaram* to 825 AD, he furnished about a score of reasons ranging from rhetoric usage to grammatic differences. While, however, recognizing the minutest details with regard to linguistic variations, he did not take into account the major historical forces that were at work. The central political message of *Silapathikaram* was to emphasize the integral unity of the three Tamil kingdoms on account of their nationality and hardly was there a reference to Pallava rule in which supposedly the work would have been written. Though his dating of

156 Ibid., p. 62.
157 Ibid., pp. 143-51.
158 Ibid., p. 166.
Silapathikaram and Kural became a matter of controversy, his methodological analysis in setting up a chronology on scientific lines proved to be a point of departure. Undoubtedly, Vaiyapuri Pillai was the first Tamil scholar to meticulously employ scientific principles in arriving at a date of a literary work. 160

The construction of chronology for Tamil literary works as an intellectual activity continue to elicit opinions from various quarters. The question about chronology was largely determined by contemporary needs and social consciousness. The histories written at various points of time reveal what the historian had wanted to know which means, history represents the knowledge of the past in accordance with the needs and norms of the present i.e., every historian makes an attempt to address the concerns of the present or arising about the concerns of the past as the present. 161

The question about Tamil literary periodisation as a part of historical activity must be analysed, assessed and situated in its socio-intellectual milieu. A careful analysis of the literary periodisation would reveal the expanding horizon of Tamil literary historiography. The periodisation should neither be seen as a mere intellectual exercise nor as an academic classification. Indeed, it was an effort to interpret the history of ideas on the basis of literary development in terms of its content, application and use. 162 Caldwell, a pioneering missionary of Scottish Order saw the literary development of Tamil in terms of literary cycles, and an approach which was adopted in relation to poetical development in the West. 163 M. S. Puralingam Pillai a well-known Tamil patriot comprehended the literary development in terms of Ages, a concept quite popular in the domain of English literature.

Maraimalai Adigal, the father of Pure Tamil Movement was perhaps the earliest scholar to read the current motives into past history of literary periodisation. 164 Obviously, taking cue from the communal predicament, he began with an Age of Pure Tamil and went on to describe the developments as the Age of Brahminism, Age of English Influence and so on. His reading of the literary

162 K. Sivathamby, Literary History, p. 102.
164 Maraimalai Adigal, Manikkavasagarin Varalarum Kalamum (The Age and History of Manika Vaasagar), Madras, 1931.
development was essentially predicated on the hegemonic, ideological dominant worldviews.

Scholars like C.W. Damodaram Pillai, M. S. Srinivasa Aiyangar saw the literary periodisation on the basis of religious ideology such as Jaina, Saiva and Vaishnava. On the other hand Selvanayagam, T. P. Meenakshi Sundaram looked at the periodisation in terms of political patronage such as Chola, Pandya and Pallava. Yet another group of scholars like Kamil Zvelebil, A. C. Chettiar delineated the development of literary history purely on the basis of literary criteria and linguistic pattern. The following table of opinion about literary periodisation would explicate the ideological underpinnings that lay embedded in various scheme of classification.

**TABLES**

**Table – 2.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Jaina Cycle</td>
<td>700 AD to 1200 AD</td>
<td><em>Tolkappiyam and Tirukkural</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tamil Ramayana Cycle</td>
<td>1200 AD</td>
<td><em>Kambaramayanam Bharatham</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Saiva Revival Cycle</td>
<td>1200 AD to 1300 AD</td>
<td>Canonical texts like <em>Devaram, Tiruvasakam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vaishnava Cycle</td>
<td>1200 AD to 1300 AD</td>
<td><em>Tirupallandu, Tiruvaimoli</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Literary Revival</td>
<td>1400 AD to 1500 AD</td>
<td><em>Nanool and Nalavenpa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anti-Brahmanical Cycle</td>
<td>1600 AD</td>
<td>Songs of Siddhas, Minor literary genres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Modern School</td>
<td>1700 AD to 1800 AD</td>
<td><em>Thenpavani Ilakkanaakottu</em></td>
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</table>

Source: *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* - 1856

**Table – 2.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apota Kaalam (Agnostic Period)</td>
<td>Pre historic period</td>
<td>Oral ballads and folk Songs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksara Kaalam (Age of letters)</td>
<td>ca. 5300 BC to ca. 3300 BC</td>
<td><em>Agattiyam and Mudunarai</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilakkana Kaalam (Grammatical)</td>
<td>ca. 3300 BC to ca. 1000 BC</td>
<td><em>Maapuranam, Tolkkapiyam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samutaya Kaalam (Academic)</td>
<td>ca. 1000 BC to ca. 150 BC</td>
<td><em>Kalariya Virai, Sayantham</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anathara Kaalam (Lethargic period)</td>
<td>150 BC to 50 AD</td>
<td>No significant work was produced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Thought Development</td>
<td>Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samana Kaalam (Jaina Period)</td>
<td>50 AD to 350 AD</td>
<td>Naladiyar and Tirukkural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itikasa Kaalam (Epic Period)</td>
<td>350 AD to 1150 AD</td>
<td>Silappatikaaram, Manimegalai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aatina Kaalam (Monastic)</td>
<td>1150 AD to 1850 AD</td>
<td>Tiruvilliyadalpuranam, Sivagnana potham</td>
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</table>

Source: Editorial commentary to Virasoliyam, Madurai, 1881

Table – 2.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>Early (8000 BC to 100 AD)</td>
<td>Tolkappiyam Agattiyam</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>Medieval first half</td>
<td>Silappatikaaram and Manimekalai</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(100 AD to 600 AD)</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>Medieval second half</td>
<td>Devaram and Tirumandiram</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(600 AD to 1400 AD)</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>Modern - 1400 AD onwards</td>
<td>Mukkadarpallu and Kutralakura Vanji</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tamil Moli Varalaru (History of the Tamil Philology), V G Suryanarayana Shastri, Madras, Madurai, 1907

Table – 2.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The period of Essays, pamphlets and short poems</td>
<td>500 AD to 600 AD</td>
<td>Tirukkural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The period of Jaina Predominance</td>
<td>700 AD</td>
<td>Tolkappiyam and Naladiyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The period of struggle between Saivaites and JAINAS</td>
<td>800 AD</td>
<td>Tirumandiram, Silappatikaaram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The period of Saiva Predominance</td>
<td>900 AD</td>
<td>Devaram and Tiruvasagam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vaisnava period</td>
<td>1400 AD to 1500 AD</td>
<td>Tiruvanpavai, Tiruppallandu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kamil V. Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, Leiden, 1975

\* No thought development available.
### Table 2.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Sangams</td>
<td>Upto 100 AD</td>
<td>Eight Anthologies Ten Idylls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Buddhists and Jains</td>
<td>100 AD to 600 AD</td>
<td><em>Silappatikaaram Manimekalai</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Religious Revival</td>
<td>600 AD to 1100 AD</td>
<td><em>Nalayiradiyva Prabandam, Panniru Tirumurai</em> (Twelve Saiva Canonical Texts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Literary Revival</td>
<td>1100 AD to 1400 AD</td>
<td><em>Sivagnana Potham, Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of Mutts and Religious Institutions</td>
<td>1400 AD to 1700 AD</td>
<td><em>Nitivenpa and Nanneri</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Age of European Culture</td>
<td>1700 AD to 1900 AD</td>
<td><em>Thembavani, Pradhaba Mudaliar Charitiram.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *A Primer of Tamil Literature*, Madras, 1904

### Table 2.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sangam period</td>
<td>600 BC to 150 AD</td>
<td>Eight Anthologies <em>Tolkappiyam</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Heterodox Sects</td>
<td>150 AD to 500 AD</td>
<td><em>Silappatikaaram Manimekalai</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahminical (Bhakti Literature)</td>
<td>500 AD to 950 AD</td>
<td><em>Tiruvagasam, Devaram</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of translations</td>
<td>950 AD to 1200 AD</td>
<td><em>Kambaramanayam, Sivaga Sindhamani</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exegetical</td>
<td>1200 AD to 1450 AD</td>
<td>Commentaries of Nachinarkkiniar and Perasiriyar to Sangam works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>1450 AD to 1850 AD</td>
<td><em>Meenakshi Pillai Tamil, Vetriverkai</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** M. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Tamil Studies*, Madras, 1914

### Table 2.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From primitive period to the end of Sangam</td>
<td>To the end of 300 AD</td>
<td>Eight Anthologies Ten Idylls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangam age to Second Millennium</td>
<td>300 AD to 1000 AD</td>
<td>Eighteen minor works, Saiva and Vaisnava Canonical works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Development</td>
<td>1000 AD to 1400 AD</td>
<td><em>Sivagnana Potham and Sivagnana Siddhiyar</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** K. S. Srinivasa Pillai, *Tamil Varalaru*, Tanjavur, 1922
### Table – 2.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanitamil Kalam (The Age of Pure Tamil)</td>
<td>3101 AD to 100 AD (Maha Bharata War)</td>
<td>Eight Anthologies Ten Idylls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddha Kalam (The Age of Buddha)</td>
<td>100 AD to 400 AD</td>
<td>Manimekalai, Sivagasindamani and Naaladiyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samana Kalam (The Age of Jaina)</td>
<td>400 AD to 700 AD</td>
<td>Sivanagamani and Naaladiyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saiva-Vaishnava Kalam (The age of Saivas and Vaishnavas)</td>
<td>700 AD to 1400 AD</td>
<td>Devaram, Tiruvlsaippa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parpana Kalam (The Age of Brahmins)</td>
<td>1400 AD to 1800 AD</td>
<td>Kanchi Stala puranam, Kantaralankaram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angila Kalam (The Age of English)</td>
<td>1800 AD to till date</td>
<td>Novels like Pradhapa Mudaliar Charithaaram, Thenpavani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marimalai Adigal, *Manickavasagar Kalamum Varalarum* (Age and History of Manickavasagar), Madras, 1930

### Table – 2.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thalaisangamum Idaisangamum (First and Second Sangam)</td>
<td>9690 BC to 1500 BC</td>
<td>Agattiyam, Mutukurugu Mutunaarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadaisanga Kalam (Period of Last Sangam)</td>
<td>1500 BC to 300 BC</td>
<td>Eight Anthologies Ten Idylls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samanaratikka Kalam (Period of Jaina Domination)</td>
<td>300 AD to 570 AD</td>
<td>Thiruvaasagam Naladiyar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thevara Kalam</td>
<td>570 AD to 655 AD</td>
<td>Songs of Appar Sambandar and Sundarar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvargal Kalam (Age of Alwars)</td>
<td>Upto 850 AD</td>
<td>Tiruvaymoli and Tirupallandu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siddha Kalam (Period of non-Brahminic mystic Saints)</td>
<td>850 AD to 1000 AD</td>
<td>Songs of Eighteen Siddhas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samanarthurukilarchi (anti-Jaina Period)</td>
<td>1000 AD to 1300 AD</td>
<td>Nilakesi and Kundalakesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saivakappiyakalam (Epic period of Saivites)</td>
<td>1000 AD to 1200 AD</td>
<td>Periyapuranam Kabadapuranam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ka. Subrahmaniam Pillai, *Tamil Ilakiya Varalaru* (History of Tamil Literature), Madras, 1930.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought Development</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mursanga Kalam</td>
<td>100 AD to 350 AD</td>
<td><em>Akananooru, Purananooru</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokaisey Kalam</td>
<td>400 AD to 500 AD</td>
<td>Redaction of Sangam works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirsaanga Kalam</td>
<td>600 AD to 750 AD</td>
<td><em>Tirukkural and Paripadal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakthinur Kalam</td>
<td>600 AD to 900 AD</td>
<td><em>Tirumurukkarruppadai and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitinur Kalam</td>
<td>600 AD to 850 AD</td>
<td><em>Nanmanikadigai and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murkavya Kalam</td>
<td>750 AD to 1000 AD</td>
<td><em>Sivagasindamani and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirkavya Kalam</td>
<td>1100 AD to 1300 AD</td>
<td><em>Baratham and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattuvanur Kalam</td>
<td>1000 AD to 1350 AD</td>
<td><em>Sivagnana Sidhiyar</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viyakkiyanna Kalam</td>
<td>1200 AD to 1500 AD</td>
<td><em>Parimelakarathu</em> (Commentary to Kural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purana-Prabanda Kalam</td>
<td>1500 AD to 1850 AD</td>
<td><em>Kandapuranam and</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thar Kalam</td>
<td>1850 AD to 1947 AD</td>
<td><em>Tiruvurudpa and</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On the basis of foregoing analysis, it may be argued that the intellectual effort to unearth the Tamil past had brought forth many socially sensitive issues leading to cultural awakening in the late nineteenth century. It was designated as social transformation, Tamil Renaissance or Cultural Revolution. Whatever may be the case the colonial intrusion through the process of modernization had radically altered the mental perception of the native society. The indigenous response to colonial intervention lead to the emergence of various popular movements. Central to the problem was the question of ethnic uniqueness, cultural antiquity and social identity, which became an issue of immense concern. The effort to situate the Sangam Age on the concomitance of literary periodisation marked the emergence of social consciousness and historical awareness of Tamil society. It got further reinforced with the expanding horizon of intense political activities.