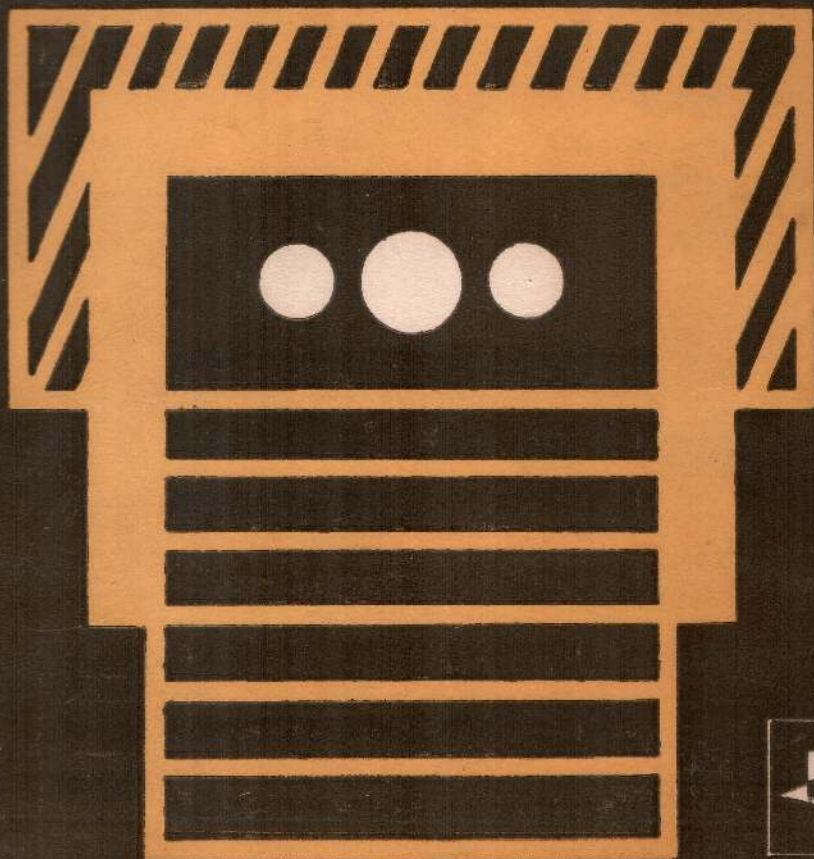


# On Art and Literature



Prof. K. Kailasapathy

New Century Book House Private Limited

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# ON ART AND LITERATURE

**Dr. K. Kailasapathy**

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Dr. K. Kailasapathy, M. A. (Cey.), Ph. D. (Birm.)



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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Tamil Literary World was plunged in sorrow, darkness and gloom, when, on the 6th December, 1982, it received the shocking and sad news that the icy cold hands of death had snatched away Prof. K. Kailasapathy, before he could complete 50 years of age. He was born on the 5th April, 1933; he died on the 6th December, 1982, prematurely and unexpectedly, leaving behind him thousands of admirers, scholars, students and followers to lament.

After obtaining the Doctorate degree from the Birmingham University for his Thesis "Tamil Heroic Poetry", he returned to Sri Lanka and plunged into literary activities. In a short span of twenty-five years, he wrote several books and essays, contributed (a journalist himself) a number of articles to the Press and participated in several Seminars, national and international, presenting a number of papers; as a Professor of Tamil, he kindled in his students a flavour for truthful research.

The significant achievement of his has been his capacity to employ Historical materialist method in research, and uphold throughout the genuineness of Marxism - Leninism in the study of various aspects of the social life of Tamils from Sangam Age to the present day.

Proficient as he was in the all-conquering philosophy of Marxism - Leninism, his contributions had been bold and strikingly original, devoid of monstrous confusion and streak of pessimism. He set the critical trend in literary studies—Sangam literature, puranic literature, epics, linguistics, grammar, novels, short stories, folk songs, Tamil history—nothing escaped his notice. His criticisms were sometimes trenchant and sometimes mellowed, but all the time reasoned and well-grounded,

having regard to the well-known dictum of Karl Marx : “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways ; the point however is to change it”.

Such an eminent and erudite scholar is no more. His death is an irreparable loss to the progressive Tamil World—to all those interested in the ushering in of a new Tamil Society without caste and class distinctions and strife.

The New Century Book House Private Limited, that first introduced the Sri Lanka Tamil Scholar Dr. Kailasapathy to Tamil Nadu is proud, while recording its deepest sense of sorrow over his loss, in publishing the first volume of his articles, essays and papers, some of which remained hitherto unpublished.

This volume bears the title *On Art and Literature*, and reveals the facile pen of Dr. Kailasapathy, in English. It also bears ample evidence to his versatility as well as vitality of his writings.

The first article, *The Tamil Purist Movement : a Re-Evaluation*, deals with the phenomenon of pure Tamil movement in its historical setting. Influenced by Robert Caldwell, Prof. Sundaram Pillai, S. Suryanarayana Sastri and Saint Ramalingar, Swami Vedachalam launched the pure Tamil movement, as a reaction against the dominant *manipravala* style and Swaminatha Desigar's assertion that Sanskrit rules applied *ipso facto* to Tamil as well, in order to save Tamil from Sanskrit. He establishes that so long as it served revivalist trends, it evoked general support, but in the end proved self-defeating. He traces the various aspects of the movement—early influences, genesis, growth, success, decline and fall. He concludes “conceding a formative significance to the prose of Vedachalam which, taken in conjunction with that of some of those whom he influenced, was to modify today's language”.

The second article is *Tradition and Change—A Glimpse of Modern Tamil Literature*. In spite of all the creative and positive contributions of the scholars with leaning towards Marxism, they are accused that they would accept anything excepting the antiquity of Tamil language and its literature.



Such an accusation is unjustified and untenable. While tracing the tradition in Tamil literature, Kailasapathy asserts : " The earliest known poetry dates back to atleast 500 B. C. which would indicate a considerable amount of literature preceding it". He traces how tradition has become problematic and new literary forms in Tamil developed breaking the fetters of tradition, in modern times throwing light on the new trends such as novels, short stories, " New Poetry " and mass media, as well, at the same time.

The third article, *Contemporary Tamil Literature—A Critique*, is almost a thematic continuation of the second. " The conflict between tradition and change, " he says, " has always been there—taking different forms in different times. But...worked out evenly and at times beneficently in the earlier phases". Dealing with Subramania Bharathi " the measure of modern Tamil literature " he feels for the neglect of Bharathi in comparative studies in Asian literature. He is rightly harsh towards elitist critics who " often deliberately juxtapose art and propaganda, thought and action, the universal and the particular, tradition and modernity, politics and literature, quality and quantity and such concepts, " which are " critical jargons and passed off as valid truths ". In repudiating the false notion " of Art for Art's sake " he argues that such theories have been imported from the West and that Indian nation is not to " separate the artist from the rest of the society, but, however, considers that it would amount to ' Denial of history, if it is suggested that nothing positive has resulted from the impact of Western theories and works of art. " For the first time he draws the attention of Tamil writers to problems in the under-developed countries in the light of modernization.

The fourth and fifth essays are *Tamil Heroic Poetry* and *A Note on Modern Tamil Poetry* respectively. Though short, they are thought-provoking. Inaugurated by H. M. Chadwick in 1912 with the publication of " The Heroic Age ", the study of Heroic Poetry has acquired new dimensions. His three-volume work, *The Growth of Literature*, is monumental and emphasises the importance of the study of non-Indo-European peoples. Dr. Kailasapathy places Sumerian Heroic Age, Indo-European

(Greek) Heroic Age, Indo-Aryan Heroic Age, Tamil Heroic Age and Teutonic Heroic Age (about the fourth century A. D.) in the order. He says, "The Tamil Heroic age should be placed somewhere in the fourth or fifth century B. C. and in any case the Tamil Heroic Poetry had most probably been committed to writing by the beginning of the Christian Era." The Tamil Heroic Poetry "Portrays the emergence of the three principal kingdoms from among innumerable tribal organisations and village communities. This epoch in a nation's history is violent, but brilliant, short-lived but glorious, cumulative but opulent". He applies brilliantly the eight-fold characteristics of Heroic Poetry to the study of Tamil Heroic Poetry "which took its final form when trade between South India and the Western world flourished," and emphasises the need for undertaking a comparative study of 'Heroic Poetry' of all peoples which will bring mutual benefit. In the Note on modern Tamil Poetry which begins with Subramania Bharathi, he outlines the Western influences on Bharathi, through Shelley, Byron and Walt Whitman and also the evolution of new poetry on *avant garde* lines. The new Poets are of 'two categories, one psychological, and the other Social,' depending on the question of content and function of new poetry.

The last two essays, *The Relation of Tamil and Western Literature*, have a wider range and canvas ; they deal in outlines with the Western influences and Tamil Responses, "in the specific context of the growth of modernism in Tamil". Starting from 1857, the year of founding of the Madras University, he traces in the first part the contributions of early scholars—the wonderful galaxy of writers—from a Sri Lankan perspective, marshalling historical evidence to show that the Western system of education provided the necessary background for the growth of modern Tamil literature. He notices three stages of general progress : (1) imitation of foreign models ; (2) debates between indigenous sources and foreign models ; and (3) emergence of more balanced views and says "we certainly have not experienced the third stage". Apart from the poetic works of early scholars on traditional pattern, new forms of literature notably novels of different shades—moralist, vedanta unfolded—under the impact of the West. Also, various schools on Western models such as *avant garde*, stream of consci-



ousness, imagism, psychological, Art for Art's sake and other trends in Tamil literary works, after many years of emergence in the West. In his criticism against these schools, Dr. Kailasapathy is trenchant but fair, at the same time, for instance he says, "Even so, T. K. C. and his associate did not proclaim the *credo* of Art for Art's sake ; they were too cultured to do that. It is only since the sixties that the cry had assumed a virulent form. These instances would indicate that there is a time lag in Western influences being felt in Tamil and even when they do so they are often metamorphosed into something very different from the originals".

In the second part, he examines the most important influence from the West in the form of Romantic movement, theoretical and documentary, with specific reference to Subramania Bharathi. "Generally speaking," he contends, "Romanticism as a European phenomenon lasted from about 1780 and 1850" and the Romantics did not leave any creative endeavour untouched. He admires their "serious concern with history", unorthodoxy in religion and politics, accommodation of folk arts and "conscious revolt against the rigid but impotent conventions and rules of Neo-classicism". The discovery of *Tolkappiyam* and Sangam works was "a sudden revelation of the past glory and greatness of the Tamil" and "gave a fillip to the notion of classicism among the Tamil scholars", in whose minds "a sort of parity had been established between European and Tamil classicism". Then followed a period of neo classicism in Tamil literature : *Rupavathi* of Suryanarayana Sastri and *Manonmaniyam* of P. Sundaram Pillai. Sastri argued the case of Tamil to be classified as a classical language. Precisely in this background, the impact of the Western Romantic movement in Tamil was felt. He turned his back 'very deliberately' on neo-classicists. Romanticists loved freedom. Shelley's follower Bharathi sang of freedom and freedom fighters. Byron and John Keats have also influenced Bharathi. Odes and Ballads impelled him. All these aspects have been clearly presented. "The most productive of the modes of literary expression" of the Romantic poets is 'lyric' and this "found its first and best response in Bharathi, a few before him had already begun



to prepare the ground." Next, Kailasapathy deals with 'Sonnets' and contends that Suryanarayana Sastri's *Tani-Perun-Togai* indicates a new departure in Tamil Poetry; but it was Bharathi who successfully wrote sonnets and lyrical poems. Bharathi in *Kuyil Pattu* and *Panchali Sabatham* did not engage himself in pure descriptive poetry, but as a mature poet, absorbed and recreated imageries and discipline of English nature poets. Romanticism had other influence also on Tamil mind: a large number of poems of major English poets have been rendered into Tamil and a majority of them are Romantic poets. Regarding the interplay of literature and science in Europe, in the atmosphere of intellectualism which Romanticism had created, Dr. Kailasapathy admirably establishes with evidence that Romanticists were equally absorbed in scientific lore. Coming down to Tamil Nadu, he says "that poetic apertures have been open-view science and its implications in their proper perspective".

The New Century Book House Private Ltd., propose to publish Dr. Kailasapathy's other essays also, in as short a time as possible. This can only be a fitting tribute to the services of Dr. K. Kailasapathy.

We are deeply indebted to Mrs. Kailasapathy who kindly entrusted this task to us. We have no words of solace for the great loss sustained by her in the death of her beloved husband.

The New Century Book House Private Ltd., has been drawing freely from time to time on the services of Shri R. Parthasarathy (R. P. S.), M. A., B. A. (Hons.), LL. B., and this time also w asked him for assistance in the preparation of this Note. He readily agreed and complied with promptly.

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## **I. The Tamil Purist Movement : a Re-Evaluation**

THE PURIST movement in Tamil has, hitherto, been largely the concern of literary scholars and linguists. But as a phenomenon it is equally important to the social scientist who is engaged in studying nationalism and the problems of modernisation. The Tamil purist movement brings into focus the underlying social and political forces that seized upon genuine linguistic problems and diverted them into ethnic and chauvinistic channels. The Tamil purist movement shows in bold relief the class positions of its proponents who were pro-British and came from an essentially high caste Hindu background. These and other facts emerge from an analysis of the genesis of the Tamil purist movement and its evolution.

The place and role of Tamil language in the modern politics and social conflicts of South India (and one may add Sri Lanka) have been abundantly described in a number of monographs during the last two decades<sup>1</sup>. Besides the specific studies on South India, certain general works dealing with the Indian sub-continent as a whole or other regions of

India in particular, have made passing references and observations that have helped focus attention on the subject<sup>2</sup>. One aspect of the language movement in Tamil that has not received the scrutiny it deserves is the *tanittamil*, 'pure-Tamil' movement, which in many ways highlights the more virulent features of Tamil revivalism. Although the 'pure-Tamil' movement will, inevitably, be discussed in its socio-political context, it is intended to approach the subject from the vantage point of a writer's experience; more specifically the implications of the movement to creative literature and its ramifications will be analysed to evaluate its importance. For, while a certain amount of sociological data on the emergence of the purist movement has been examined by writers on the subject,<sup>3</sup> the literary sources bearing on it have hitherto been largely neglected. Furthermore, a study of instances of language prescription, which is the main characteristic of the movement, can be revealing for both the linguist and the cultural historian.

### *The Influence of Caldwell's Writings*

The intellectual background to Tamil nationalism has already been dealt with in recent studies making it unnecessary to elaborate on it here. Suffice it to say that certain statements by European missionary scholars like Percival, Winslow, Caldwell, Pope and others kindled a sense of pride among Tamils about their heritage. The writings of these early Indologists contributed in no small measure to the discovery and interpretation of their past by Tamil scholars and writers. The enthusiasm and thrill with which the European savants presented the salient features of Tamil language and literature, antiquities and religion also instilled in these Tamil scholars a notion of uniqueness about their past glory that set them apart from other races and peoples of India, especially the Brahmin community, (broadly identified as Aryans) who were portrayed as traditionally hostile to Tamil and constantly conspiring to elevate Sanskrit at the expense of Tamil—through a process of 'Aryanization' or 'Sanskritization'<sup>4</sup>. Robert Caldwell (1814 - 1891) was probably the first to adumbrate the idea.



It was supposed by the Sanskrit Pandits (by whom everything with which they were acquainted was referred to a Brahmanical origin), and too hastily taken for granted by the earlier European scholars, that the Dravidian languages, though differing in many particulars from the North Indian idioms, were equally with them derived from Sanskrit...This representation...and the supposition of the derivation of the Dravidian languages from Sanskrit, though entertained in the past generation, is now known to be entirely destitute of foundation...The Orientalists referred to were also unaware that true Dravidian words, which form the great majority of the words in the southern vocabularies, are placed by native grammarians in a different class from the...derivatives from Sanskrit and honoured with the epithets 'national words' and 'pure words'...Tamil however the most highly cultivated *ab intra* of all Dravidian idioms can dispense with its Sanskrit altogether, if need be, and not only stand alone but flourish without its aid, and by dispensing with it rises to a purer and more refined style...So completely has this jealousy of Sanskrit pervaded the minds of the educated classes amongst the Tamilians, that a Tamil poetical composition is regarded as in accordance with good taste and worthy of being called classical, not in proportion to the amount of Sanskrit it contains, as would be the case in some other dialects, but in proportion to its freedom from Sanskrit...Even in prose compositions on religious subjects in which a larger amount of Sanskrit is employed than in any other department of literature, the proportion of Sanskrit which has found its way into Tamil is not greater than the amount of Latin contained in corresponding compositions in English...Through the predominant influence of the religion of the Brahmins the majority of the words expressive of religious ideas in actual use in modern Tamil are of Sanskrit origin and though there are equivalent Dravidian words which are equally appropriate and in some instances more so, such words have gradually become obsolete, and are now confined to the poetical dialect...In Tamil.. few Brahmins



have written anything worthy of preservation. The language has been cultivated and developed with immense zeal and success by native Tamilians and the highest rank in Tamil literature which has been reached by a Brahmin is that of a commentator. The commentary of Parimelazhagar on the *Kural* of Tiruvalluvar...is the most classical production written in Tamil by a Brahmin.<sup>6</sup>

These remarks made by Caldwell in his lengthy introduction under the sub-heading 'The Dravidian Languages independent of Sanskrit' have had such an abiding influence over subsequent generations of Tamil scholars that they merit closer scrutiny. Phrases such as "pure words", "religion of the Brahmins", "native Tamilians" and "freedom from Sanskrit", set in motion a train of ideas and movements whose repercussions and consequences went beyond the field of philology. Many socio-political and cultural movements among the Tamils during the last hundred years have without doubt been influenced in one way or another by the statements of Caldwell: the non-Brahmin movement, the self-respect movement, the pure-Tamil movement, the quest for the ancient Tamil religion, the Tamil (*ical*) music movement, the anti-Hindi agitation and the movement for an independent Tamil State, not to speak of the general revivalist movement of Tamil literature and culture, owe, in different ways and degrees, something to Caldwell's zealous writings.

### *Sundaram Pillai's Contribution*

Be that as it may, it was P. Sundaram Pillai (1855 - 1897) who introduced some of these ideas into Tamil literature.<sup>7</sup> In his dramatic poem *Manonmaniyam* (1891) Sundaram Pillai made an innovation in the matter of the invocatory verse. Till then it was customary for authors to invoke a deity or deities at the beginning of a work. Sundaram Pillai wrote a "prayer to Goddess Tamil" as the invocatory verse.<sup>8</sup> Composed in the *kali* meter which lends itself to singing,<sup>9</sup> the verse has since remained a model in Tamil literature.<sup>10</sup> In 49 of the 57 lines of the verse, Sundaram Pillai paid homage to Goddess Tamil in a diction that was charged

with emotion and ecstasy. Its impeccable literary quality is indisputable. But what concerns us here is its content. Sundaram Pillai made the following assertions: (a) Deccan is a distinctive division of the country (India), (b) Dravidam is pre-eminent among its constituents, (c) Tamil has universal recognition and fame, (d) Tamil is like the eternal God, (e) Tamil is the 'parent' of all the Dravidian languages, and (f) Unlike Sanskrit (which became extinct) Tamil is a living tongue (ever young). In making these statements the author compares works in both Sanskrit and Tamil and asserts that Tamil works are superior in their imagination, morality, piety and social justice. For instance he says that those who know the *Kural* well will never accept the laws of Manu which discriminates between different castes and prescribes differing moral codes and justice. Likewise, he says that those who are captivated by the enthralling *Tiruvassagam* will not waste their time in chanting the *Vedas*.

Sundaram Pillai was one of the pioneers in the study of the history of Tamil literature and there is no doubt that some of his contributions are noteworthy.<sup>11</sup> He was also active in other fields like religious studies in the 1880s propounding the theory that the early religion of the Tamils was based on the *Agamas* which were later corrupted by the Brahmins who tried to reconcile the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. In this he was ably supported by J. M. Nallaswami Pillai (1864-1920) who started a monthly called *Siddhanta Deepika* or *Light of Truth* in 1897 which served for many years as the rallying forum for non-Brahmin Saiva protagonists. However, Nallaswami Pillai was not anti-Sanskrit like Vedachalam.<sup>12</sup>

It is true that Sundaram Pillai was also drawing on certain Tamil literary sources which were jealous of Sanskrit and had portrayed Tamil as equal or superior to it. In fact, it is evident from the *Bhakti* poems of the Pallava period (circa seventh century AD) that Tamil was beginning to be cherished as a sacred language and hence equal to Sanskrit.<sup>13</sup> But it is in the works of the late medieval authors like Kumarakuruparar, Sivapragasa Swami, Paranjoti Munivar, Karunaipragasan and the author of *Tamil Vidu Toothu* and others that



we hear strident voices contemptuous of Sanskrit and placing Tamil on a divine pedestal.<sup>14</sup> And yet these voices were limited in their range of 'knowledge'. Sundaram Pillai imbibed the arguments of Caldwell and made them the bases of a new religious creed. Furthermore, his predecessors had no 'scientific' authority to back up their statements. They were also not hostile to Brahmins as such. But Sundaram Pillai was apparently drawing on the philological discoveries of Caldwell and others and giving his statements the stamp of history, sociology, anthropology and philology.<sup>15</sup> Naturally his pronouncements acquired enduring prestige.

Another contemporary of Sundaram Pillai needs to be mentioned here. V. G. Suryanarayana Sastri (1870 - 1903), who was a graduate of the Madras University and Professor and Head of the Department of Tamil at Madras Christian College, had changed his name into Paritimalkalaighanar (Pariti=Surya, mal=Narayana, Kalaighanar=Sastri), a pure-Tamil form of his original Sanskrit name.<sup>16</sup> Sastri too was influenced by the writings of Caldwell and wrote a book on the Tamil language. He also wrote poetry, plays and novels. He adopted a classical style in his writings which made them somewhat difficult and heavy. However, he was sensitive to new ideas and trends and was enthusiastic about innovations<sup>17</sup>. He was for sometime the joint editor of *Nanapotini*, a periodical published since 1897 in Madras by M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866 - 1947). In fact, Sastri began serialising his novel *Mathivanan*—which he titled in English, 'A classical Tamil story'—from the first issue of the magazine.

### *Early Influences on Maraimalai Adikal*

It is significant that the founder of the pure-Tamil movement had close ties with Sundaram Pillai and Suryanarayana Sastri both of whom laid the foundations for the movement. S. Vedachalam Pillai (1876 - 1950), who changed his name into Maraimalai Adikal after he started the pure-Tamil movement, was a Vellala from Nagapattinam in Thanjavur district. At the age of nineteen (1895) Vedachalam went to



Trivandrum along with his Tamil mentor, Narayanasamy Pillai, to meet Sundaram Pillai who had also studied under the same teacher. It would appear that Vedachalam had made a good impression on the Professor who gave him a testimonial recommending him for a post in colleges.<sup>1\*</sup> Vedachalam returned to Trivandrum the next year and spent about three months working as a tutor and delivering lectures on religion. During this period he came into contact with Nallaswami Pillai who was then a District Magistrate in Chittoor and very much in need of help to edit his Tamil version of *Siddhanta Deepika*. Vedachalam worked in the journal for some time before joining the staff at the Madras Christian College. As has been remarked earlier, Suryanarayana Sastri was the head of the Tamil Department there and Vedachalam worked as a Tamil pandit in the College from 1898 to 1911. Sastri died prematurely in 1903 (within two years of the demise of C. W. Tamotharam Pillai <sup>1\*</sup> whose tutelage was valuable and fruitful for his academic career) but Vedachalam must have had close connections with him for at least five years.

Thus we see that before launching the pure-Tamil movement, Vedachalam had a preparatory period during which he had the benefit of learning and discussing matters with active and eminent personalities like Sundaram Pillai, Nallaswami Pillai and Suryanarayana Sastri who were propagating the "ideas concerning the antiquity and cultural self-sufficiency of the Dravidians". It is probable that there were also other influences that shaped Vedachalam's ideas<sup>2\*</sup>.

### *The Genesis of the Tanittamil Movement*

The genesis of the pure-Tamil movement has been described, *albeit* dramatically by the biographers, of Vedachalam.<sup>21</sup> It is said that while discussing the poetry of Saint Ramalingar (1823 - 1874) with his daughter Neelayathadevi, Vedachalam opined that in a particular line the pure-Tamil word *yakki* (body) would have been more apposite and aesthetically more satisfying than the word *tekam* which was of Sanskrit origin.<sup>22</sup> At the end of the discussion they decided to use thence-

forth pure Tamil words in their speeches and writings. In accordance with that decision, both father and daughter changed their names to Maraimalai Adikal and Neelambikai respectively. Likewise, his journal *Nanacekaram* was renamed *Arivukkadal* and his institution, *Samarasa Sanmarga Sangam*, was redesignated *Potu nilaik Kalakam*. These developments, of course, took place over a period of time. However, historically speaking, we may consider 1915 as the year in which Vedachalam launched the movement. It is indeed interesting to speculate on its timing when we recall the fact that the Justice Party—officially called at the beginning the South Indian Liberal Federation (SILF)—came into being that year.<sup>23</sup> The organisation announced its birth with the publication of “The Non-Brahmin Manifesto” and proclaimed its aim to promote and protect the political interests of non-Brahmin caste Hindus. If nothing else, Vedachalam would appear to have chosen the perfect moment to “eliminate” Sanskrit—a language identified with Brahmins—from the Tamil scene. In other words, as much as the SILF strove to “free” South Indian socio-political life from Brahmin domination, Vedachalam too wanted to “free” Tamil language and literature (and religion) from Sanskritic influences. Both movements were mutually complementary. Furthermore, it may be pointed out that in spite of his professed abandonment of “non-spiritual public activities” and retreat to his “*Ashram*” in Pallavaram in 1911, he did participate actively in both the anti-Hindi agitations of 1937 and 1948—addressing public meetings and publishing pamphlets.<sup>24</sup>

We may now delineate Vedachalam’s concept of pure-Tamil. As it was one of his main preoccupations, he has written about it at different places in his works. In brief, he argues that language is the basis of civilizations and hence its preservation and vitality is essential for a race like the Tamils; at all times it is the elite which has the capacity to direct the development of a language; the letters of the Tamil alphabet are sufficient and adequate to express all the necessary sounds and hence no reform is required; alien words will corrupt both the language and its speakers. But let his words speak for themselves :



That the Tamils were highly civilized in the past is not only deducible from their ancient literature but is demonstrated also by the researches of Oriental Scholars. Caldwell writes: "The primitive Dravidians do not appear to have been by any means a barbarous and degraded people. Whatever may have been the condition of the forest tribes, it cannot be doubted that the Dravidians properly so called, had acquired at least the elements of civilization prior to the arrival amongst them of the Brahmins"...In any case Dravidian civilization was predominant in India before the coming of the Aryans... The Dravidians were probably in a much more advanced stage of civilization...

Now, it is time we try to get at an idea of the factors that have contributed to the building up of such a Civilization...It is the peculiar good fortune of the Tamils that those halcyon days produced among them thinkers and writers of the right type, differing in this respect from their brethren of such contemporary western civilized nations as the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Chaldean, the Aryan, etc. It is because of this vital difference that the Tamil Civilization endures against odds while others remain merely as archaeological curiosities. The language used by the Tamils continues alive and grows while the rest are all respectable dead languages. It is to impress this fact on our mind that the late lamented Sundaram Pillai sang: 'Oh! Tamil: If the whole world had been yours before the birth of the Aryan tongue which contains the four Vedas, is it too much to say that ye are the first-born and eternal speech.' To those who deeply consider all these facts it must be obvious that this enduring characteristic of the Tamil civilization is not a little attributable to its birth from the loins of ancient Tamil poets and scholars who bravely, wisely and unflinchingly held up the standard of Tamil culture. Writers of over 1,800 years ago were careful to practise the art of writing in pure, well-chosen, simple and virile Tamil words. They would not weaken its strength and



get themselves demoralised by indiscriminately admitting into its fold any extraneous word. A language loses its vitality if it is needlessly and thoughtlessly corrupted. So also a class of people becomes disintegrated and weak by harmful admixture. The great and deserving merit of the Tamilians is that, for more than fifty centuries, they have used their language with great care and vigilance and kept it so pure and undefiled, without disintegrating it by reckless mixture with Sanskrit words, that we who are their descendants are able to speak now almost the same language they spoke then and derive the same enjoyment they had of their productions as if they had been the productions of our own age. For such legacies, is it possible for any of us to make an adequate return in an appropriate manner?<sup>25</sup>

These statements and claims need no explication. The author's indebtedness to Caldwell and Sundaram Pillai is obvious. But what is most striking is his notion of the role of thinkers and poets in the growth of the language. While his idea of the past is certainly romantic, his prescription for the preservation and development of the language is elitist and betrays utter voluntarism. In it lies the strength and weakness of the movement he initiated.

Because of the fervour with which he presented his case and the prevailing socio-cultural milieu, Vedachalam's call had considerable attraction. Although the number of people with total commitment to the cause was always small, it had, initially atleast, a certain vogue that was out of proportion to its actual strength. Given the fact that Vedachalam travelled around in South India and Sri Lanka to deliver lectures he established contacts and changing names became fashionable among certain Tamil scholars, especially those who had some grounding in traditional literary scholarship. One of his early followers was Uruthirakodeeswarar who also lived in Sri Lanka for a few years. Another follower was S. Balasundaram who changed his name to Ilavalakanar<sup>26</sup> and wrote a number of books on Sangam literature. Some aspects of the linguistic implications of the Tamil purist

movement has been treated by E. Annamalai in a recent paper.<sup>27</sup> As has been mentioned earlier, the literary background will be considered here in greater detail.

Puristic movements in languages are not new, nor are they entirely modern phenomena. However, it may be correct to say that such movements have a tendency to be present in situations where national sentiments are awakened or strong.<sup>28</sup> The essence of purism has been aptly summarised by Wexler.

People have also frequently shown an inclination to direct the development of their language by proposing that certain existing linguistic elements be either dropped or retained while still other elements be introduced into their language. These activities of labelling and regulating linguistic elements are invariably characterised by recourse to some previously defined preferential norms, usually consciously formulated by the native speakers themselves. The terms "purism" and "puristic trends" are widely used to designate instance of language evaluation and regulation where speakers are generally opposed to elements in their language.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Basis for the Movement*

The Tamil purist movement had as its object elimination of foreign elements like Sanskrit (and English) words that had found and were finding their way into Tamil.<sup>30</sup> These were to be replaced by native elements. (In practice the attack on English was less vehement and often purely symbolic. For as we shall see, Vedachalam himself wrote frequently in English and as time went on, particularly after the anti-Hindi agitations, argued for the retention of English as the main language. In a peculiarly patronising tone he once wrote: "therefore, the safe, precious and inspiring examples to be followed for building up a solid and substantial future are available only to the English and the Tamils").<sup>31</sup>



Viewed historically, one might *a priori* concede that there was a felt need for crying halt to the indiscriminate and sometime wanton use of Sanskrit words in Tamil. As part of the commentatorial literature, a style of prose evolved in Tamil using a very high percentage of Sanskrit loan words without adapting them to the Tamil phonemic system, and translocating a great number of structural features of Sanskrit into Tamil. Furthermore, a poet like Tayumanavar (circa 1706 - 1744 AD) could write whole lines comprising Sanskrit words. This mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil was called *manipravala*, like a necklace of gems and corals. The Vaishnava philosophical writing excelled in this type of prose.<sup>32</sup>

Given their educational and social standing, the Brahmins were prone to adopt this style. But it must be pointed out that in the 18th and 19th centuries, the non-Brahmin caste Hindus too wrote, if not in *manipravala*, certainly in a highly Sanskritised idiom. With the increase in the reading public and the spread of popular education, there was a necessity to rectify this absurdity. Furthermore, *Virasoliyam*, the grammatical treatise (circa 12th century AD) had legitimized the *manipravala* style and subsequently a few commentators to the *Tolkappiyam* and the 17th century grammarian, Swaminatha Desigar, asserted that Sanskrit grammatical rules applied to Tamil as well. These trends naturally provoked reactions<sup>33</sup> among Tamil scholars and Vedachalam was, in a way, giving form and shape to such sentiments. But the manner of his reaction was extreme and, as will be shown below, in the end self-defeating. As long as the pure-Tamil movement overlapped with the general revivalist trend, it evoked general support. But the main thrust of the linguistic (and cultural) fervour was for the development of Tamil into new branches of knowledge and experience which basically required a sense of freedom and variety. But Vedachalam's concept of pure-Tamil was in effect a return to the glorious past—the time of the *Canror*, the Sangam poets<sup>34</sup>—whose poetic language was supposed to be free from Sanskrit admixture. In choosing or opting for the old Tamil, undoubtedly archaic and unintelligible to large



numbers of people in modern times, Vedachalam was trying to swim against the current. There were two issues involved and he mixed the two together.

### *The Traditional Diglossia Situation*

It is well known that traditionally diglossia has existed in Tamil in the form of *Centamil*, classical language, and *Koduntamil*, vulgar language, and these two "have long-established, functionally separate roots in the same society."<sup>35</sup> Besides the above classification, which was fundamental, the grammarians also spoke of the *valakku*, spoken, colloquial (style) and *ceyyul* literary, poetic (style). Until the first quarter of this century, the spoken language was rarely committed to writing. (Western missionary scholars like Beschi,<sup>36</sup> Caldwell and Pope<sup>37</sup> were quick to perceive the diglossia situation and came to terms with it.)

Partly as a result of the impact of English and also owing to the changes in Tamil Society, the main effort in modern Tamil has been towards the creation of an effective, simple and standard language. This drive manifested itself first in prose and subsequently in poetry. The achievement of a person like Arumuka Navalar (1822-1876) is precisely this. Although he never used colloquialisms "he wrote simple, elegant but grammatically correct prose."<sup>38</sup> Navalar, who had a hand in the translation of the Bible, benefited from his education in a Methodist missionary school in Jaffna and made many innovations in writing. Later, in his polemical writings against the Christians and Hindus, he approached the speech rhythm of his times. He was also the first to introduce public speaking in Tamil.<sup>39</sup> Navalar, of course, used Sanskrit loan words in Tamil but adapted to the Tamil phonemic system.

Similarly, Subramania Bharathi (1882-1921), the father of modern Tamil poetry, was committed to writing in an idiom that could be readily understood by the average person. The very success of Bharathi and his place in modern Tamil literature is mainly due to his use of simple, popular

language. Thus we see that, both in prose and poetry, the mainstream was towards 'modernisation' and 'simplification' of the literary language.<sup>40</sup> The task was not easy and the process is still on. Naturally, there was and is some opposition to this process of using an increasing amount of popular language. The question of a standard Tamil is still not settled. But Vedachalam's attempt to preserve not only classical Tamil but also make it free of Sanskrit was doubly retrogressive. It was an impossible task. But he persisted. Besides writing 'theoretical' essays on the subject of purism, language preservation and planning, Vedachalam endeavoured to preach by his own practice too. By 1916, he had already published nearly a dozen books which had Sanskrit words in them. It is probably true that even before 1916 he used Sanskrit words sparingly.<sup>41</sup> But he now set out to revise his works and began to expunge the Sanskrit words interspersed in them. As is to be expected, he was also interested in dictionary writing and the coining of terminology. Sociolinguists characterise such activity as part of the process of modernisation of a language, and Ferguson's observation is apt :

The efforts of language planners generally focus on the production of glossaries and dictionaries of new technical terms and on disputes about the proper form of new words, when the critical question seems to be that of assuring the consistent use of such forms by the appropriate sectors of the population.<sup>42</sup>

The purists in Tamil first took up positions in this matter (under the leadership of Vedachalam) during the 1930s when the need for text books and other reading material in Tamil led to some organised efforts. The Madras Presidency Tamil Association (with Government patronage and support) constituted a Committee for Scientific and Technical Terminology in 1934. It published initially a volume of ten thousand technical terms in Tamil pertaining to nine branches of study.<sup>43</sup> C. Rajagopalachari, as Chief Minister of Madras, was keenly interested in the project. (He was confident that science could be taught in Tamil but, given his family and social background, was not a purist.)<sup>44</sup>



### *Controversies over a Glossary*

During the time when the glossary was being prepared, "disputes about the proper form of new words" erupted. With the view to obtaining a consensus and greater participation of interested persons, the Committee conducted a number of seminars and conferences,<sup>45</sup> which also provided the forum for conflicting viewpoints. Basically there emerged (as is often the case till today) three points of view : (1) the 'cosmopolitan', (2) the 'Sanskritic' and (3) the 'puristic'. (In each school of thought there were extremists as well as moderates.)<sup>46</sup> Broadly speaking the English-educated liberals, especially those seriously concerned with the development of the sciences comprised the core of the cosmopolitans. They argued the case for the adoption of foreign (English) words into Tamil for efficacy, economy and expediency. They were aware of the need for intertranslatability.<sup>47</sup> The 'Sanskritic' school was predominantly championed by 'nationalists' and 'integrationists' who felt that Sanskrit was the fountain of technical vocabulary for the whole of India and, citing the analogy of Latin and Greek forming the base for technical terms in European languages, pleaded for leaning on Sanskrit. This school probably had many Brahmins supporting it.

The 'puristic' school marshalled all the evidence in support of the purity and self-sufficiency of Tamil and argued that the inherent nature of Tamil language (words being formed from roots) would facilitate the coining of precise and pleasing terms. Vedachalam's opinion may be seen in one of his books of essays.

Tamil is an independent language with a rich store of words capable of expressing in a skilful hand all kinds of thoughts that appear in the different branches of learning.<sup>48</sup>

The purists were also opposed to the use of *grantha* alphabets in Tamil, especially in technical terms. Vedachalam's daughter, Neelambikai, was active during this period and with the help and guidance of her father, published two dictionaries of Sanskrit loan words in Tamil and their equivalent pure Tamil

words.<sup>49</sup> She also wrote a monograph on the development of the Tamil language. Judging the various glossaries in Tamil dealing with science, law, administration, commerce and so on that have been published since then both in Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka, it would appear that the puristic school has had a definite impact.<sup>50</sup> But more often than not, the terms in the glossaries have not gained currency in usage. A leader published in the *Madras Mail* (28th May, 1927) seems to have registered the point:

Fortunately such purists do not control the growth of a language. That is the work of the common people. The purists may frown at slang, they may grumble that the language is being debased by slipshod and lazy talkers and writers, but fifty percent of what they condemn eventually finds its way into the language, to be defended by a later generation of purists as violently as the earlier fought for its exclusion. Language cannot be successfully cribbed, cabined and confined.<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the influence of Vedachalam and his followers on those engaged in the preparation of glossaries and dictionaries has been significant. But two important forms of discourse in the process of modernisation are the news and feature stories of the Press and Radio.<sup>52</sup>

### *Weaknesses of the Movement*

It is in this important aspect that the purists were always pushed to a defensive position, if not utter helplessness. The real problem insofar as Tamil was concerned was the existence of traditional diglossia and the urgency for a 'standard' language adequate for communication in the context of modern life. In that sense Vedachalam's grand crusade was really charging at the wind-mills; the actual battle was elsewhere. Nor was Vedachalam's campaign of any immediate importance or advantage for the ruling elite, who were quite happy with the English educational heritage.

Although Vedachalam made periodic sallies into the socio-political arena, he was never in the front line. Nor were his periodicals reaching the common man at any time. His journal had a



circulation of less than 300 copies. As a result, it was personalities like T. V. Kaliyanasundaranar (1883 - 1953), scholar, publicist, politician and pioneer trade unionist, or C. Rajagopalachari (1878 - 1972), statesman, scholar and writer, or Kalki (R. Krishnamurthi, (1897 - 1954), social worker, writer, organizer and journalist or C. N. Annadurai (1909 - 1968), politician, dramatist, orator, or P. Jeevanandam (1907 - 1963), agitator, trade unionist, publicist, who were decisive in shaping the form of the modern prose. The politicians, popularisers and propagandists used the language as a medium of communication. The newspapers in particular helped evolve a standard Tamil that was always close to the idiom of the people. And because Vedachalam and his disciples were restricted by their concept of classical and pure-Tamil they were never in the picture.

It is interesting to note that the novel too has played its role, *albeit* obliquely, in deflating the altruistic claims of the purists. Among the unforgettable characters created by Rajam Iyer (1872 - 1898) is the erudite but naive and impractical Tamil Pandit Adusapatti Ammaiyappa Pillai, who has since remained the prototype of a pedantic Tamil teacher speaking in an obsolete language. His flawless but fossilised and funny utterances are in sharp contrast to the lively and vibrant conversations of the other characters. Subsequent novelists, playwrights, cartoonists and film makers have often utilised such characters for evoking laughter<sup>55</sup>.

But the real weakness of the purist movement showed up in its inability to generate any form of literary creativity. For, starting with religious revivalism, it was more in literature that the Tamil Renaissance found its maximum outlet and noteworthy accomplishment. The novel, in particular, has been in vogue since 1876 and except for a handful of novels written now and then in pure-Tamil, all of them show a wide variety of linguistic patterns. Virtually all the dialectal forms have found their way into the novel. From Rajam Iyer, who wrote "the first real novel in the language,"<sup>54</sup> to Rajam Krishnan, the contemporary novelist who handles socio-political themes realistically, the novelists have touched upon all dimensions of the life of the people both in its private and public aspects. The history of modern Tamil prose is largely the history of the novel.<sup>55</sup> Some of the finest prose writers

like Rajam Iyer, Madhavaiya (1872 - 1925), Bharathi, Kalki, R. Shanmugasundaram, T. Janakiraman, T. M. C. Ragunathan, G. Alagiriswamy (1923 - 1970), D. Jayakanthan, S. Ponnuthurai, K. Daniel and L. S. Ramamirtham are also remarkable novelists. Many of them were also journalists.

Now, Vedachalam himself published two novels, *Kumutavalli* (1911) and *Kokilampal Kaditankal* (1921), in pure-Tamil. Both were adaptations from English works of fiction which are considered mediocre : the former, *Kumutavalli*, was a Tamilized work of a story by G. W. M. Reynolds (1809 - 1873). Vedachalam remarked in his lengthy English preface that the original was a celebrated work and he was rendering it into Tamil as an exemplary creation. This of course reflects on his literary taste and judgment.<sup>56</sup> But more than literary or aesthetic considerations, he was once again using the novel as a pretext for his puristic crusade.

Although the Tamil language is pliant and rich in vocabulary capable of conveying the finest shades of meanings, yet, in all the Tamil novels published in a decade or two, the diction is rendered very unwholesome by the introduction of unassimilated foreign words from Sanskrit and other languages and by the unhappy combination of words and phrases.<sup>57</sup>

Except for the fact that *Kumutavalli* was prescribed as a text for examinations held by the Universities of London, Madras, Annamalai and Sri Lanka at different times, it was never considered a serious work of fiction by Tamil readers. Apart from its rigid, archaic, monotonous and grave style, the content of the novel too was remote and unfamiliar—the story taking place in an imaginary Tamil Nad of the sixth or seventh century AD. “In his enthusiasm to maintain purity, Atikal even resorted to the use of certain archaic forms of literary expression,”<sup>58</sup> which found its peak in a work like this. Suryanarayana Sastri too wrote his *Mathivanan* in a language which “exhibits all the worst features of linguistic purism and the artificial introduction of stilted phrases.”<sup>59</sup> His disciple and biographer, N. Balarama Iyer (1875 - 1943), too wrote the novel *Leelai* (1897) in a similar style. These writers were probably motivated by the desire to see their works prescribed as literary texts for examinations.<sup>60</sup> But such attempts ceased with



the works of Vedachalam. The readers of fiction from the 1920s had access to a variety of novels that were being written in an easy and elegant style and hence had no patience for a language that was frequently unrecognisable to them. Thus ended the abortive attempt of the purists to enter the world of creative writing. It is true that a few poets like Bharathidasan (Subburathnam, 1891-1964) and his followers—Suratha, Mudiyaśan and Vaanidasan—were exponents of pure Tamil poetry. Bharathidasan was a disciple of Subramania Bharathi, but later embraced the Self-Respect and pure-Tamil movements. Due to his allegiance to the Dravida Kazhagam (D. K.) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (D. M. K.) doctrines he became popular among non-Brahmin readers and was the unofficial “Poet laureate” of the D. M. K. He was called *Paaventar*, king of poets. However, he never adopted archaisms and was also flexible and relatively simple in his style. But perhaps, because of his obsession with purism, the anti-Hindi movement, anti-Brahminism and other issues, his poetry suffered. Says Zvelebil: “Bharathidasan—only a few years after his death—sounds slogan-like, proclamative, flat and full of hollow rhetoric.”<sup>61</sup> This sums up the attempts of the purists to use their language as a literary medium.

### *The Manikkodi Group*

The most powerful and productive literary group that sprang in the 1930s was called after the short-lived but scintillating journal *Manikkodi*. It was started by two veteran journalists, K. Srinivasan and T. S. Sockalingam, with Va Raa (V. Ramaswami Iyengar, 1889 - 1951) as the editor. Va Raa, who was an admirer of Subramania Bharathi and wrote the first biography of him, made the journal the forum and centre for literary experimentation. He was one of those rare personalities who could inspire promising writers without patronising or inhibiting their ideas. Although the journal was inspired by patriotic and Gandhian ideals, it soon emerged as a magazine devoted to serious literature and criticism.

In the previous decades, V. V. S. Aiyar (1881 - 1925) had been the leading figure in literary activity.<sup>62</sup> He was the first to write original short stories in Tamil (1910) and also to introduce modern

literary criticism and comparative studies. The writers who gathered around *Manikkodi* had not studied Tamil as a discipline. They came to Tamil writing having studied Sanskrit, English, Philosophy, Economics, Medicine and so on. They were influenced by British, American and European literature between the two world wars, and of course by the achievement of Bengali writers. To some of them, literature was a vocation. Putumaipittan, (S. Virudachalam, 1906 - 1948), the greatest short story writer in Tamil, was one of the members of this group. He was (in spite of his pseudonym which meant "he who is mad after novelty"), well grounded in traditional Tamil literature, which naturally gave him an edge over his fellow writers. As Zvelebil observes, some of his stories may be favourably "compared with highly developed story-writing of world literature."<sup>63</sup> But one person does not make a movement. Besides Putumaipittan, K. P. Rajagopalan (1902 - 1944), N. Pichamurti (1900 - 1976), B. S. Ramaiah, C. S. Chellappah, P. K. Sundararajan, Mauni, L. S. Ramamirtham and others wrote short stories, poems, new-verse, criticism, polemics and political commentaries. Most of these writers were romantics, whose individualism, aesthetic commitment and creative zeal called for felicitous, sensitive and unrestricted language and style. To them, pure Tamil was intellectually abhorrent. The sheer power of their works and the others who followed them established *marumalarchi natai*—the style of the renaissance—as the principal medium of literature and communication.<sup>64</sup>

These writers were not content with creative work alone. Bharathi and V. V. S. Aiyar had written occasional essays on the nature of literature. But these writers, concerned as they were primarily with contemporary literature and its problems, went into the question of the appropriate prose for different genres of literature and wrote penetrating articles on the subject. Va Raa was of the conviction that "one should write as one speaks."<sup>65</sup> But others like Pudumaipittan, C. S. Chellappah,<sup>66</sup> K. N. Subramanyan, N. Pichamurti and Ilangaiyarkon were more subtle. Their articles were analytical and persuasive. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, the illustrious editor of the Tamil Lexicon and one of the outstanding textual critics and literary historians, took a sober view of the problem and wrote in favour of simple and effective prose.<sup>67</sup> As he was a scholar with scientific objectivity and scru-



pulous exactitude, his support gave some moral strength to the creative writers who were standing up to the ferocious onslaught of the purists (and traditional Tamil scholars). The *Manikkodi* writers even got backing from an unexpected quarter. T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar (1882 - 1954), popularly called *Rasikamani* the 'connoisseur par excellence'—was a gentleman of means and leisure who spent his time in the enjoyment of poetry, especially in the company of selected friends. A sort of an anti-intellectual with an impressionistic approach and endowed with graceful eloquence, he was an institution by himself lending support to cultural movement. Being a gifted conversationalist, he was of the opinion that "you should write as you would speak." He never hesitated to use Sanskrit loan words if he felt it was appropriate although he was capable of coining words for new concepts.<sup>88</sup> Chidambaranatha Mudaliar was an intimate friend of C. Rajagopalachari and Kalki and wrote regularly to the weekly, *Kalki*. Primarily concerned with cultural values, he resented the regimentation and pedantry of the purist school.

### *The New Anti - Purist Writers*

Yet another factor worked against purism from about the 1950s. Both in South India and Sri Lanka, post-Independence problems created the conditions for the emergence of a band of writers who came from the traditionally oppressed sections of Tamil society, that is, the lower castes. Many of them were attracted by Marxism and communist organisations which provided them with a world view and also the confidence to struggle against exploitation and articulate their thoughts and feelings freely. As might be expected, their level of literary education was somewhat low. But they ushered in new experiences and visions into fiction, poetry and drama using hitherto unheard of dialects, idioms and expressions.<sup>89</sup> They were indifferent to "correct" Tamil itself as taught by school teachers; pure Tamil was of no concern to them: they in fact openly despised it and ridiculed its proponents. To them linguistic restrictions or restraints were akin to social and political oppression and all such barriers had to be broken down. Harrison's general observation in a slightly different context seems applicable here :

Where language differences tend to coincide with class distinctions, language conflict is apt to coincide accordingly with the lines of social conflict, greatly increasing it. And if the language of the lower classes is spoken by them at a time when they increase in numbers, or when they gain a bigger share in political and economic power in the society, then the language quarrels will be part of a general process of their elevation in the society and of their gradual bid for increasing social power.<sup>70</sup>

### *The Decline of the Tanittamil Movement*

Viewed in sociological terms, the exclusiveness of the pure Tamil movement, its alienation from the literary mainstream and the social pressures from below sealed its fate. "By the Thirties, pedantic, scholarly writing was practically dead and the purist trend was sterile."<sup>71</sup>

This inescapable weakening of the purist dogma was bound to reflect on the movement itself. Nambi Arooran has analysed the percentage of Sanskrit words in Vedachalam's works at different times (see Table I).

Explaining the increased percentage of Sanskrit words in Vedachalam's later works, Nambi Arooran conjectures that his failing health and old age vitiated the vigorous pursuance of his ideal. But it would be more logical to surmise that Vedachalam

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE OF SANSKRIT WORDS IN VEDACHALAM'S WORKS

<i>Year</i>	<i>General theme</i>	<i>Literary theme</i>	<i>Religious theme</i>	<i>Average</i>
1902	21	7	22	16
1911	28	10	16	15
1921	9	3	8	7
1931	6	5	5	5
1941	10	9	9	9

had reached the limits of pure-Tamil writing and the inevitable compromise was taking place. Such a line of argument is strengthened by the fact that while dealing with non-literary themes he



had perforce to use more Sanskrit words. The table indicates that the percentage of Sanskrit was highest in works pertaining to general themes. This fact is crucial. The whole point of developing a language for modern needs calls for quick and easy communication in a medium that would cause the least delay and confusion, Vedachalam himself must have recognised this problem as is shown by the fact that at times "he found it necessary to limit his pure Tamil style while communicating with his readers." In other words, he had to make concessions to his reader. But, by and large, he stuck to his position arguing that the readers of his works should make an effort "to catch up with his high and pure style which was the only way to increase one's vocabulary" and knowledge of the language. It is interesting to note that Raghuvira, one of the most prominent and enthusiastic proponents of the pure-Hindi movement, once retorted to Nehru (who had complained that though a Hindi speaker himself, he found it difficult to understand documents in pure-Hindi), that "the attitude of the educated Hindi speakers to the new style should be 'that of a learner, a receiver.'"<sup>73</sup>

As has been indicated earlier, the purist movement lost momentum in the late thirties and early forties. Some causes have been pointed out; a rounded statement may be attempted now. Wexler adduces four major reasons for the ultimate discrepancy between prescription and performance in language purism.<sup>74</sup> (1) Regulators are frequently not consistent in implementing their principles. (2) Regulators may frequently disagree with one another, and a single trend may include supporters who differ in their interpretations. (3) Prescriptive norms may change through time with the result that new recommendations can both supersede and co-exist with earlier recommendations. (4) The public fails to heed prescriptive pronouncements.

These four factors have, in varying degrees, been operating in the Tamil purist movement too. For instance, while the extremists would have no Sanskrit words at all, the moderates were prepared to accommodate them provided they were changed to suit Tamil orthography and pronunciation. We have also pointed out the inconsistencies in Vedachalam's practice<sup>75</sup> and the compromises he had to make.

*Socio-Political Aspects*

We must conclude now with a few remarks on the socio-political aspects of the purist movement. It was pointed out at the beginning that the launching of the purist movement coincided with the formation of the SILF (Justice Party). Notwithstanding the differences between politics and culture in the tempo of their development, one is able to see certain broad parallels in the rise and fall of the Justice Party and the pure-Tamil movement. Both were started by non-Brahmin upper caste personalities drawing support from educated, wealthy and pro-British personages. They were never really popular movements; under their broad slogan of Dravidian nationalism and its ostensible unity were hidden several conflicts, contradictions and confusion. In the thirties, the Justice Party ran out of fuel being superseded by the Self-Respect movement, which in turn gave way to the more militant D. K. and D. M. K. Likewise, the pure-Tamil movement merged with the anti-Hindi movement in the Thirties and was later absorbed into the ideology of the D. M. K. In Sri Lanka it later became part of the Federal Party's revivalist doctrine. Washbrook's observation on the Justice Party is illuminating :

The South was supposed to be the scene of a great Brahmin/Non-Brahmin drama but, between the early 1920s and 1936, this was taking place off-stage. The Non-Brahmin Justice Party in office had dismantled its ideology and had shown itself very willing to support any Brahmin who would support it. By 1930 it was seriously considering offering membership to Brahmins. The British, who had played a large part in engineering caste animosity, had lost interest in the controversy.<sup>70</sup>

Although caste, religion and language served at a particular juncture to mobilize loyalties and furnish a sense of identification they are not the real bases for politics and power. For nationalism, along with modernisation, is simultaneously the cause and effect for the death of old communities dying and the birth of new communities. In this process, loyalties



and priorities too frequently fluctuate and change. Class interests overtake caste interests though sometimes both can co-exist and overlap. Language bonds are not free from political manipulation.<sup>77</sup>

The middle class which spearheaded the literary renaissance did not wish to be contained within puristic boundaries. The claims and boasts of the purists doubtless gave a sense of pride and self satisfaction to some sections of the petty bourgeoisie. But such claims were not to be taken seriously for actual practice. For the middle class, while paying lip service to pure-Tamil and such other cultural symbolisms were set on a cosmopolitan course. Life and literature, precept and practice were neatly separated. Language was also a handy weapon. So when the anti-Hindi agitation flared up, pure-Tamil enthusiasts like Eelathu Civanantha Atikal and others began to campaign for it. The pure-Tamil movement became a past relic, a hobby horse of the monolingual Tamil teachers in South India and Sri Lanka, who refer to it while bemoaning their plight. The petty bourgeoisie itself prefers to be its own watchdog rather than allow the purist to dictate its correct expression. In Tamil Nadu, under the guise of fighting against Hindi, English continues to dominate the administration, courts and education. "By putting forward English as the only weapon with which the Hindi offensive can be met the most conservative and powerful sections in our country cleverly hide the fact that their real object is a refusal to let Tamil grow and a determination to keep English in the place which Tamil, and not Hindi should occupy."<sup>78</sup>

It is an irony of history to note that Vedachalam, who probably spoke and wrote more about the development of Tamil and its potentialities, should have eventually argued for the retention of English as the common language of India.<sup>79</sup> Using all his skills he made a case for preferring English. With that the pure-Tamil movement not only lost its momentum, but also its very *raison d'être*. The writers and communicators of the new generation, have categorically rejected the restraints of purism. Yet we must concede a

formative significance to the prose of Vedachalam which, taken in conjunction with that of some of those whom he influenced, was to modify today's language.

### NOTES

1. Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement*, Bombay, 1965 ; Eugene F. Irschik, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969 ; Marguerite Ross Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton, N. J., 1976 ; R. Bhaskaran, *Sociology of Politics*, Bombay, 1967 ; R. Suntharalingem, *Politics and National Awakening in South India, 1852 - 1891*, Tucson, Arizona, 1974 ; S. J. Tambiak, "The Politics of Language in India and Ceylon," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. I, Part 3, Cambridge, July, 1967 ; pp 215 - 240. Harold Schiffman, "Language, Linguistics and Politics in Tamilnad" *DRAVLINGPEX*, Vol. 5, No. 2, November, 1972.
2. Joytirindra Das Gupta, *Language Conflict and National Development*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970 ; Prakash Karat, *Language and Nationality Politics in India*, Madras, 1973 ; Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge, 1974 ; Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon : Dilemmas of a New Nation*, Princeton, N. J., 1960.
3. K. Nambi Arooran, *The Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism, 1905 - 1944, with special reference to the works of Maraimalai Atikal*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of London, 1976. Also, Irschick, *op. cit.*, pp. 275 - 310.
4. For a sample of these, see D. Rajarigam, *The History of Tamil Christian Literature*, Bangalore, 1958, pp. 8 - 11. It is of interest to note that the writings of two other Christian missionary scholars in the present century influenced the "Dravidian nationalist" historians and linguists : Father Henry Heras (1888 - 1955) whose work on the Indus scripts favouring a Dravidian origin for them boosted the morale of many an anti-Aryan scholar. Father S. Gnanapragasam of Jaffna, Sri Lanka (1875 - 1947), wrote among other things, a *Comparative Etymological Dictionary of Tamil* (incomplete) which argued that Tamil was the basic language. Father Gnanapragasam who knew more than twenty languages was an indefatigable worker and was honoured in Germany with an issue of a stamp. His ideas have influenced later Tamil writers like K. Appadurai, Devaneyan, Ilakkuvanar and M. Kana-pathi Pillai.
5. Unfortunately Tamil literary history and scholarship provide ample examples of such an attitude. A modern scholar like K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (1892 - 1976), whose researches on many aspects of South Indian culture earned him the well-deserved esteem of scholars all over the world, had a predilection for extolling Sanskrit as the mainspring of Tamil literature and philosophy. Cf. *History of South*



- India*, Oxford, 1958, p. 330 ; also *Dravidian Literatures*, Madras, 1949. W. Krishnaswamy Iyer, a judge of the Madras High Court, once remarked that " Sanskrit is the parent of all Indian literatures including Tamil ; for much that is claimed in Tamil as original is indebted to conceptions which are entirely to be found in the field of Sanskrit literature, " *Madras Mail*, 6th May, 1910, quoted by Nambi Aroorant *op. cit.*, p. 341. At the other end of the spectrum one sees modern Tamil enthusiasts with scholarly pretensions like G. Devaneyan, K. Appadurai Pillai, S. Ilakkuvanar and others asserting that Tamil was the first language in the world. Such emotionally charged statements and positions " can sometimes be quite comical and fallacious in content," for, these men " are very often not professional linguists and, as propagandisers of a particular position, frequently act on emotion rather than on objective examination of facts. " *Vide*, Paul N. Wexler, *Purism and Language*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1974, p. 7. Although the author deals primarily with modern Ukrainian and Belorussian Nationalism, his comparative data is instructive ; for a critique of Brahminism, see B. N. Nair, *The Dynamic Brahmin*, Bombay, 1959.
6. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, Second edition (revised), London, 1875, pp. 45 - 51.
  7. For biographical details, see *Professor P. Sundaram Pillai Commemoration Volume*, K. K. Pillai (ed.), Madras, 1957 ; S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamil Cudar Manikal*, Third edition, Madras, 1959.
  8. For a detailed study of Tamil Invocatory Poems, see K. Kailasapathy, *Adiyum Mudiym*, Madras, 1970, pp. 64 - 119.
  9. It may be recalled that during the D. M. K. rule, the Tamil Nadu Government had declared this poem as the " national " anthem. Even before that, it was sung before commencing of Tamil literary meetings.
  10. Says Xavier S. Thani Nayagam : " The burden of these lines has been a recurrent theme during the last sixty years and has not been superseded even now as the main undertone of patriotic Tamil writing " (" Regional Nationalism in Twentieth Century Tamil Literature, " *Tamil Culture*, Vol. X, No. 1, 1963, p. 3). More than 35 poets have written similar poems on Tamil since Sundaram Pillai. For a representative collection of these poems, see T. Swaminatha Velautham Pillai (ed.), *Molyarasi*, second edition, Madras, 1971.
  11. *Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature*, Madras, 1895.
  12. K. M. Balasubramaniam, *The Life of J. M. Nallaswami Pillai*, Annamalaiagar, 1965, pp. 61 - 98. Nallaswami Pillai was closely associated with the founding of the Saiva Siddhanta Samajam in 1905 and was for many years its senior adviser and organiser. After a few years of association, Vedachalam kept away from the activities of the Samajam. It is likely that in Vedachalam's view Nallaswami Pillai was too moderate.

13. K. Kailasapathy, *Pandai Tamilar Valyum Valipatum (Studies in the Religion and Society of the Early Tamils)*, Madras, 1966, pp. 120 - 126 ; N. Vanamamalai, *Tamilar Varalarum Panpatum (History and Culture of the Tamils)*, Madras, 1966, pp 42 - 62.
14. *Adiyum Mudiyum*, p. 108.
15. It is an indication of the English-educated, middle-class-oriented nature of the revivalist movement that Caldwell's seminal work—*Comparative Grammar*—remained untranslated into Tamil till 1959. And yet it was the most invoked work in language polemics in Tamil during the last few decades. Isolated passages from his works were often cited as quotations—often out of their context—by Tamil scholars to buttress the arguments about the antiquity, purity, independence and self-sufficiency of their language, *vis-a-vis* Sanskrit and Hindi. For the translation of Caldwell's work, see *Tiravida Molikalin Oppilakkanam*, translated by K. Govindan and T. Singaravelu, Madras, 1959. The continued use of English as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges was also a reason for the delay in the translation. For a balanced view on these matters written in Tamil, *vide* S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tiravida Molikalil Araychi*, Madras, 1956. It is only recently, with the development of linguistics as a discipline in Universities in Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka, that Caldwell has been objectively evaluated.
16. N. Subramaniam (ed.), *Suryanarayana Sastri Centenary Volume*, Madras, 1970. See K. Kailasapathy, "*Paritimalkalaigannar—marumati-pitu*," in the volume.
17. Sastri tried to introduce the English sonnet in Tamil by publishing *Tanipacurat tokai*, Madras, 1901. G. U. Pope translated some of them into English and wrote an Introduction too. Sastri also wrote a treatise on dramaturgy called *Natakaviyal*, Madras, 1901.
18. It is interesting to note that a few years later, Vedachalam gave an almost identical testimonial to T. V. Kaliyanasundaranar who was applying for a teaching post at Wesley College, Madras. *Vide*, *Valkkai Kurip-pukal*, second edition, Madras, 1969, p. 164.
19. C. W. Tamotaram Pillai (1832 - 1901) from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, was in many ways, one of the most remarkable scholars of the last century. He was the first graduate of the Madras University, passing the B. A. degree examination in 1858. He later qualified and practised law and retired as a High Court judge in 1890. A key figure in the Tamil renaissance, he critically edited and published several literary and grammatical classics. An outstanding intellectual, he was instrumental in creating a love for Tamil among the educated people of his days. "Without doubt he was the one who was first engaged in the rediscovery of the earliest classical literature...Perseverance and modesty were the two most characteristic features of this man, whose greatness



- and merits have never been acknowledged," Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, Leiden, 1973, p. 269; S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Tamil Cutar Manikal*; also see K. Kailasapathy, Foreword to V. Muttucumaraswamy's *C. W. Tamotarampillai*, Jaffna, 1971. Tamotaram Pillai was very fond of Sastri (having been one of his examiners), and constantly encouraged him in his pursuits. At the death of Pillai, Sastri wrote a moving elegy: see his *Tamil Pulavar Carithiram*, sixth edition, Madras, 1968, pp. 92 - 96.
20. Vedachalam's views on Saiva Siddhanta was largely shaped by his mentor and model, Somasundara Nayagar (1846 - 1901), who treated him as his son. At Nayagar's death, Vedachalam wrote a long elegy. It was later published, *Comacuntara Kanciyakkam*, third edition, Madras, 1941. Another person who probably influenced Vedachalam was Naniyar Atikal (1873 - 1942), who was the Head of the Tirukkovalur *Math*. He was an enlightened person who did much for the revival of Tamil and Saivism. He was associated with the founding of the Saiva Siddhanta Samajam and it was largely due to his suggestion that Pandi Thurai Thevar, Zamindar of Palavanantham, founded the Madurai Tamil Sangam in 1901. See V. Sundaram, *Tavattiru Naniyar Atikal*, Madras, 1972, pp. 36 - 43. Vedachalam must have also imbibed his missionary zeal from his Christian teachers at the Wesleyan Mission High School.
  21. Pulavar Aracu, *Maraimalaiyatikal*, Madras, 1951; M. Tirunavukkaracu, *Maraimalaiyatikal Varalaru*, Madras, 1959. The later author is one of the sons of Vedachalam. For interesting and revealing reminiscences of the man, see T. V. Kaliyanasundaranar, *op. cit.*, pp. 163 - 169; also Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, pp. 309 - 328. But a critical biography and study of Vedachalam is yet to be published. That it is a desideratum need not be emphasised.
  22. For the poem and its English translation, see A. Balakrishnan, *English Renderings of Thiru Arutpa*, Madras, 1966, pp. 22 - 23. Vedachalam was influenced by Saint Ramalingar's life and works from which he derived his idea of a religious order.
  23. Irschick, *op. cit.*, pp. 47 - 48.
  24. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, p. 354, and the details cited in the footnotes. Perhaps Vedachalam's most important pamphlet was *Inti potu moliya?* (Is Hindi a common language?) serialised in his journal in 1937 and later printed and distributed freely by his disciple from Sri Lanka, Ilattuc Civananta Atikal.
  25. *Ancient and Modern Tamil Poets*, Pallavaram, Madras, 1939, pp. 12 - 15. The concluding lines of the passage quoted here reminds one of a similar sentiment expressed by Sundaram Pillai in his preface to *Manon-maniyam*. Vedachalam probably followed Sundaram Pillai in writing prefaces in English to his Tamil books.

26. Changing of Sanskritic names to "pure" Tamil ones is perhaps one of the most tangible results of Vedachalam's movement. In Sri Lanka too a number of Tamil poets and scholars assumed new and pure-Tamil names for example, Balasubramanian became Ilamurukanar. Of the others, S. Iraca Aiyanar, Venathanar and Alagasundara Tesikar (1873 - 1941) may be mentioned. At one stage it became a fad. In subsequent years, such symbolic actions became part of Tamil nationalist politics in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. In some cases changing names was also an escape from caste positions, enabling those with new names a greater amount of social mobility within the political group. Those who did not formally change their names took on pure-Tamil pen names. On changes in names and designations in Tamil, cf. Franklin C. Southworth "Linguistic Masks for Power: Some Relationships between Semantic and Social Change," *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 16, No. 5, Bloomington, May 1974, pp. 177 - 191.
27. "Movement for Linguistic Purism," seminar paper, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, India, Jan., 1977 (mimeographed).
28. Although language conflict and planning is a major problem in developing countries, especially where multilingual situations prevail, purism is also present in developed countries like France and Germany. By and large, East European countries appear to have experienced these problems for many years. It is interesting to note that in Sinhala too there is a purist movement initiated by Munidasa Cumaratunga (1887 - 1944) in the thirties of this century. He was a scholar in grammar. His movement was called the *Hela* or *Elu* movement, fighting against Sanskritization. It is said that Sinhala poetry has always preserved *Elu* and that it is one of its peculiarities. Cumaratunga was a lecturer in Sinhala in teacher training colleges and those who came under his influence carried his message all over the country. At times the movement betrayed caste loyalties too. Munidasa Cumaratunga was also a writer of some distinction. In recent years the *Elu* movement appears to be sagging. On purism in Sinhalese, see M. W. Sugathapala de Silva, "Effects of Purism on the Evolution of the Written Language: Case History of the situation in Sinhalese," *Linguistics*, Vol. 36, Hague, November, 1967, pp. 5 - 17. Sugathapala de Silva, "Some Linguistic Peculiarities of Sinhalese Poetry," *Linguistics*, 60, pp. 5 - 26, August, 1970. Also, James W. Gair, "Sinhalese Diglossia," *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Bloomington, January, 1968, pp. 1 - 15.
29. Wexler, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
30. Some perceptive Tamil scholars (for example, the late K. Kanapathi Pillai of the University of Sri Lanka) who were not too concerned with the 'politics' of purism felt that more than foreign vocabulary, foreign syntactic patterns were influencing and imperceptibly changing



the essential characteristic of Tamil language. Kanapati Pillai was a traditional scholar and a trained linguist. For instance, ever since the translation of the Bible into Tamil, English syntactic and phraseological influences have come into the language. Concerned as he was with the intrusion of overtly recognisable 'non-native' elements, Vedachalam does not seem to have discussed this aspect of the problem. (It is also likely that his particular penchant for English might have stood in the way of such an inquiry.) Systematic studies of English syntactic overlay in Tamil formal prose will be immensely rewarding. For parallel data on this problem, see Wexler, *Ibid*, pp. 5 - 6 *passim*.

31. *Ancient and Modern Tamil Poets*, p. 3.
32. T. P. Meenakshisundaram, *A History of Tamil Literature*, Annamalai-nagar, 1965, pp. 173 - 74.
33. For discussion of this situation, see *Adiyum Mudiym*, pp. 102 - 110.
34. K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 229 - 230.
35. Cf. Joshua A. Fishman, in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, New York, 1968, p. 45.
36. It is generally accepted that Constantius Beschi (1680 - 1746) was the first European to note the presence of Diglossia in Tamil. He wrote *A Grammar of the Common Dialect of Tamil called Koduntamil*, Tanjore Saraswathi Mahal Series, 1971.
37. G. U. Pope (1820 - 1907) has endeared himself by his exuberant love for Tamil language and literature and his many translations of Tamil works into English. As Irschick rightly remarks, Pope contributed much "to the elevation of Tamil studies and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study for Oriental scholars," *op. cit.*, p. 279. He published many of his translations in *Siddhanta Deepika* and was a source of encouragement to Nallaswami Pillai. Pope had wide contacts with Tamil scholars in India and Sri Lanka. Also see K. M. Balasubramaniam, *op. cit.*, *passim* on Pope. Vedachalam has made an observation on Pope's translation of *Tiruvachagam*: "How strange and uncouth, and even how grotesque in certain places does the literal English translation of the Tiruvachakam, the great sacred lyric in Tamil, look, even when it is done by so eminent a Tamil scholar as Dr. G. U. Pope," *Ancient and Modern Tamil Poets*, p. vii.
38. T. P. Meenakshisundaram, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
39. S. Sivapadasundaram, *Arumukha Navalar*, Jaffna, 1950, p. 9. In recent years there has been an upsurge in the study of the Sri Lankan Tamil heritage and, as might be expected, Navalar has attracted considerable attention. See, T. Thananjayarajasingham, *Navalar Panikal*, Peradeniya,

1969 ; N. Somakanthan, " From the Role of a Religious Reformer to a National Hero " (in Tamil), *Tamil Sahitya Festival Souvenir*, Colombo, 1972. In 1968 on the occasion of the Second International Conference—Seminar of Tamil studies held in Madras, the Tamil Nadu Government honoured great Tamil personages by erecting statues to them. The Tamils in Sri Lanka felt hurt and let down that Navalar was overlooked. Reacting to this alleged blatant indiscretion, an idea to erect a statue for him in Sri Lanka at his birth-place gathered momentum. A Navalar *Sabha* came into being (or was revived) and, in 1969, a statue was duly installed in Nallur. It was also planned to establish a library there. The occasion assumed a " national " character. A commemoration volume was published containing articles in Tamil and English. See K. Kailasapathy, " Tradition and Modernity in Navalar " (Tamil) in the volume. Two years later in October, 1971 the Government issued a stamp in honour of the national hero. This episode shows the existence of (minor?) contradictions between South Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil ' national ' sentiments. It is a constant irritant to Sri Lankan Tamil enthusiasts that Navalar who had done yeoman services to the revival of Tamil and Saivism should be forgotten by the Tamils in India—where Navalar spent a good many years teaching, lecturing and printing books. In another sense, Navalar has become, in a different context, part of a contemporary Tamil cultural nationalism in Sri Lanka. A number of books have been written on him recently, *Vide* S. Kanapathi Pillai, *Navalar*, Jaffna, 1968.

40. It is only in recent years that socio-linguists have begun to investigate the problem of social change and linguistic pattern. For an early essay on this important topic, A. K. Ramanujan, " Language and Social Change : The Tamil Example " in *Transition in South Asia—Problems of Modernization*, Robert I. Crane, (ed.), Duke University, 1972, pp. 61 - 84.
41. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, pp. 343 - 344.
42. Charles A. Ferguson in *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, p. 33.
43. K. P. Ratnam, " Kalaic Collakkam, " *Proceeding of the Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil, III*, Madras, 1968, pp. 222 - 236.
44. In fact Rajaji wrote a few articles on elementary chemistry in Tamil. His intention was to demonstrate that scientific subjects could be dealt with in Tamil. These articles were later published (Thinnai racayanam, Madras, 1946). In his Foreword to the book, he made the following observation : " No one can create barriers for the development of Tamil ; it is wrong to do so. But I do not wish to quarrel over the matter. Authors should be free to choose their mode and style. The best will survive. " As is well known Rajaji was a prolific writer in Tamil and among his valuable contributions are translations from Socrates and the *Meditations* of the Roman Emperor,



Marcus Aurelius. Rajaji's prose is simple, conversational and homely but incisive and to the point. For Rajaji's views, *The Art of Translation—A Symposium*, New Delhi, 1962.

45. One such conference was held in 1936 at Pachaiyappa's College, Madras. Swami Vipulananda (1892 - 1947) from Sri Lanka presided over the conference and ably guided the proceedings. The Swami, previously called S. Mylvaganam, was a science graduate of the London University and a pandit of the Madurai Tamil Sangam—the first to qualify at the Annamalai and Ceylon Universities. As a Swami of Ramakrishna Mission he was universal in his outlook and knew Sanskrit (and a few other languages) very well. However, he leaned towards pure-Tamil unobtrusively. He took part in the coining of terminology and made significant contributions. See for instance his lone essay "Vignana Deepam" (The Light of Science) where he uses numerous terms he had coined. Unlike some of the aggressive artless purists, Vipulananda had a poet's sense of feeling for euphonic words and a scientist's concern for precision and brevity. He was also a gifted translator from English to Tamil. He did sections of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning and others into Tamil, which are of a very high order. Vipulananda's students later became officials in the Government language planning agencies in Sri Lanka and adopted their teacher's preference for pure-Tamil but without his broad vision and subtlety. Vedachalam visited Sri Lanka three times—in 1914, 1917 and 1921—and during his sojourns, Mylvaganam had met him. It is likely that his interest in pure-Tamil was kindled by these meetings.
46. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, p. 339 and the references given therein.
47. Cf. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
48. *Cintanaik Katturaikal*, second edition, Madras, 1925, p. 23.
49. *Vatcol Tamil Akaravaricai*, Madras, 1937 ; *Vatcol Tamil Akaravaricai Curukkam*, Madras, 1938.
50. Insofar as the preparation of glossaries for technical terms in the various branches of academic and administrative establishments is concerned, the Tamils in Sri Lanka have done more and better work. Because the medium of instruction in most of the educational institutions is in national languages, the compilation of dictionaries and glossaries and the translation of basic text books and other reading material were a dire necessity. This urgency was never felt in Tamil Nadu where, by and large, higher education still continues to be in English. At the same time most of the work done by private persons and Government agencies unmistakably shows the firm hand of purists at work. The literary (not creative) elite who were bureaucratically chosen to man these posts had, as a result of their preoccupation with such matters over a period of time, preconceived notions about their

- task and apparent expertise. Once given responsibilities, they set about to create a vocabulary and a prose style that was consistent with the genius of the Tamil language. Beginning with V. Ponniah, who was a sort of a polymath, a number of people connected with 'official languages' work—K. P. Ratnam, A. W. Mylvaganam, E. Rathinam, M. Kanapathi Pillai—were of the puristic school. It is only in very recent years, especially after bitter experiences and telling feedback and protests, that a gradual relaxation of "fundamental principles" is becoming evident. See K. P. Ratnam, *op. cit.*, p. 227. For interesting—almost identical—parallels in the Hindi scene, Jyotirindra Dass Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 177 - 180.
51. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, p. 341.
  52. Ferguson, *op. cit.*, p. 32 ; also Joshua A. Fishman, "Language Modernization and Planning in Comparison with other Types of National Modernization and Planning," *Language in Society*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April, 1973, pp. 25 - 26.
  53. Usually the forced alliterations, pompous phrases, shallow witticisms, silly blunders, pure-Tamil patterns and recurrent hyperboles of these pandits cause laughter.
  54. Zvelebil, *op. cit.*, p. 281.
  55. For elaboration of this idea, see K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Naval Ilakkiyam*, second edition, Madras, 1977, Chapter 2.
  56. *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.
  57. *Kumutavalli Nakanattaraci*, Pallavaram, Madras, 1911, English Preface, p. ii.
  58. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, p. 346.
  59. Selig S. Harrison, *The Most Dangerous Decades*, Columbia University, 1957, p. 19.
  60. P. G. Sundararajan, S. Sivapathasundaram, *Tamil Naval*, Madras, 1977, pp. 69 - 72.
  61. *Smile of Murugan*, p. 285. Zvelebil seems to have had a different opinion of the poet a few years ago. *Vide, Introducing Tamil Literature*, Madras, 1968, p. 23, wherein he says, "Bharathidasan was one of the greatest—or perhaps the greatest—modern Tamil poets after Bharathi".
  62. Aiyar went to England to study law but became involved in radical patriotic activities and escaped to Pondicherry which was then a haven for Indian patriots. He was a confidant of V. D. Savarkar, a friend of Aurobindo, and a dear companion to Subramania Bharathi. His essay, "Poetry" (1918) was the precursor to later critical works



that flourished in the late twenties and thirties. In politics Aiyar was a militant Hindu.

63. *Smile of Murugan*, p. 292.
64. Something should be said about a few other journals. After *Manikkodi* ceased publication, a number of little magazines, each in its own way, tried to continue the literary endeavour of Manikkodi : *Kalamohini*, *Chandrodayam*, *Suravali*, *Teni* and *Kirama ooliyan* in Tamil Nadu and *Eelakesari*, *Bharati* and *Marumalarci* in Sri Lanka served as avenues for the ever-increasing literary output. All of them were short-lived. However, one magazine established itself successfully and is still in business : *Kalaimagal* was started in 1932 by R. S. Narayana-swami Iyer who ran the Madras Law Journal Press, and from the beginning it established respectability and reliability. It no doubt had a strong Brahmin bias and thrived on caste loyalty. But it also catered to new literary consciousness. In its early years, scholars and cultural personalities like K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, T. A. Gopinatha Rao, U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, R. Raghava Iyengar, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, P. N. Appuswami, P. Sri Acharya, T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, Swami Vipulananda and others wrote in it. It also carried translations of Bengali, Hindi and Marathi fiction. But gradually its character changed. After the end of *Manikkodi*, a number of writers had their short stories published in *Kalaimagal*. It was never really inclined towards experimentation and on the whole is conservative. But it played its role in the consolidation of modern creative literature.
65. See his powerful essay "Etu Tamil ?" (which is Tamil) ? in *Inraiya Tamil Ilakkiyam*, Madras, 1965, pp. 172 - 182.
66. *Tamilil Ilakkiya Vimarcanam*, Madras, 1974. He is the historian of the movement, nostalgically hanging on to the past.
67. Vaiyapuri Pillai (1891 - 1956) had an abiding interest in creative literature and occasionally dabbled in it. He has to his credit a few poems in translation, a couple of short stories, and a novel, *Raji*. His essays dealing with modern Tamil literature are collected in *Tamilin Maru Malarci*, Madras, 1947. He was a good friend of the poet-scholar, Desigavinayagam Pillai (1876 - 1954), and wrote a few appreciative essays about his works which are collected in *Kavimani Desigavinayagam Pillai*, Nagarkoil, 1967. He worked closely with K. A. Nilakanta Sastri.
68. For representative collections of his literary and cultural essays, see *Itaya Oli*, Madras, 1958 and *Arputa Rasam*, Madras, 1964. He is said to have coined the word *panpatu* as an equivalent to the English term 'culture.' It has virtually supplanted the earlier word *Kalacaram*. For a brief critical evaluation of T. K. C. as he was known, see K. Kailasapathy, *Ilakkiyamum Tiranaivum* (*Literature and Criticism*), second edition, Madras, 1976, pp. 43 - 48, 121 - 123 *passim*.

69. I have discussed this point in a historical perspective in "Tamil Studies in Sri Lanka," *Newsletter of the S S I S*, Vol. 10, No. 1, November, 1977. Also in a seminar paper for the International Writing Programme, the University of Iowa, October, 1977, "Tradition and Change—A Glimpse of Modern Tamil Literature."
70. *The Most Dangerous Decades*, p. 12. In Sri Lanka the late fifties and early sixties saw a sharp struggle between the 'progressive' writers and the Tamil literary establishment over the use of dialectalism and neologisms. Some purist members of the establishment had called the language used by certain writers, *ilicinar valakku*, 'the usage of vulgar (low caste) people.' The matter had socio-political undertones. For a quick glimpse of contemporary Tamil writing in Sri Lanka, see K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Naval Ilakkiyam*, Chapter 6; K. Sivathamby, *Tamilil Cirukataiyin Torramum Valarciyum*, Madras, 1967, pp. 143-152; K. S. Sivakumaran, *Tamil Writing in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1974; and Sundararajan and Sivapathasundaram, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-272.
71. *Smile of Murugan*, p. 287.
72. Nambi Arooran, *op. cit.*, p. 346.
73. Das Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
74. Wexler, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
75. Some contradictions in the personal life of Vedachalam have always troubled his friends and admirers. In contrast to his insistence on Tamils using their language in all walks of life, he maintained his diaries in English. Tirunavukkaracu, *Maraimalaiyatikal Varalaru*, p. 153. Likewise he also corresponded with many in English. T. V. Kaliyanasundaranar refers to such matters in his autobiography, *Valkkaik Kurippukal*, p. 168.
76. C. J. Baker and D. A. Washbrook, *South India*, Bombay, 1975, p. 16.
77. Cf. Selig S. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
78. Mohan S. Kumaramangalam, *India's Language Crisis*, Madras, 1965, p. 71.
79. Besides Vedachalam, a person like S. Somasundara Bharathi (1879-1959), a lawyer who turned to Tamil studies (like many others of that era—S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, K. Subramania Pillai) flourished in the self-respect atmosphere. He even occupied the Chair of Tamil at Annamalai University. A fanatical purist he later campaigned against the imposition of Hindi but eventually argued for the retention of English. Likewise, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866-1947), who was a colleague of Suryanarayana Sastri at Madras Christian College and wrote *Tamil Literature* (1929), the first history of Tamil literature, favoured the use of English. In contrast, T. V. Kaliyanasundaranar consistently pleaded for the use of Tamil in education and administration.



80. A feature that became noticeable during the last fifteen years or so is the lavish use of English—words, phrases and sometimes whole sentences—in prose and poetry by some Tamil writers. They either use English alphabets or transliterate the words. This is most prominent in what is called the avant-gardist writings that are published in little magazines. This trend started with the “ New Poets ” who emerged around 1958 - 59 and spread to fiction writers too. Among the novelists Indira Parthasarathy, Jeyakanthan, N. Parthasarathy, Sujatha, Ambai and a few others are noted for this. C. S. Chellappah, V. Swaminathan, K. N. Subramanian and N. Jegannathan intersperse English in their critical essays. Some of these writers have created characters that are bilingual and at times conversing in English. Naturally the readers’ knowledge of that language is taken for granted. This phenomenon is not seen in the writings of the earlier generations (1930s and 1940s) who too in their days claimed to be “ experimental ” writers. I do not mean the use of technical words, but simple sentences like “ Don’t be silly ”. Indira Parthasarathy’s play *Malai*, ‘ Rain ’ is virtually in both Tamil and English. Some observers, have attributed this excessive use of English to the alienation of the writers, a reaction to linguistic prescription, a growing sense of ‘ internationalism ’ in literature and a process of intellectualization of Tamil literature. It is also true that such writers are mostly from the cities. On some aspects of the “ New Poetry ” see *Smile of Murugan*, pp. 313 - 335. As to the problem of alienation of the writer and the impact of modernisation, vide, *Tamil Naval Ilakkiyam*, pp. 135 - 156. Also M. Shanmugam Pillai, “ Code-Switching in a Tamil Novel ” in *Structural Approaches to South India*, Harry M. Buck and Glenn E. Yocum, Pennsylvania, 1974, pp. 81 - 95, wherein he analyzes the phenomenon of code-switching found in a novel by Jeyakanthan. Shanmugam Pillai thinks that because the novelist writes about middle class people and some of the subjects dealt with in the novel are taboo, English helps to keep the distance and facilitates discussion. On the question of using regional dialects in fiction, Shanmugam Pillai, “ Merger of literary and colloquial Tamil ” *Anthropological Linguistics*, Bloomington, April, 1965. The lavish use of English seems to be a feature in contemporary Hindi Literature too, especially in poetry. This became marked at the end of 1950s. I am indebted to Karine Schomer (Berkeley) for this information.

## Tradition and Change — A Glimpse of Modern Tamil Literature

The year 1976 saw the centenary jubilee of the publication of the first Tamil novel *Piratapa Mudaliar Charithiram*—"The Life and Adventures of Pratapa Mudaliar." Its author Samuel Veda-nayagam Pillai (1826 - 1889) one of the earliest natives to hold a judicial post wrote the novel purporting to narrate the life-story of a "well-educated gentleman of brilliant parts, wit and humour" and to introduce a new literary form in Tamil. No doubt he had in mind the early English novels with similar titles. Furthermore, he described his novel as a 'prose epic.'

In many ways its publication in 1876 (it was followed by another novel by the author in 1887) marked the beginning of a new era in Tamil literature: for the first time prose was used to create a long work of fiction; in spite of its semi-historical setting there was no doubt that it dealt with contemporary events and thoughts; the author was consciously modelling his work on a European genre. (It is interesting to note that the term—*Naaval*—a Tamilised form of the English *novel* has come to stay in the language to denote fiction); it was inspired by reformist zeal and was largely didactic in character; it extolled certain "Tamil"



virtues and also pleaded for support—to the Tamil language—which the author remarked lacked many types of literary work that were found in English and French.

Like most choices of dates this too can be arbitrary. But it is certainly useful for our discussion: a century of Tamil literature. But more than a rounded period the characteristics enumerated earlier are important since they are germane to our literature of the last hundred years. There can be no doubt that compared to the first Tamil novel, Tamil literature has come a long way. In contrast to the quasi-historical, romantic novels of the early period we now have realistic images of contemporary Tamil life. The “observations of a moral tendency” have given way to amoral attitudes that seem the order of the day. And yet the basic issues raised by *Piratapa Mudaliar* are still very much with us.

But before I go on to adumbrate some aspects of modern Tamil literature, I must mention one important fact that will be crucial to any discussion of the subject: the antiquity of Tamil language and literature. The earliest known poetry dates back to at least 500 B. C. which would indicate a considerable amount of literature preceding it. This ancient body of literature subsequently classified into erotic and heroic poetry and considered to be some of the finest of its kind in the world, formed the basis for the writing of grammars that dealt with language, diction, prosody and themes. Thus the modern Tamil writer has a literary history and grammatical tradition of more than two and a half millennia with a remarkable continuity and presence. Their weight can be enormous and overwhelming. This heritage while being a veritable source for historians, linguists, anthropologists and others has not always been congenial to creative writers: the literary conventions tend to stifle originality and creativity as much as they can exhilarate and stimulate the literary imagination. It is so satisfying to expatiate on the wondrous blend of the old and the new and the assimilation of the best of the past in the making of the present. But only those confronted with an almost changeless past, daring to challenge and attempt to change it would really know its immense might. Justice Venkatrama Iyer once said that to carry out innovation in Tamil was like setting fire to an iceberg. I have described

this fact at some length because it is something special to Tamil—a feature it shares with perhaps not more than two or three languages in the world. (Chinese, Greek and Hebrew ?)

Such a situation naturally finds its expression in literature. To an avowed modernist like C. S. Mani, tradition can become problematic. In a longish poem (rather unusual for a ‘new poet’ *Narakam*—“Hell”, Mani has a section on Tamilnadu of today :

*Tamilnadu is neither Eastern  
Nor fully Western  
Having placed the pot on the fire  
She refused to cook the rice.  
Hunger and deace  
Have been the result.  
Does not go backward  
Does not step forward  
The present hangs in midair  
Hidebound tradition  
locked in beliefs  
unwilling to be helped.  
What can one do  
to cut the knot ?* (87 - 100)

Another young poet T. S. Venugopalan has a short piece called *Palam Perumai* “Past Glory.” The almost indifferent and matter of fact manner of expression in the original is untranslatable :

*The seed of the juicy mango  
Bragged of its pedigree  
I planted it and waited.  
The tall tree and its fruits  
gave shade  
The wriggling worm  
I had.* (1 - 8)



But the problem is not simple as all that. Tradition is not confined to literature and art alone. It is much more pervasive and permeates all aspects of life. Language being the most cherished possession and the primary depository of a nation's culture, it is not surprising that modern Tamil writers have spent considerable time and energy on the question of language. The problem can be simply stated as follows : What is the type of language that is suitable for literary creation : should it be the age-old " standard ", " correct " Tamil used by poets of the past or should it be the current " spoken ", " lively " Tamil understood by the majority of the people ? The answer would appear to be self-evident if not superfluous. But not so in actuality. For the answer to the question involves a judgement of values which in turn is determined by complex factors such as the system of prevailing education, the socio-political environment, the level of modernization and the degree of social mobility. To these must be added the general tendency of language to remain behind the tempo of social change, i.e., social and technical developments in that society.

Two major trends or movements have been significant among the Tamil people in recent time. 1) Separatist movements in India and Sri Lanka for the establishment of independent states where among other things the continued and safe development of the Tamil language will be ensured, free from the threats of languages like Hindi and Sinhala respectively. 2) The movement for linguistic purism which indicates an inclination to direct the development of the language by intervention : in practice this means dropping or retaining certain elements and also introducing certain norms preferred in the past. Admittedly these movements are socio-political in nature. Consequently the creative writer has no option but to face them squarely.

I am not discussing here the politics of the above-mentioned movements although it is important in itself and cannot be ignored by a sensitive writer, but there are linguistic implications that are of critical importance to him. Even while granting that the questions are of paramount importance to his community, the writer sooner or later

discovers that his creative writing cannot be accomplished in a language prescribed for him: his special concern, which is using language imaginatively and effectively does not necessarily coincide with the motive of those who want to regulate language. This is not the place to discuss the problem of language and purism. However, as far as it concerns the contemporary Tamil writer some explanation is required. For instance, puristic movements are generally directed against foreign elements which the purists endeavour to replace by so-called 'pure' or 'native' elements. (To the Tamil purist it means the elimination of Sanskrit and English words that have found their way into his language.) However, it is often the case that purism is also directed against elements emanating from within: regional and social dialectalisms, colloquialisms, neologisms, etc.; to students of linguistics this will doubtless be evident as an instance of diglossia where the written and spoken languages are mutually exclusive; consequently a strong tendency to eschew elements considered to be "incorrect" or "unacceptable," e. g., dialectal, colloquial and 'vulgar' from the written language prevails. Now it is obvious that these very elements of a language are vital to a writer in that they constitute the basis of important ingredients for his literary communication. Their indispensability to the contemporary writer cannot be over-emphasized. George Steiner has aptly remarked that, "in culture, no less than in politics, chauvinism and isolation are suicidal options" (*Language and Silence*, New York, 1967, p. 63). The section of the Tamil neo-literati that champions linguistic purism is utterly bereft of contemporary literary position and constantly harks back to one several generations if not centuries out of date. The incessant struggles waged by modern Tamil writers during the last two decades to overcome language barriers and to use what they call the "living language" is one of the exciting stories awaiting to be written. (The condescending scholars will not do it, while the writers who were in the forefront are fully engrossed in their own work and more urgent problems that they have neither the time nor the inclination for introspection to recount the details.)



In spite of what one might describe as the tyranny of literary conventions and linguistic purism, Tamil writers have, in the course of the last two decades, succeeded in producing a respectable body of works in which the most varied and fascinating modes of linguistic experimentations are discernible. As the writers came to grips with new areas of social and personal experiences and began to extend the range of portrayal of emotions and psychological state of characters, their linguistic horizon too, inevitably broadened, embracing not only the numerous dialects within the Tamil State (in India) but also the speech forms of Tamil in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and elsewhere. As a result, one of the salient features of modern Tamil literature and certainly an entirely new phenomenon is the confluence of literature in Tamil produced by Tamils living outside Tamilnadu, which on a world scale is symbolic of our age; but more on this later.

Perhaps as a reaction to the conscious purism of the pillars of learning and society some writers have gone to the other extreme in their views. For instance, V. Ramaswami, better known as Va Ra, observed : "My prose should be understood even by a rickshaw-puller". But it was Subramania Bharathi (1882-1921), the greatest Tamil poet of the modern age, who put the problem in proper perspective. He wrote in his preface to *Paanjaali Capatham* (1910) :

"He who produces an epic in simple style and diction, easily understandable metres and popular tunes will be infusing a new life into our language. The meaning must be crystal clear even to the neo-literates; at the same time, the poem must not be wanting in the graces and refinements that are expected of an epic..."

This was not merely a poetic credo. Bharathi—the high priest of twentieth century Tamil poetry—practised what he preached. Finding the traditional forms and metres inadequate to cope with his new creative impulses he broke through the rigidity of conventions and reached over to the common man. As with all great masters Bharathi was an evangelist too. In trying to catch the whole movement of life he succeeded in giving expression and

voice to the modern sensibility in Tamil. It was left to his successors to accomplish his grand visions. During the last twenty years, novelists like Jeyakanthan, Indira Parthasarathy, T. Janakiraman, Saroja Ramamurthi, D. Selvaraj, K. Sinnappa Bharathi in South India and K. Daniel, S. Ganesha Lingam, S. Yoganathan and Benedict Balan in Sri Lanka, to mention only a few, have utilized the day-to-day spoken language of ordinary people in their works.

What is interesting and certainly pertinent is the fact that many of these writers have come from the lower strata of society—something remarkable in the context of limited social mobility. To put it in simple sociological terms they are from the depressed castes, who are still, in many ways socially untouchables. Traditionally they have had no access to learning and were considered culturally backward. Jeyakanthan in India, Daniel and Dominic Jeeva in Sri Lanka, to cite three examples, who are outstanding fiction writers, never had any formal education. To them writing itself has been a continuing process of self education. Concerned with protest and experiment, the exciting process of exploration and growth, they solved their impulse through writing. Naturally they brought with them an idiom or idioms that were fresh, robust, plain and simple but capable of “infusing a new life into our language”. (It is not surprising therefore, to find American and Indian graduate students analyzing the language and style of a writer like Jeyakanthan.)

These writers who have emerged from the depressed castes, have over the years, tended to assume a leftist-Marxist orientation. This disposition towards Marxism is not necessarily intellectual or ideological. The Communists have always been in the forefront of the struggles for the emancipation of the oppressed caste and consequently political activists among outcastes have developed a sense of loyalty to the Communist Party that often manifests itself in the writer's leaning towards it. Some writers have virtually been fostered by the Party. However, the relationship between the writers and the Party has not always been smooth. As the writers mature and strive for perfect rendition of feeling,



tone and language they find themselves in conflict with the norms held by the Party, and thereafter bickerings begin. A writer like Jeyakanthan, perhaps the foremost novelist writing in Tamil today, has vividly portrayed this tension, love-hate relationship in his *Political Experiences of a Literary Writer*—an autobiographical document that reveals the dilemmas of the writer. S. Ponnuthurai, an important Tamil writer in Sri Lanka, has had difficulties with the Party due to his alleged amoral attitude in the treatment of sex in his novels and short stories. The examples could be multiplied. But broadly speaking many Tamil writers have had or have emotional attachment to the Communist movement because it provides them with a world-outlook, a well-knit fraternity, and an important role in the ongoing cultural revolution. For instance it is partly due to the backing they had from the communist movement that the writers launched the movement for the use of the spoken language in literature in the late fifties.

Before concluding my remarks on purism something should be said of its implications to modern poetry. What is to be noted is that “the fundamental motivation and the major controlling principle of purism is ideological—i.e., political, cultural, or religious”. Its fundamental demand is the elimination of non-native influences. Starting from words and phrases the purist true to his motivation extends his attention to the content of literature: his conservatism in language expresses itself in other areas too. As far as poetry is concerned the purists maintain that not only the grammatical forms of sentences should be scrupulously observed but rhyme and metre are essential to poetry. In their view (and it cannot be altogether rejected) poetry will lose if it is not in verse, and the only fitting verse for it is metrical. (It may be of interest to note that Bharathi himself never discarded metre. His so-called “prose-poems” or attempts at free verse, albeit considered the prototype of the ‘New Poetry’ were in fact prose pieces echoing the rapturous outbursts of the Vedic poets.)

Consequently the conflict between the traditionalists and the modernists has been most protracted and acrimonious as regard poetry. It is not necessary to elaborate the details. The kind of literary 'warfare' that takes place in all languages over innovations in poetry is all too familiar to writers. In all such cases the poets who consciously break with the past, dissociate themselves from the traditional modes of poetry and speak of revolutionizing the language.

In 1962, a slender volume entitled *Puthuk Kuralkal*, "New Voices," was published in Madras. Sixty-three poems by 24 young poets, including three from Sri Lanka marked the arrival of the modernists on the scene. Two critics—C. S. Chellappa and K. N. Subramanian, themselves practitioners of 'new poetry,' were behind the venture. Subsequent to that, more than 25 collections of 'new poetry' have been published both in the form of individual collections and anthologies. We are in mid-tide of this new poetic effervescence too recent, too controversial to allow of any conclusive assessment. I myself do not approve of everything said and done under the banner of 'New Poetry.' Personally I prefer rhyme and metre, and I have expressed my penchant for them in my critical writings. I am, of course, not an absolutist in this matter. Furthermore, I am convinced that the cavalier attitude of some of our younger poets may very well be the result of ignorance (of literary history in general and prosody in particular) which is unfortunately backed up by an adolescent satisfaction in rebelliousness. My own position is perhaps best expressed in the words of the scholar critic, Arthur Melville Clark :

"When free verse is agreeably modulated, its rhythms will either approximate to rhythms perfectly feasible in metre but perhaps disguised to look new, or else will be new, but not beyond the reach of metrical experiment."

In my view the only poet now writing in Tamil who comes very close to this definition is R. Murugaiyan in Sri Lanka. A graduate in both Science and Arts with a sound grounding in classical poetry he can "always be relied



upon to be more interesting, lively, provocative, wide-ranging, psychologically penetrating, technically skilful and ingenious than most of his contemporaries."

Perhaps the one single important feature of the 'new poetry' is "psychologism". The individualized inner experiences of the poets find their expression in their (often fragmentary) poems. What sometimes jars or disconcerts readers (who are unilingual) of these poems is their betrayal of excessive imitation of the avant-garde poetry in other parts of the world. These poets also have a weakness for using English words, often unwarranted, in their poems. Another important fact is that almost all of the poets derive one way or another their postures from western poets. A few examples of this school of poets may be cited here. For it must be emphasized that parallel to this movement, there is a flourishing school of poets in the traditional mould and style that is equally productive and popular. These poets by the very nature of their poems recite or read poems to large audiences. Their poetry is lyrical in character and appears to touch the hidden chords in the listeners. It is something of a curious phenomenon that whereas a printed book of poems does not sell on an average, more than five hundred copies, it is not unusual for an audience of two or three thousand people (often in open air) to listen in rapt attention to poets declaiming their work. Such occasions are called *Kavi Arangu* "Poets' Forum", which are becoming increasingly popular in our society. Seldom can one witness the primal power of the word in so tangible a manner; the different reactions the poets are able to evoke in their listeners, who are by no means illiterate, testifies to the efficacy of the spoken word in an age which is constantly devaluing it through the mass-media. Perhaps these poets have inherited something of the old itinerant bards and minstrels who by their art breached the wall between 'intellectual' and 'entertaining' poetry. In the context of barren and sterile disputes waged by the poets over form in poetry, the success of the "Poets' Forum" symbolises the future hope for poetry. In the light of my observations on the question of language it is to be expected that poets will write about it. Gnanakuttan has this to say :

*A great many poets forced Tamil, fettered,  
 pushing it inside a cave,  
 blindfolding everyone's eyes  
 With akam and puram and Kural and Cilampu.*

*For me too,  
 Tamil is my very breath.*

*But  
 I don't let it breathe  
 down others' necks.*

TRANSLATED BY KAMIL ZVELEBIL

Yet another poet Nedumidal has a stanza on the subject :

*A blind bird  
 fluttering in the darkness  
 fainted and fell.  
 I took it and saw  
 that it was  
 Tamil.*

TRANSLATED BY KAMIL ZVELEBIL

N. Kamaracan, one of the late-comers to new poetry, who subsequently went over to the cinema industry to be a lyric writer, wrote a long poem entitled "We are just Ordinary People." A few lines from it :

*You and me . . . . .  
 The ultimate off-shoots of the middle classes  
 Two confused swoons in the evening of the first day  
 of the month  
 Friends in the train of wages  
 You are no Menaka  
 But I am Visvamitra*

*You and me . . . . .  
 Camels carrying children  
 in the Children's Park of Marina*



*I am the lover for your bed-time  
We are just ordinary people, sweetheart*

*We . . . . .  
are not asleep  
nor are we awake  
just dumb dreams.*

TRANSLATED BY KAMIL ZVELEBIL

Kamaracan is one of the few 'new poets' who is relatively more overt in his socio-political opinions. In a poem entitled "Mother India and a Dime" he has the following stanzas :

*Poverty has made our belly  
begging-bowl.  
Our civilization flourished on river basins  
Our provinces now quarrel over river-water.*

*Our epical heroine throws her precious ear-ring  
to chase the birds away  
Our Tamil lady of today  
has only feathers for ornaments.  
We failed to unify India  
therefore  
We are loud about the unity of the world.*

*Poverty has made our belly  
begging-bowl,  
Since independence  
We have become bolder  
We now beg on  
"Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Road"  
"Independent Queen"  
"Aryan Princess"  
"Mother India"*

*"Please . . . can you spare a dime?"*  
O.A.L.—4

Whatever he is, he is contemporary and makes you aware that matters he writes about are at your elbow. On the whole it may be said that the 'New Poetry' within its limited dimensions reflect the preoccupations of the Tamil poets of today.

Another area in which we see the conflict between tradition and modernity is literary criticism. It goes without saying that as new forms and experimentations take place a certain amount of conceptual or theoretical writings are thrown up that provide the rationalization for the change. However, the critical function is relatively more of a cerebral activity compared to the creative impulse and is inevitably meant for a limited readership. Broadly speaking, the critics who are modern-oriented like K. N. Subramanian, C. S. Chellappa, Ragunathan, K. S. Sivakumaran and the present writer are familiar with western literary works and have had some experience of travel outside their countries. The creative writers have had lesser opportunities for education and travel. As a result, a sort of gulf tends to develop between them, although the dividing lines are not always sharply drawn. The critics too are not a monolithic group; ideological and other factors help to differentiate between them.

Unfortunately, and here again as a result of the impact of certain Western critical concepts and concomitant terminologies, discussions about literary issues have been confused and often over-simplified as a quarrel between aesthetists and realists. As could be expected real issues have been blurred by quibblings over definitions and distortion of facts. The most obnoxious aspect of this development is the polarization of politics and literature. Raymond Williams once characterized such polarizations as vulgar. However, we have this antithesis between politics and literature. A whole range of terms are held to be antithetical to each other and discussions take place around them rather than about the reality of life and literature. A prominent Tamil critic like K. N. Subramanian, has for instance held and inculcated the view that quality and quantity are incompatible: an author with a large readership must necessarily be mediocre if not banal. His partisanship for minority culture or elitism is obvious.



Such tendencies arise out of "very questionable assumptions regarding the true nature of a creative writer's genius." Critics like Subramanian often juxtapose art and propaganda, thought and action, the universal and particular, tradition and modernity, politics and literature and such other things. Although these are false juxtapositions they are couched in critical jargons or phraseology which makes things difficult. One hears such pejorative labels like doctrinaire, theoretical, propagandist, puritan or didactic used to deplore writers with commitment and convictions. The 'Candid outsider' is held as the ideal writer, free from ideological considerations. To many writers such 'refined' criticism is only a sinuous literary avant-garde.

My quarrel with these critics is not so much on their critical tenets but with their creative works (because some of the critics are also creative) which are becoming increasingly alienated. An Indian critic has recently remarked that, "in the name of autonomy and purity of art or authenticity of the private vision, both writers and the reading public are often sought to be insulated from the major social and political concerns of our time." This tendency is of course a recent phenomenon. But it brings into focus the crux of the problem. The neomoderns are rejecting popular language and forms and are trying to create a mode of expression, extremely individualistic and obscure. Fortunately for us—I mean Tamil writers—this trend is less pronounced in Sri Lanka than in South India, where much of the avant-garde writing has ceased to have any meaning and significance to the usually eager and enlightened reader. To me this strikes as the very negation of literary communication.

To come back to western influence, I do not for a moment suggest that nothing positive has resulted from it. That would be fatuous if not a denial of history. In fact the very idea of literature and social change is in itself a clear evidence of a historical process that is very much with us. Our consciousness accepts change as a condition of modern life. As I have mentioned earlier, a major poet like Bharathi

or an eminent revivalist like Arumuka Navalar of Jaffna (1822 - 1876) would not have been what they were without the historical process of modernization (westernization ?). This we all know. Whether it be Anagarika Dharmapala, Arumuka Navalar, Swami Vivekananda, Ananda Coomaraswamy, or Aurobindo, to mention the leading figures in the religious and cultural renaissance in India and Sri Lanka, were without exception bilingual, i.e., they were adequately familiar with English or in some cases French in addition to their own tongue.

What characterizes these great masters of the past, especially the earlier poets like Tagore, Bharathi or Vallathol was their strong attachment to their own cultural traditions. Naturally their reaction and response to western literature was not identical. Some strove to effect a synthesis ; some rejected (or appeared to reject) it outright ; yet others were ambivalent about it. But none of them adopted it wholesale or made imitation a virtue. This is important and I think well worth pondering.

Some of the issues I have just outlined might appear too vague and general. But the Tamil mind, if I may use such an expression, is used to centuries of philosophical debates and polemics that even the mundane modern writer often dealing with concrete works of literature or arguing seemingly literary problems is inevitably drawn into theoretical questions that appear to have a bearing on critical tendencies. In such a situation, older systems like Saiva Siddhanta and Vedanta along with mysticism are often pitted against the incoming Humanism, Marxism, Existentialism, etc., for a philosophical solution. To many Tamil intellectuals this is essential to any serious inquiry into literature and the resulting debates tend to assume dimensions out of proportion to their context. As much as a brilliant scientist can hold what might appear to many, infantile religious beliefs, it is not unthinkable to find a rational writer sociologically well informed to entertain beliefs running counter to his own works. Such is the hold of 'philosophy' over our writers that the normal types of "pure" literary discussions suddenly



become fundamental issues in the face of which further concern with literature will be well nigh impossible.

It is a curious phenomenon I have observed in recent Tamil writings that westernization is more evident now—within the last few years—than ever before. I say curious because one would have thought that with gradual weakening of English Education in our countries and the increasing use of national languages for official purposes, a more inward literary climate would emerge. (The inward and the spiritual is always there) But one is certainly struck by the utmost interest about the west manifested in our contemporary fiction. Paris, London, New York, Ithaca, Tokyo, Montreal and similar cities figure in novels and short stories. D. Jeyakanthan for instance has written *Parisukuppo*, "Return to Paris"—a novel centering around an alienated artist returning from Paris. K. N. Subramanian hailed it for its urbanity and sophistication. I myself do not consider this cosmopolitanism a blemish in itself. After all so many writers have had exotic backgrounds for their novels. Such use of locale is artistically legitimate. But the cosmopolitanism is, in some cases at least, contrived and introduced more for the sake of novelty and shock than genuine artistic needs. Moreover, I cannot help feeling that a good deal of such stuff is part of an evasion of real difficulties on the part of the novelists—an easy way out of certain problems.

I think such tendencies in our literature should be considered in the context of problems connected with emigration, brain-drain, etc. The interest in foreign countries and places in our fiction is but another aspect of the emigratory inclinations of certain sections of people in the society. Naturally their attitude towards the country they want to leave cannot, in most cases, be complimentary or sympathetic. Nor will they be seriously involved in the problems of the country they want to forsake. I mention all these to emphasize the point that we cannot isolate literary issues from the others. Furthermore, there is a real connection

between certain ideas about literature and the role of the writer and social factors. It is here that I feel many of our critics falter. Their loud insistence on the value of the individual's vision and sensibility and pretence that society does not exist is the result of extreme alienation.

As a consequence of all this, the readership for these writers is becoming even more narrow and a vicious circle begins to operate. You start off by catering to a small group of writer-readers and then the exclusiveness of the readership begins to exert its influence on the writing. And so it goes on. Finally a whole theory of literature is built on this premise. Although the question of readership is a universal problem, I feel writers in Asia and elsewhere have to come to terms with it in a more complicated manner.

A few years ago I published a book on the history of the Tamil novel. I argued that there has been a sharp decline in the quality of the recent novels and felt that they reflected a disintegrated personality. K. N. Subramanian in the course of reviewing the book admitted my main thesis: "we have lost the good tradition of Rajam Iyer and Madhavayya," he commented, but never raised the more fundamental question of why we have lost it.

Owing to habitual response and inbuilt inhibitions which many Tamil writers have unconsciously imbibed with their liberal (English oriented) education and an idealization of literature as pure aesthetic, they have become uneasy and even embarrassed in asking questions that might rock the established ideas. The dominant traditions of literary criticism help perpetuate this state of affairs. What is interesting to note is the fact that the avant-garde literature which is anti-establishment in some matters coalesces with it in declaring literature to be a-political. By doing so, it becomes futile in the context of a developing society and its multifarious needs.

Under the circumstances, a Tamil writer, especially a more educated one, is faced with a dilemma: is he to succumb to the mirage of autonomy and purity of art and



sink ever more deeply into his own psyche and write for a small group of people who would appear to have his sentiments? In the process he falls into a disconcerting world weariness and loses whatever human sympathies he may have had. Or is he to stand for his commitments and write with his heart and soul immersed in the human reality around? In so doing he will not uphold preconceived notions about tradition or modernity but will utilize any material that will help him create literature imbued with artistic integrity.

I cannot conclude my talk without at least a passing remark about the peculiar position of the cinema vis-a-vis the writer in our society. Nothing dramatizes more tellingly the role of the cinema in the Tamil society than the fact that three chief ministers of Madras (Tamilnadu)—C. N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi and M. G. Ramachandran—have had very close connections with the film industry: the first two were writers for the films and the latter, the screen idol of millions of people. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it was due to his immense popularity as an actor (always playing the role of an idealist reformer) that he was elected to the high position. In other words the cinema has been and is a powerful weapon in the hands of certain political organizations. In that process it has almost become a “total art” embracing literature, music and the visual arts. Being a powerful industry it has naturally been able to attract some of the best talents in the fields of literature and music, who without exception go there naively with hopes of doing something worthwhile, but soon learn the inexorable laws of the commercial world. The best of writers over the years—Kalki, Ramiah, Puthumaipithan, Vallikkannan, Vinthan, Akilan, Varatharajan, not to speak of Jeyakanthan, have all been through the portals of Kodambakkam—the Hollywood of Madras—coming out as frustrated men. And yet such is the charm and temptation of the medium that it continues to attract quite a few serious writers. Even some of the avant-garde writers of ‘New Poetry’ have turned out to be successful churners of lyrics for third-rate films. But one

thing must be said : in spite of its banality in content and uninhibited commercialism, the Tamil cinema has done a few things. It has, while superficially observing and not violating the so-called "Indian values", left no area of the society untouched : morality, sex, language, religion. In that sense it has been an instrument of modernization which has made some of the writers' task easier. While the writers were debating with the pundits about the use of dialects in literary works, the cinema had a whole range of characters speaking wholly slang from an area or a profession. Folk music too was given a fillip by the cinema which in the process of using different locale for their exotic interest helped resuscitate folk poetry and music. The music directors of the films exploited folk music in a big way. The writers, naturally, were quick to see the intrinsic value of folklore for their work. There is a growing interest in folk poetry among many writers today. Likewise atheism entered into the cinema more effectively than into the literature of the same period. The cinema gets away with all this because it is considered less "sacred" than the literary forms that have an aura of cultural significance associated with the past.

Finally, I would like to say that some of the problems I have discussed arise from the writers' excessive preoccupation with literature to the exclusion of other fields of human activity. (Here again the modern notion of a free artist seems to overlap with the image of the literati of the earlier ages who did nothing but the cultivation of the words. What is overlooked is the crucial fact that the ancient literati were patronized by the kings and chiefs and played a definite role.) By making literature all-important one not only loses sight of a great deal of necessary experience and knowledge, but in the process also endangers the very basis of literature itself. A poem of Bharathi comes to mind. In a prayer to God, he says,

*Poetry is my vocation  
Service to the nation  
and alertness at all times.*



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### 3. Contemporary Tamil Literature – A Critique

The movement in literature evolve a national tradition resulted from “political independence that bred self-consciousness of autonomy” and a conviction that there exists a definable ethos in which the writers live and work. This Ceylonese accent in literature is in startling contrast to the Tamil literature upto the early fifties when it was considered to be part and parcel of the mainstream of Tamil literature, by which was meant the literature of South India. Within the last two decades or so there has been a conscious movement towards “Ceylonism in Tamil Literature.” Those familiar with American literature, will at once recall the many writers in the 19th Century who were preoccupied with the American accent. As Albert D. Van Nostrand has put it, “it is some characteristic way in a group of writers of turning a local instance to general significance.” I mentioned the American analogy advisedly since it was a classic of a vigorous literature evolving its individual characteristic in spite of a common language.

The point is that the changes we see in literature in our times are so varied and complex, making it difficult to discuss them in straight forward terms.



Before going on to my subject, however, a few more words ought to be said on the idea of Ceylonism in literature. This idea is of course related to nationalism. It is a common place in political history that nationalism is a phenomenon which at a certain stage in a country's history gives it a sense of unity and coherence besides the militant self-consciousness that it imparts to the people of that country. At the same time it is equally well-known that nationalism has an inherent tendency to circumscribe one, because of its exclusiveness and insistence on its difference from the rest of the world.

Here we see a problem—a contradiction if one would like to put it that way. And how is one to find a way out? Perhaps the proper question is : how is one to achieve a balance?

This brings one to the core of the subject under discussion : the dilemma of the modern Tamil writer. I deliberately started off with the Ceylonese accent in the works of our writers since it led me to the problem of nationalism vs. internationalism. As a person who has been following our literary scene eagerly, I have found that many of our writers and critics tend to dismiss this problem as irrelevant. I do not agree with them.

It is the failure to recognize this problem that has resulted in an agonising dichotomy : Those who talk glibly of the universal author and those who talk of the committed artist. I do not pretend for a moment that there is an easy solution to this vexed problem. Nevertheless, I would like to submit that without a historic sense, a by-product of our place in time, and conditioned by the here and now, a work of art ceases to have any significance. If I may take this matter a little further, it cannot be denied that a writer or for that matter, a nation, must necessarily have roots somewhere. It is that belonging which gives him a certain depth whether emotional or intellectual.

Now, this dichotomy found in our writing—I mean specifically Tamil writing—has on the whole been very

harmful. It manifests itself in the cleavage between the so-called universalists and aesthetists on the one hand and the nationalists and realists on the other. I personally am not at all happy with this situation. Strictly speaking these are not exclusive concepts. And yet, such is the literary education and influences that many of our writers are exposed to from the west that they claim to have said the last word on the matter, which is a pity.

To be sure, a creative writer has to avoid crude oversimplifications and endeavour to comprehend the totality of the human situation at a given point of time. But that does not absolve him of the need to understand the dynamic interaction of socio-historical forces that shape his material and ultimately his sensitivity to language.

For convenience and useful comparisons we may classify our writers into two categories. The English educated or what we call the western-oriented ones, and the Tamil educated or tradition-biased ones. This is an awkward division I know. Yet it helps discussion.

It goes without saying that much of what we call modern writing is done by the former; the forms derived from the west or as a result of English education; the novel, short story and drama. By and large, this group of writers have inherited and imbibed a liberal education or what I would like to describe—a liberal ideology.

The latter category of writers comprising those concerned with traditional works such as Poetry and *belles-lettres* see in the work of the moderns all that is abominable and unworthy. The traditionalists usually bemoan the gradual disappearance of the conventional 'literary diction' if one may say so and the break-up of the traditional forms. To them the literary language of most contemporary authors is poverty-stricken.

The point I want to make here is that both categories of people are producing works that are essentially derivative: the former looks up to the Anglo-American or Anglo-Saxon



scene. This category often includes the Anglophil who would want our writers to reflect at every turn all the latest fad and fashion in the west. The traditionalists' consciousness on the other hand, is deeply rooted in the Past—the lost 'Golden Age'—when language, morals and the people were supposed to be pure and perfect.

I suppose there is nothing new in this state of affairs and a certain of it, to be sure, seems obvious. The point is that this process is becoming more and more acute; the hiatus is terribly malignant. I shall explain my position.

The conflict between tradition and change has always been there—taking different forms in different times, although since the impact of the west, and as a result of unprecedented changes, an entirely new situation has arisen—the almost irreconcilable confrontation between the modern and the traditional. But this conflict itself worked out evenly and at times beneficently in the earlier phases. The Tamil novelists writing at the end of the last century and in the first two or three decades of the present, showed a tremendous capacity to portray and reflect the central problems of the time. Their "uninhibited desire to see things and men as they really were" gave their novels an organic quality which is almost absent in the works of the contemporary novelists.

The blend of the west and the best in Tamil was perhaps fully realized in the writings of Subramania Bharathi—a contemporary of Tagore and a major poet like him. It is now more than half a century since he passed away and it is no exaggeration to say that all modern Tamil literature is judged on the basis of their relation to his works. He is the measure of modern Tamil literature, and with him Tamil literature enters into the twentieth century. And yet it is doubtful if Bharathi is known to many non-Tamil students of Indian literatures. It is a sad reflection on the norms and values of translations in Asia, that a major poet like Bharathi has been neglected; in fact neglected far too long. Of course, within India itself it was only recently that Bharathi's true greatness and importance have come to be

understood and appreciated. Students of comparative studies have begun to realize that he should be ranked along with Tagore and in some respects he is even superior to the Nobel Laureate. It is a pity that many of us in this part of the world know more about western authors than about those in countries around us.

There is an intellectual and emotional balance and poise in Bharathi's poems resulting from the acceptance of traditional language and forms to express new concepts and equally new values. The modern Tamil readers owe to him new insights into matters that very much needed it.

At the moment it seems fashionable among certain critics to politely dismiss Bharathi's work as products of a nationalist, propagandistic phase of our recent past and to describe him as a traditional bard. To my mind it is an absurd snobbery born out of either ignorance or prejudice. Actually, the detractors of Bharathi feel themselves to be superior to him just because they do not recognize prosody for their own works. They have even worked out a formula to say that traditional metres=hackneyed subjects, and hence unsuitable for our time.

This tendency is of course very recent but brings into focus the crux of the problem. The new school of poets and novelists are deliberately rejecting Popular language and forms and are trying to create a mode of expression that is extremely individualistic and obscure in character. Fortunately for us—I mean Tamil writers—this trend is less marked in Sri Lanka, than in South India, where much of what is written under the banner of New Poetry has ceased to have any meaning and significance to the usually eager and enlightened reader. It is the very negation of communication.

Unfortunately, and here again as a result of the impact of certain western critical notions and terminologies, discussions about these problems have been either polarised between aesthetists and realists. Real issues have been confused by quarrels over words and passions raised by wanton distortion of facts. The most obnoxious aspect of this development is the polarisation between what is called politics and literature.



It may be recalled how Raymond Williams decried this vulgar antithesis between politics and literature. A whole range of words are held to be antithetical to each other and discussions take place around them rather than about the true nature of life and literature. A leading Tamil critic like K. N. Subramanian, has for instance, held and inculcated the view that quality and quantity are incompatible and an author with a large readership must necessarily be mediocre, if not banal. His partisanship for minority culture is obvious.

Such elitist tendencies are based on "very questionable assumptions regarding the true nature of a creative writer's genius." Critics like Subramanian often deliberately juxtapose art and propaganda, thought and action, the universal and the particular, tradition and modernity, politics and literature, quality and quantity and such concepts. Although these are false antitheses, they are couched in critical jargons and passed off as valid truths. One hears such pejorative terms like doctrinaire, theoretical, propagandistic, rhetoric or didactic used against certain writers who show definite commitment to their convictions. The 'candid outsider' is held to be ideal, the writer free from ideological considerations.

My quarrel with the so-called neo-moderns or the avant-garde is not so much on their critical tenets, but with their creative works which are increasingly becoming alienated. Recently an Indian critic has aptly observed that "in the name of autonomy and purity of art or authenticity of the private vision, both writers and the reading public are often sought to be insulated from the major social and political concerns of our time".

The exalted notion of the "free and uncommitted writer" is by itself nothing new in world literature. But I have a feeling that it is never found in the Eastern literary tradition. In fact the idea of a pure artist is inconceivable in our literary history. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy sums up the general theory of art and literature thus: "The justification of art is made with reference to use (*prayōjana*) or value (*purusartha*)" which as is well known numbers four: *dharma*, *kāma*, *artha* and *mōksha*. He concludes by saying, "there cannot be imagined an art

without meaning or use. The doctrine of art for art's sake is disposed of in a sentence quoted in the *Sahitya Darpana* commentary : " all expressions (*vākya*), human or revealed, are directed to an end beyond themselves : or if not so determined, are thereby comparable only to the utterances of a mad man ".

I have not quoted this passage from Ananda Coomaraswamy to argue a case for what our ancients have said on the matter. But only to point out that this notion of the separateness of the artist from the rest of society is neither found in our tradition nor has its sanction. It is something that has come upon our writers along with certain theories of art and literature from the west.

I do not for a moment suggest that nothing positive has resulted from the impact of western theories and works of art. That would be a denial of history.

In fact the very idea of literature and social change is in itself a clear evidence of a historical process that is very much with us. Our consciousness accepts change as a condition of modern life. As I have mentioned earlier, a major poet like Bharathi or an eminent religious revivalist like Arumuka Navalar in the last Century would not have been what they were without the historical process of westernization. This we all know. Whether it be Anagarika Dharmapala, Arumuka Navalar, Swami Vivekananda or Ananda Coomaraswamy, all the main figures of the religious and cultural renaissance in India and Sri Lanka were without exception bilingual, i. e., they were adequately familiar with English or in some cases French in addition to their mother tongue.

What characterizes these great masters of the past like Bharathi or Tagore, was their strong attachment to their own cultural tradition. Their reactions and responses to western literature varied from person to person. Some strove to effect a synthesis ; some rejected it outright ; yet others had an ambivalent attitude towards it. But none of them adopted it wholesale or made imitation a virtue. This is important and I think well worth pondering.



It is a curious phenomenon I have observed in recent Tamil writings that westernization is more evident now—within the last few years—than ever before. I say curious because one would have thought that with gradual weakening of English education in India and the increasing use of *Swabhasha* for official purposes, a more inward-looking literary climate would evolve. But on the contrary, one is struck by the overwhelming interest in the west in our contemporary fiction. Paris, London, New York, Ithaca, Tokyo and Montreal and similar cities figure in these work. D. Jayakanthan, the noted Tamil writer for instance has written *Pārisuku pō*—"Return to Paris." Critics like K. N. Subramanian have hailed such novels for their urbanity and sophistication. I myself do not consider this cosmopolitanism a serious blemish in itself. But, after all many English writers in the heyday of the Empire had exotic backgrounds to their stories. Such use of locale is artistically legitimate. One could think of the novels of Conrad or even Hemingway. But the cosmopolitanism in some of the Tamil novels I have in mind, appear to be contrived and introduced more for the sake of novelty and shock than genuine artistic needs. Moreover, I cannot help the feeling that a good deal of such stuff, is part of an evasion of real difficulties on the part of the novelists—an easy solution to certain problems.

I think such tendencies in our literature should be taken along with the larger problems of emigration, brain drain, etc. The interest in foreign countries and places in our novels is but another aspect of the emigratory inclinations of certain class of people in our society. Naturally their attitude towards the country they want to leave cannot, in most cases be complimentary or sympathetic. Nor will they be seriously involved in the problems of the country they want to forsake. I mention all these to emphasize the point that we cannot isolate literary issues from the others. Furthermore, there is a real connexion between certain ideas about literature and the role of the writer and socio-economic factors. It is here I feel that many of our writers and critics falter or betray themselves. Their loud insistence on

the value of the individual's vision and sensibility and pretence that society does not exist is the result of alienation.

As a consequence of all this, the readership for these writers is becoming ever more narrow and a vicious circle begins to operate. You start off by catering to a small group of writers, readers and then the smallness of the readership begins to exert its influence on the writing. And so it goes on. Finally, a whole theory of literature is built on this premise of elitist appreciation and understanding.

Sometime back I wrote a book on the Tamil Novel, in which I had argued that there has been a sharp decline in the quality of the recent novels and that they showed a disintegrated personality. K. N. Subramanian in the course of a review of that book admitted my main thesis; "We have lost the good tradition of Rajam Iyer and Madhavayya," he commented, but never asked the pertinent question 'why we lost the good tradition of the early novelists'.

The burden of my argument in this essay is simply this. Owing to our habitual responses and inbuilt inhibitions, which many of us have unconsciously imbibed with our liberal education and an idealization of literature as pure aesthetics, we become uneasy and even embarrassed in raising questions that might appear to upset or disturb the established ideas. The dominant traditions of literary criticism helps to perpetuate this state of affairs.

Under the circumstances, many a Tamil writer is faced with a dilemma; is he to succumb to the mirage of autonomy and purity of art and sink ever more deeply into his own psyche and write for a small group of people who would appear to share his attitudes? In the process he falls into a disconcerting world weariness and loses whatever human sympathies he may have had. *Or* is he to stand for his commitments and write with his heart and soul immersed in the human reality around him? In so doing, he will not uphold preconceived notions about tradition and modernity but will utilise any material that will help him create a work of art with artistic integrity.



In conclusion, I would like to say that many of the problems I have discussed arise from the writers' excessive preoccupation with literature to the exclusion of other fields of human activity. By making literature all-important, one not only loses sight of a great deal of necessary experience and knowledge, but in the process also endangers the very existence of literature itself.

Very few major literary critics in South India have drawn attention to the fact that the writer in the under-developed countries has additional problems to grapple with. It will not be very wrong to say that our writers are confronted with problems analogous to those faced by the planners and economists. They too have challenges to be met, and demands to be supplied. I have dwelt long on these socio-political aspects for the simple reason that they are often by-passed. The point is that whether by the type of foreign influences he is subject to, or by force of traditional responses, the average Tamil writer lives and writes in what C. P. Snow dubbed as the "literary culture", oblivious of the larger historical factors that affect the modern man. At times I cannot resist the temptation to think of him verily as a frog in the well. For at a time when Science and Technology are revolutionising our entire concepts of the world and being, it would be pretty foolish to quarrel over quality and quantity, in purely literary terms. By the term 'quality' the writer means something vague, indeterminate and essentially subjective, whereas the scientist devises precise ways and means for quality control. He also wants to quantify quality. Surely the writer cannot close his eyes to these developments in the intellectual world around him. Having described and discussed a few things about contemporary Tamil literature around the concepts of quality and quantity, let me conclude with a quotation from an American author writing on "The Future of Modernization":

"The genuine issue of modern life is the capacity to mix quality and quantity: to handle new masses of people and new and complex systems of social, economic and political behaviour purposefully with respect for the individual.

“Here answers seem not impossible. Today our capabilities in architecture, in planning, and in social organization for building attractive, orderly, pleasant, and helpful cities are greater than ever before ; so are our knowledge and techniques for providing specialized vocational education to restructure the capabilities of the men and women now in danger of being left out of this society. Our capacities to direct science and technology for the peaceful uses of mankind likewise expand. As they grow, most modern nations move in the direction of new public investments attention to amenities, and concern with the human condition, that should powerfully counteract the difficulties in their social orders. As they increase the effectiveness of these programmes, as they redouble their efforts to understand the machine and put it to human purposes, and as they invest more in the facilities for training and knowledge, the future of modernity is bright. The call of adventure in the quest for quality can be as exciting and rewarding as any in the history of mankind.”

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#### 4. Tamil Heroic Poetry : A Comparative Study

With the publication of *The Heroic Age* by H. M. Chadwick in 1912, the comparative study of heroic poetry may be said to have begun. Beginning his studies on the early narrative poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, he extended his inquiry to the epics of different peoples—particularly the ancient Greeks—and by a comparative study established a number of correlations which make it possible to refer to a body of works showing many of the same characteristics, that they may be regarded as arising out of a specific set of social and historical conditions. Following Chadwick's work, the epic narrative poetry of the Indo-European nations was studied, by many who have produced a considerable number of works on the Homeric epics, the old French epic, the Teutonic heroic songs, the epics of Indians, the Irish and Icelandic prose sagas and Slavonic popular literature. Chadwick himself along with his wife followed up his studies with the monumental three-volume work *The Growth of Literature* (Cambridge 1932 - 40), which drew on several studies in various languages. They rightly emphasized the potential value in the study of the heroic poetry of non-Indo-European peoples, particularly the African and Polynesian communities. In recent years archaeological studies of the Near East have led to the 'discovery' of a New

Heroic Age of the Ancient Sumerians. This has been largely due to the work of S. N. Kramer, who has applied the comparative method of Chadwick very successfully. Referring to the pioneering works of the Chadwicks, Kramer says, "it is no insignificant index of the value and reliability of these works to note their effective utilization to give meaning and form to an hitherto practically unknown cultural stage in the history of ancient Mesopotamia."<sup>1</sup>

Since heroic poetry may be related to a specific socio-historical condition and literary *milieu* it can arise at different times among different peoples. So far as is known, the Sumerian Heroic Age is the oldest, preceding the oldest of the Indo-European Heroic Ages, that of the Greeks, by more than a millennium and a half. The Indo-Aryan or (North) Indian Heroic Age probably dates only a century or so later than that of Greece. One could venture to say that the Tamil Heroic Age comes next in time, preceding the Teutonic Heroic Age of about the fourth century A. D. The Tamil Heroic Age should be placed somewhere in the fourth or fifth century B. C. Before we go on to it, it would be relevant to point out here that in almost all the cases of these ancient Heroic Ages, the written literary pieces relating to them date from much later days; in Sumer it is said that some at least of the heroic lays were first inscribed on clay some five to six hundred years following the close of the Heroic Age<sup>2</sup>; a span of about four hundred years may be ascribed for the Greek and a little more may be the case with that of the Tamils. In any case the Tamil heroic poetry had most probably been committed to writing by the beginning of the Christian era.

Now, what is of interest to us here is that the bulk of the heroic poetry which has come down to us, portrays the emergence of the three principal kingdoms from among innumerable tribal organisations and village communities. This epoch in a nation's history is violent but brilliant, short-lived but glorious, convulsive but opulent. As elsewhere, the politics of the Tamil Heroic Age were marked by the ascendancy of an "energetic military caste, which torn by



internecine conflicts of succession and inheritance breaks loose from its tribal bonds into a career of violent, self-assertive individualism."<sup>3</sup>

It has been pointed out that most heroic poetry evolves round a few select personalities, giving rise to a cycle of poems and lays. For example, in the Slavonic Kiev cycle of heroic poems, Vladimir I dominates the subject-matter,<sup>4</sup> as Charlemagne does in the French *Chanson de Roland*. Similarly, Sumerian heroic poetry centres round, among others, Gilgamesh. Among the Kirghiz, the greatest hero is Manas with his retinue of forty friends. The heroic songs of Manas form a cycle and, with that, the starting point for a real epic is provided. The case of Achilles, Odysseus and Hector is only too familiar in the Greek epics.

In common with this general characteristic, most of the Ten Songs have their heroes, two princes, Nhetunjcezhayan of the Paantiya dynasty and Karikaalan of the Coozha dynasty. Cengkuttuvan of the Ceeral line represents the third family. We have mentioned that Emperor Asoka referred in his rock edicts to these three kingdoms. In the course of the development of Tamil heroic poetry, one from each of these three dynasties seem to have emerged and remained heroes *par excellence*.

Students of heroic poetry have often formulated the following general characteristics for comparative purposes : (1) narratives told for their own sake ; (2) connected with the Heroic Age of past ; (3) they contain factual or detailed descriptions ; (4) told in the third person with abundant speeches ; (5) full of formulae, i.e., noun-adjective combination, repeated lines, and themes used often though not always in precisely the same form ; (6) composed in a metre where the line is the unit and not the stanza ; (7) centred on a few heroes ; (8) accepted by later generations as records of historical past. The idea that the bards who sang these were divinely inspired gave it absolute authenticity.<sup>5</sup> Now, if we turn to the Tamil heroic poems, we find these characteristics more or less valid. The Ten Songs at least are narratives, developed by

generations of bards whose special vocation was the declamation of heroic poetry; they are certainly connected with a Heroic Age, which saw the establishment or the laying of foundations for the establishment of the three kingdoms which survived well into the medieval period. In them we have abundant factual and detailed descriptions of unimportant actions, needed by the narratives, such as banquets, dress, travel, ornaments, instruments, etc. They are narrated in the third person, but with plenty of speeches, such as oaths, challenges, reports and the like. The words *killhavi* and *kuuttu* may be noted. The very basis of this poetry is the traditional language of the epics, full of all formulae, which had led some modern critics to see painful repetitions in them. The metre of these poems is *akaval*, the oldest known metre in Tamil, ideally suited for oral narration, and comparable—and in fact compared by some—to the Greek hexametre. They are centered around a few super heroes. They were traditionally accepted by Tamil scholarship as of authentic historical past, and like the Homeric poems we know that they formed the staple of Tamil education in post-heroic period until our times.

“For Homer,” wrote Parry, “as for all minstrels, to versify was to remember—to remember words, expressions, phrases from the recitals of minstrels who had bequeathed to him the traditional style of heroic verse.” By studying the recent compositions of Yugoslav minstrels, he demonstrated that such poems depend upon a gradually evolved traditional style of stock epithets, fixed expressions, which the bards fit into their mould of verse after a fixed pattern, according to their needs. Now a study of the early Tamil poems show this to be very true. For example, fixed formulaic phrases like “chieftain of swift steeds”, “warrior of victorious lance”, “possessor of lofty chariots,” “chieftain of eye-filling garlands”, “Ceeran of war-drum beating army”, “wide-spaced world”, “beautiful broad breast”, “Mathurai rich in gold”, are repeated wherever occasion demands them, and they are not always the characteristic style of a single poet. The question of imitation does not arise at all, as there is “no question of plagiarism or copyright”.<sup>8</sup>



Readers of Homeric epic are familiar with formulaic phrases such as *chronos thronos Hera*—‘golden-throned Hera’, *polytlas dios Odysseus*—‘long-suffering god-like Odysseus’, *Gerenios hippota nestor*—‘the Gerenion charioteer Nestor’, *Glaukos Athene*—‘grey-eyed Athene’ or ‘Mycenae or Troy rich in gold’, etc. Such stock epithets and many others like them evolved by a long process were the stock in trade of all the minstrels and in due course came to form a literary dialect or what has been called the epic dialect. Similar to these noun-adjective combinations are the stock of repeated lines and passages.

This composite nature of the Tamil heroic poems, and their cherished recital by schools of bards—of which we have some evidence—in due course lead to what we may call a “national consciousness”, an idea of pan-Tamilian culture, which in fact became a political concept in historical times. In this sense, one is naturally reminded of the gradual evolution of a Greek national consciousness arising out of the recitation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* at the Panathenaea.

In an epic style like that of early Tamil heroic poetry, reaching back through a tradition, we would naturally find not only ancient words and usage but also archaic customs and manners. There are survivals in the poems, faithfully carried on by the bards as part of their stylistic heritage. The Tamil heroic poetry perhaps, took its final form, when trade between South India and the western world flourished. The writings of the Graeco-Roman geographers corroborate some of the evidence in these poems. As such they are datable. And descriptions of material objects are identical. Yet the bulk of the poetry contains older memories with their terminology unchanged. We may cite an example. There are repeated references to ‘rain-cloud-like black hides’—the heroes’ shield. The word used for hide is *tool*, ‘skin’ or ‘hide’, has survived to this day. This expression was probably an echo of a time when hide *was* in fact used as a shield. But we also find in the poem new words—meaning shields of other materials—wood and metal. These were

presumably added by later bards, when such was the practice. A striking parallel is seen in the *Iliad*. In the 6th Book, when Hector withdraws from battle, it is said, 'the black hide beat upon his neck ankles', referring in all probability to a Nycenean body shield. But it has been pointed out that at a later date it was not visualized as such, and a further description, "the rim which ran round the outside of the bossed shield", was added. The latter description does not fit with the earlier one.

Finally, I shall just mention one more aspect of heroic poetry that promises scope for comparative study: the simile. It has been pointed out by students of Homeric epics that there are three types of simile:

- (1) The elementary one. The identification of one object with another.
- (2) Where comparisons in two objects are developed on both sides.
- (3) The typical Homeric, or epic simile in which the image used as illustration is developed at length for its own sake, where some of the details no longer apply in the comparison.<sup>7</sup>

With the reservation that Tamil Heroic poetry did not develop into the epic but remained in the form of lays—the longest being about 700 lines—which to some degree curbs the effective use of similes—it may be said that all three types are found in it.<sup>8</sup>

By way of conclusion, let me draw your attention to the immense potentialities of the comparative method. In a penetrating essay on *The Comparative Study of Homer*,<sup>9</sup> Sir Maurice Bowra has shown how comparative studies or rather studies in other literatures have had their impact on Homeric scholarship. For example, Lachmann's theory of independent lays that constitute the *Iliad* is said to be traceable to the creation of the *Kalevala* by the poet-scholar-folklorist Lönnrot. This was a Finnish epic made out of a



number of epic poems collected by the scholar. Likewise, the postulation of three strata for the *Iliad* by Leaf, the famous editor, commentator and analyst, owes something to the systematic analysis and edition of the *Mahābhārata*, with its obvious interpolations. The idea held by the influential Greek scholar and translator, Gilbert Murray, that the Homeric epics are traditional books, subject to continuous change, i.e., accretion and expurgation, appears to have been derived from the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> These were some of the influences that emanated from works of the last century and before. In the present century the collection and analysis of living oral poetry of several peoples have gradually helped evolve a new awareness of oral poetics which alone seems to hold the key to the true understanding and appreciation of heroic poets like Homer. Says Professor Emeneau, "For many scholars over many centuries the implications of oral composition for the understanding of Homer were forgotten. There was a need for some new impulse to make the matter vivid enough to be vital in Homeric Studies."<sup>11</sup> The reference is of course to Milman Parry and his associates who broke new ground by applying boldly and profitably to Homeric study the details of the technique of oral verse-making found among the South Slav epic singers.

While studies on Tamil heroic poetry can benefit immensely from such works as that of Radlov, the Chadwicks, Parry, Thomson, Lord and others.<sup>12</sup> I would hazard the suggestion that a proper study of Tamil heroic poetry itself will in turn throw some light at least on some problems that beset the students of Homeric and other heroic poetry in general.

#### NOTES

1. S. N. Kramer, "Heroes of Sumer—A New Heroic Age in World History and Literature", *PAPS* 90 (1946), p. 120.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
3. G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society, I: The Prehistoric Aegean*, 2nd ed., London, 1954, pp. 413 f.

4. H. M. and N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, Cambridge, 1932 - 40, 2, p. 99 ; 3, p. 37 ; etc.
5. For a detailed enumeration of these categories, see C. M. Bowra, "The Comparative Study of Homer", *AJA* LIV (1950), p. 185.
6. Cf. C. M. Bowra, in *Companion to Homer*, p. 34.
7. R. W. Willetts, "The World of Homer", *Our History Series* 32 (1963 - 64), pp. 8 - 11.
8. Rev. X. S. Thani Nayagam has briefly referred to the striking similarity between the Homeric and Tamil simile. Cf. *Nature Ancient Tamil Poetry*, Tuticorin, 1953, pp. 48 f.
9. *AJA* LIV (1950), pp. 184 - 92.
10. Cf. G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Oxford, 1934, pp. 93 - 145.
11. M. B. Emeneau, "Oral Poets of South India—The Todas", *JAF* 71 (1958), p. 312. As an attempt at applying theories of oral poetics to a living Dravidian literature, the importance of this essay cannot be over-rated. See also "The Songs of the Todas", *PAPS* 77 (1937), pp. 543 - 59.
12. For a detailed comparison of such features, see K. KAILASAPATHY, *A Study of Tamil Heroic Poetry with Some Reference to Ancient Greek Epics* (Thesis approved for the degree of Ph. D., in the University of Birmingham). Material contained in this thesis was later published in *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968).



## 5. A Note on Modern Tamil Poetry

Modern Tamil Poetry begins with Subramania Bharathi (1882 - 1921), a contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore and a major Indian poet like him. Modern Tamil readers owe to him a new insight into matters that very much needed it.

Bharathi of course lived and wrote in the heyday of Indian nationalism and was personally acquainted with great personalities such as Tilak, Bepin Chandra Pal, Lajapati Rai, Aurobindo and Gandhi, and yet it would be a mistake to dub him as a nationalist poet. He was too subtle and complex for that. As a youth he was attracted towards Shelley, Byron and Whitman—just to mention three western poets. But he was equally steeped in the literary traditions of Sanskrit and Tamil. As a result, in Bharathi's works we see a blend of the west and the best in Tamil and Sanskrit.

There is an intellectual and emotional balance and poise in his poems resulting from the acceptance of traditional metres and prosodical forms to express new concepts and equally new values.

The most significant and abiding contribution to modern Tamil poetry is not only in singing of the socio-political and

economic aspects of modern life but also in changing the idioms of Tamil poetry. He utilized perhaps for the first time in this century the rhythm of the colloquial speech of the Tamil language. It is true that in the popular dramas and folk songs, colloquial speech had been used by earlier bards. But this kind of poetry was reserved for the illiterate men and women while the learned few continued to use an archaic and artificial literary language. Bharathi broke with this literary conservatism and gave a respectability to the idiom of the common man by raising it to the level of literary diction.

At the same time Bharathi also experimented with what has come to be called *verse-libra* in modern times. In the thirties—after the poet's death—some critics described these pieces as 'Prose poems'. But Bharathi himself does not call them free verse or *Vacana Kavitai*. He was no doubt influenced by Walt Whitman in this matter, yet, Bharathi explained them as adaptations of Vedic literary forms in modern Tamil. Nonetheless, one can easily see the true nature of such compositions of his. They were not intended to be sung like other poems of his (in fact very many poems of Bharathi have been set to music by the poet himself), but to be recited. (Here too one notices striking similarities between Bharathi and Tagore.)

After Bharathi a split may be said to have occurred in Tamil poetry. One line of poets have continued and developed and at times modified (or simplified) Bharathi's traditional aspects, i.e., elevation of the folk forms and refining them with new content: preserving metrical forms with slight changes. The other line of poets have seized on his so-called 'free verse' and claiming him to be their precursor, have brought into being the new poetry—ranging from Laurentian type of personal outburst of feeling to contemporary concrete poetry.

Since this is a widespread phenomenon in the modern world one need not go into details. The New Poets invoke the names of Imagists, Surrealists and the practitioners of concrete poetry and all the arguments in favour of metreless, personal visions are adduced. Many of the New Poems have a fair percentage of foreign, especially English words in them, which gives them an exotic, if not alien flavour. N. Pichchamurti, S. Vaitheeswaran,



Gnanakoothan, Venugopalan and Meera are some of the better-known New Poets.

The New Poets of course do not belong to a coherent school or band. They are as varied and diverse as their number. But for the sake of convenience two broad categories could be discerned : One group could be called the 'psychological' and the other 'social'. They differ on the question of content and function of poetry.

Both in quantity and quality the 'traditionalists' are still more dominant in modern Tamil literature. Naturally they have a larger audience and a greater popularity. The New Poets are largely confined to the pages of little—*avant-garde* magazines, and an extremely small readership of fellow poets—at times praising one another and very often criticising one another.

The main point would appear to be this : there is a division between poetry to be sung and poems to be read. This dichotomy is perhaps the dominant feature of contemporary Tamil Poetry. But such dichotomy is in a sense not confined to poetry alone. In different ways it is the main problem of modern literature, is it not ?

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## 6. The Relation of Tamil and Western Literatures\*

### I

Very soon we shall begin celebrating the birth centenary of our greatest modern poet—Subramania Bharathi (1882 - 1921). A century is a brief moment in the life of a people whose cultural history goes back, at least, to two and a half millennia. Nevertheless, the last hundred years or so have a significance for exceeding the length of the period. This was a period when Tamil literature was responding to external influences from the west, especially to English influences, and at the same time trying to express its sense of nationality and the consciousness of its own tradition. It is a paradox that the period which saw intense western influences has also been the period of the 'National Resurgence'. For one of the first and chief things observable in the group of pioneers who heralded the Tamil 'Renaissance' in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, both in Tamil Nadu and Ceylon, is that they were impelled to study

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\* A series of Lectures were delivered by the Author at the Madurai-Kamaraj University sometime in 1982.



their own history, and their own legends, their own customs and folk-lore. It is a strange phenomenon that the modern movement that began to manifest itself during the latter half of the Nineteenth Century and gathered momentum by the turn of the Century, should draw its initial sustenance from the past. In fact, it was in the process of discovering the past—a conscious intellectual endeavour, in contrast to the mechanical repetitions of traditional arrangements that characterized life during the previous few centuries—that the foundations for a new literature were laid. This phenomenon will be familiar to cultural historians as inevitable process in the passage of a literature from colonial rule to national independence and maturity. And the poetical works of Bharathi exemplifies this apparent paradox. Accordingly, the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the *Mahakavi* will be most apposite for a retrospective appraisal or evaluation of the relation of our literature to western literatures. One recalls here Dr. V. Sachithanandan's admirable piece of work *The Impact of Western Thought on BHARATI*.

It will be evident enough, I hope, from the title of my Lecture that I do not propose to go over the areas of western impact on Tamil language and literature or to enumerate the results of such an impact. The story has been often told: the development of prose ; the preparation of lexicons ; the birth of fiction ; the evolution of the concept of Tamilology ; the emergence of the modern movement ; the rise of a critical awareness ; these have been some of the direct consequences of the confluence of Tamil and Western literatures. To recapitulate them here would be to labour a truism. V. R. M. Chettiar's observation is typical :

Modern Tamil Literature has had its growth and expansion both in style and range of subject-matter through the influence of Western Literatures, in all its varied aspects of poetry, drama, fiction and literary criticism.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for my explanation is that the subject of my Lectures is not simply the impact of the West on Tamil  
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language and literature, but the nature of the relations between Tamil and Western literatures in the specific context of the growth of Modernism in Tamil. In another sense, what I hope to discuss is the manner in which Tamil has responded to Western literary concepts and works and the overall significance of this relation between the two. I shall therefore not attempt a chronological account of the relation but rather a presentation of cultural history and criticism linking the past with the present.

It is a common knowledge that dates are often arbitrary and a convenient date for reckoning the beginning of the relation between Tamil and Western or more specifically English literature can be anybody's prescription. One could choose any one of the following : 1812, the year 'The College of Fort St. George' was established in Madras ; 1835, the year Macaulay minuted that all higher education in India should be conducted in English ; 1854, the year 'The Department of Public Instruction' came into being ; 1857, the year Universities were established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras ; 1879, the year the first Tamil novel was published ; 1891, the year P. Sundaram Pillai (1855 - 1897) published *Manonmaniyam*, a play in verse and professedly influenced by English models ; 1896, the year of publication of *A Professor's Holiday* being the speeches and writings of Professor P. Ranganada (1844 - 1893) ; or 1901, the year V. G. Suryanarayana Sastriar (1870 - 1903) better known as Paritimatkalaignar brought out *Tani-Pacura-Togai*, a Book of Tamil Sonnets with English Echoes and Notes. The English versions of the Tamil sonnets were rendered by G. U. Pope (1820 - 1907) of Balliol College, Oxford, who did yeoman service to Tamil language and literature by teaching them at Oxford and translating Tamil classical works into English. As has been aptly observed<sup>a</sup> the missionary Pope "contributed much to the elevation of Tamil studies and Tamil religion as legitimate subjects of study for oriental scholars". Every one of the events mentioned above shows the impact of English education on Tamils and signifies a turning point in their literary and cultural history.



Our first need, then is to select a date, preferably a decade, precise enough to be a watershed, yet flexible enough to include a variety of developments that could be considered seminal to the development of Modern Tamil literature. My predilection is for 1857, not because I have a bias towards university, but considering all its attendant consequences for many individuals and the society as a whole, the establishment of the University of Madras naturally enough compels our consideration. Clearly we must appreciate the importance of the event in all its ramifications. To trace the consequences in detail would take us on a course that would be inappropriate here. It is enough to recognize the fact that the early products of the University were a band of outstanding men who were incredibly versatile in many fields. The fact is that at that stage, that is, the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, specialization had not set in so much that a man could combine the pursuit of science with other liberal pursuits. They were in some ways, like the Renaissance men. Let me cite a few examples : Poondi Ranganada Mudaliar was a Professor of Mathematics, a brilliant chess player with profound interest in Philosophy and equally at home in the composition of Tamil traditional poetry. He was an able speaker and writer in English. V. P. Subramania Mudaliar (1857 - 1946) was a qualified Veterinarian who pursued philosophy and psychology, translating some works of Herbert Spencer. He also translated the first half of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Tamil, undoubtedly an ambitious task. He was also a poet with considerable originality as could be seen from his *Ahalikai Venba*. (Incidentally it may be noticed that the author had been influenced by Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* in handling this theme.) V. Kanagasabhai Pillai (1855 - 1906) who wrote the pioneering work *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago* (1904) was considered a prodigy. He was actively interested in history, archaeology, philology and numismatics. His English translations of a few Tamil poetical works appeared in the *Indian Antiquary*. L. D. Swamikannu Pillai (1865 - 1925) was a polyglot in several languages. Likewise, he was equally at home in mathematics, politics, history, astronomy, philosophy and literature. He

wrote verses in English. He was well-known for his amazing memory. His contributions to Indian Ephemeris is considered very high and original. P. Sundaram Pillai (1855 - 1897), although a product of Maharajah's College, Trivandrum, was of a similar mould. An outstanding Tamil scholar, he was a path-breaker in chronological studies, pursued epigraphy, philosophy, psychology and science. He was inclined towards mysticism, a fact clearly evident in his creative work. He himself makes mention of it in his Preface :

...It has not been thought necessary to exclude altogether such reflections, descriptions and minor incidents and details, as were found auxiliary to the moral and artistic effects of the play. To the spiritually inclined, some of the incidents may appear capable of allegorical interpretation and the stanza at the end of each act will perhaps be found helpful in that direction... It will be also observed that the metre used is the simplest in the language and the nearest approach to the English Blank verse, which not only saves the distortions and obscurities that rhyme often brings in its train but is also specially favourable to that continuity of thought and expression so needful in dialogues.

One could add more names to this list. Certainly C. W. Thamotaram Pillai (1832 - 1901), T. Chelvakesavaraya Mudaliar (1864 - 1921) and A. Madhaviah (1872 - 1925) need to be included. These men were graduates of the University that was established in 1857 and not only justified their higher studies, but were also men of extraordinary calibre : nearly all of them combined a scientific-historical outlook and a genuine respect for tradition. They were equally adept in versifying in Tamil and English and almost all of them wrote excellent prose in both the languages. Even if it is taken as a purely arbitrary date, 1857 could be accepted as a legitimate landmark in our modern cultural history.

At this point I am impelled to make a few remarks on this preliminary topic from a Sri Lankan perspective. That there is a Sri Lankan perspective is often overlooked by



scholars. I make these remarks not as a reproach but simply as a reminder that in the making of the modern movement, Sri Lankan scholars, especially of the last century have made a distinct contribution. Someone remarked that an age is always too crowded for seeing in it the few things that are by definition unique. There was something unique in the educational facilities available in Jaffna during the middle of the last century that have an important bearing on the relation between Tamil and Western scholarship.

This is not the place to discuss the process of modernization that took place and is taking place, in Tamil society and its ramifications in all aspects of social life. Suffice it to say that the intellectual awakening and fervour that were concurrent with this change were largely due to the impact of the West, which for all practical purposes was most prominent in the field of education and the resultant upheavals in social values. Due to a number of factors some of which were fortuitous and others intrinsically historical, Jaffna was in the forefront of this 'Renaissance'. The educational contributions of some of the Christian Missionaries in Jaffna to this efflorescence cannot be exaggerated.<sup>3</sup>

By the 20s of the last century Jaffna had seen the establishment of seminaries where systematic education was imparted at a very high level. As a result there arose a generation of Jaffna scholars who distinguished themselves in different walks of life and in many branches of Tamil studies. There was distinct esteem in Madras for Jaffna scholars and a person like C. W. Thamotaram Pillai was certainly reckoned to be an outstanding intellectual of his time. The very mention of such names as Henry Martyn (1811 - 1861), William Nevins Sithamparapillai (1820 - 1889), Carroll Visvanathapillai (1820 - 1880), J. Arnold Sathasivampillai (1820 - 1895), Arumuka Navalar (1822 - 1879), C. Wyman Kathiravelpillai (1829 - 1904), T. Chellappapillai (1837 - 1902), K. Senthinatha Aiyar (1848 - 1924), T. Kanagasundarampillai (1863 - 1924), A. Muthuthambipillai (1858 - 1917) will be sufficient to indicate the calibre of personalities who constituted the Jaffna school. Of course, almost all of them came from

families with access to traditional learning. In a sense English education was super-imposed on their Tamil learning. But what proved to be of crucial importance was the quality of English education they were exposed to, at Missionary institutions like the Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna Central School. For instance it may be noted in passing that C. Arumukam who was to become famous in later years as *Navalar*, 'orator' joined the Jaffna Central School in 1834 and spent fourteen years there both as a student and a teacher. At the school he was deeply influenced by the Rev. Peter Percival who later became Professor of Indian Languages and Literature at Presidency College, Madras, and was also the founder-editor of *Dinavartamani* (1855) which was perhaps the first newspaper in Tamil.

Missionaries of the stature of Daniel Poor and Peter Percival, like Alexander Duff (1806 - 1878) in India, were not mere evangelists. They were of the strong conviction that "nothing short of a widespread system of elementary Christian education in the vernacular tongue, and a thorough-going system of scientific and theological instruction, both in Tamil and English, were the appropriate means to be used."

A perusal of the courses taught at the Batticotta Seminary would show very clearly their broad vision and aims. Besides Christianity, Science and Philosophy claimed a great share in the work of the institution. Consequently emphasis was laid on both pure and applied sciences—Mathematics, Philosophy, Natural History, Astronomy, Chemistry; as far as the Humanities and Social Sciences were concerned, besides English Literature, Greek, Latin Hebrew and Sanskrit, Geography, Geology, History, Political Economy, and Book-keeping were taught. Although motivated by the zeal to preach and spread Christianity, there is no doubt that the education provided by the Seminary was remarkably liberal in character. Of course, subsequent changes in policy and orientation were to bring this enlightened experiment to an end. But during the early phase, under the principalships of Poor and Hoisington at the Batticotta Seminary and Percival at the Wesleyan School, Science and



Philosophy held a dominant position in the curriculum. It was therefore not surprising that Sir Emerson Tennent, the sober and scholarly Colonial Secretary of Ceylon made the following observations in his *Christianity in Ceylon* (1850).

The course of education is so comprehensive as to extend over a period of eight years of study. With special regard to the future usefulness of its alumni in the conflict with the Brahmanical system, the curriculum embraces all the ordinary branches of historical and classical learning and all the higher departments of mathematical and physical science combined with the most intimate familiarisation with the great principles and evidences of the Christian religion...The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing; and it is no exaggerated encomium to say that, in the course of instruction, and in the success of the system of communicating it, the collegiate institution of Batticotta is entitled to rank with many European Universities.

The Batticotta Seminary was started in 1824 and came to an end in 1855. For thirty-one years it had provided the Ceylonese in general and the Jaffna Tamils in particular, higher education that was unique at that time in India and Ceylon. Serampore College in Calcutta was, of course, established in 1818 and imparted higher Western learning at University grade. But its overall scope was somewhat narrower than that of the Batticotta Seminary, which at one stage taught even Western medicine. The Vellore mission hospital was established on the experience of the medical school in Jaffna pioneered by Dr. Samuel Fisk Green (1822 - 1884). An experiment was made to teach medicine in Tamil. The Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were founded in 1857, two years after the closing of the Seminary. Under the circumstances it was no wonder that two of its products comfortably passed the first Bachelor of Arts degree examination of the University of Madras in 1857 without further preparation : C. W. Thamotaram Pillai and Carroll Visuvanathapillai earned a place for themselves as the first graduates of the Madras University.

It was the scientific and philosophic education which Thamotaram Pillai and others received at the Seminary in Jaffna that enabled them to blaze new trails and carry out investigations covering a vast range of subjects. The liberal education they imbibed also kindled their creative spirits and people like Arnold Sathasivampillai and Thamotaram Pillai wrote original works in prose and verse. Sathasivampillai for instance, published *Nannerik Katha Sangrakam* in 1869 which has a special place in the history of modern Tamil prose literature in that it was probably the earliest attempt to write short stories in Tamil. He was also the first to publish in Tamil a history of Tamil poets *Pavalar Charithra Theepakam* (1881), *Galaxy of Tamil Poets*. At a time when literary history was virtually unknown among Tamil scholars, Sathasivampillai produced a book that is even now most valuable. In his Preface to the first Edition the author said :

Although we Tamils can boast of our Poetic Science and Poetic Literature, and affirm that few nations on earth can boast of as many poets as the Tamils, yet it is strange and humiliating that no attempt has ever been made, either in ancient or modern times, to make a collection of the biographies of the numerous poets and poetesses that lived in Southern India and Ceylon.

Likewise, it was this sense of history and scientific spirit that launched C. W. Thamotaram Pillai on his pioneering attempt at periodization of the history of Tamil literature and into textual criticism in which he was a path-finder. In both the periodization of literature and textual criticism he must have been influenced by Western methodology. One is tempted to imagine Thamotaram Pillai engrossed in a variorum Shakespeare, with its lines of text at the top of the page, and multitude of surmises and conjectures at the bottom and contemplating on some classical Tamil text. Modern scholars are apt to wonder at the advanced theoretical and conceptual framework with which he carried out his critical work. I will go even further and say that not more than one or two persons after him have improved on his rigorous methodology. It is interesting to compare one of Swaminatha Iyer's editions full of aids for students and explicatory material,



with one of Thamotaram Pillai's containing a critical preface, explaining the method adopted in arriving at emendations.

The purpose of my digression was to delineate the background in which the relation between Tamil and Western literature was established. More than the specific and individual influences, the very exposure to Western liberal tradition and writings animated the first generation who strove to create Tamil works, often in the image of the literary works that moved them. In creating new forms and *genres* they openly expressed indebtedness to certain models and authors. What is important to observe is that although a few did attempt to write in English—like B. R. Rajam Iyer (1872 - 1898), A. Madhaviah, M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866 - 1947) and S. M. Natesa Sastriar (1859 - 1916)—most of the early writers chose to express themselves in Tamil. The best talents imbibed the literary spirit and manner from Western works and tried to “help the cause of Tamil Literature” by their creative efforts. Accordingly, the use that is made of the Western exemplars, and not the fact of their having been influenced, is the useful test by which the better known Tamil works can be judged. The Australian critic Morris Miller has aptly stated : “Interactions between literatures are common features of literary growth, and in reacting to English influences we are not on that account to be depreciated”.<sup>4</sup>

Having discussed some aspects of the historical and educational background in which Western literature influenced Tamil, I would like to say something of the Tamil response to these influences. I have earlier referred to the particular circumstance—colonial rule—under which the relation between Tamil and Western literature was born. Comparative studies show us that a general pattern exists wherever European culture came to dominate through conquest and colonial rule some less ‘advanced’ society. The general progress consists of three stages : the first stage is the period of imitation of the models provided by the dominant culture ; the second stage is characterized by intense and sometimes passionate debates between the forces attracted to indigenous sources and those drawn towards foreign models. During this stage advocates of nationalism and regionalism will appear to be triumphant. The third stage witnesses the gradual

weakening of self-conscious nationalism and the emergence of more balanced views resulting in greater self-confidence and un-self-consciousness. I do not aver that modern Tamil literature has traversed the whole gamut. We certainly have not experienced the third stage. We can comprehend it by reading about it but not feel it as an actual experience.

At this stage I wish to raise a fundamental issue about the influences I have referred to earlier ; the liberal education, and the resultant spirit of enquiry in the pursuit of knowledge. History and Science no doubt provided new perceptions and insights. And these were the benefits of English education. And yet it might appear that this change and progress was not exactly what we would expect them to be. It is true that the writers and scholars who benefited by collegiate education were critical, cautious and liberal. They had adopted new approaches to literature—both creative and critical. If one were to compare Arumuka Navalar and Mahavidwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai (1815 - 1875) the distinctions will become clear. Arumuka Navalar had spent fourteen years in a Christian Institution, without being converted to Christianity, and yet became the greatest champion and reformer of Saivism. In religion he was orthodox, uncompromising and Agamic to the core. Undoubtedly he was a conservative. But he was also a great innovator in many matters. He was a pioneer in textual criticism, in the writing of text-books, in the creation of a unique prose style, in criticising malpractices in the management of temples and in attacking the impiety and illiteracy prevalent among many Brahmin priests. How does one judge him? On the other hand, consider Meenakshisundaram Pillai. He was perhaps the last great traditional versifier. He wrote nearly a hundred works. There is no evidence that he wrote anything in prose. He was the chief Tamil scholar at the Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt. For all purposes he was oblivious of all societal issues and questions of literary innovation. He is of course remembered as the *Guru* of Swaminatha Aiyar (1855 - 1942), Thiyagaraja Chettiar (1826 - 1888) and a few others. In fact, Meenakshisundaram Pillai was the very antithesis of the modern Tamil scholar. This dichotomy has been vividly described by a recent Western scholar.



By the late 'seventies, the native community seemed to be split between two jarring elements corresponding, on the one hand, to the pre-university leaders—ignorant, timid and superstitious—and, on the other, to the products of the universities. Each faction continuously appeared to thwart the other.<sup>5</sup>

The point is that when we speak of Western influences we should not use it as a *cliche* or a blanket term. The Western sources and models that influenced the Tamil writers<sup>6</sup> did not repeat themselves in the works they inspired. The answer is not difficult to find. The two societies had not much in common. The apparent and very often surface similarities of the two literatures should not obscure the fact that the two atmospheres are not identical. Many of the early Tamil writers acquired their literary taste on the basis of their reading in English, be it for examinations, entertainment or edification. That being so, there was bound to be, and in a large measure there continues to be, a discrepancy between actual and literary experience. To the Tamil writers, not only the literary situation in their immediate environment, but more important, their social organization itself was considerably different. Naturally these were decisive constraints on the realization and execution of the influences. Thus, when we speak of the historical and scientific spirit that permeated among the English educated Tamils during the latter part of the last century, we should not conclude that the spirit was identical with what prevailed among their counterparts in the West. Compared to the moribund literary tradition that was lingering in the Monasteries and in the minds of some people, the attitude and approach of the new English educated scholars and writers were no doubt invigorating. The English educated writer did take a step forward, but he also retracted two steps backward. In spite of his acquired rationality and the proddings of his inner thoughts he was willing to be conditioned by the climate of ideas and feelings and assumptions of his public and acquiesce in them. Let me illustrate my point. The author Poondi Ranganada to whom I have already referred to was a celebrity in his life-time. He was awarded the title of Rao Bahadur by the Imperial Govern-

ment and was a member of the National Indian Association and Cosmopolitan Club in Madras. He was a typical representative of the English educated elite hobnobbing with the rulers of the day. To me he allows himself too much acquiescence with surrounding superstition and bigotry. He made the following candid statement in a paper read at Madras in 1884.

I may feel sincerely that the way in which religious ceremonies are performed and *mantrams* uttered by my family priest is a mockery of things solemn, a profanation of things sacred, and yet this solemn mockery, this sacred profanity must be endured, or I run the risk of being reviled as an apostate. I may feel that the best thing I can do for my stupid son is to keep him single, until such time at least as he is able to shift for himself and earns enough to maintain a wife and children with ; but such is the tyranny of custom that he must be married as soon as he arrives at man's estate even though I have to bear the burden of supporting, it may be to the last day of my life, my worthless son and his wife and all the creatures they may bring into existence. It may seem to me to be a profligate waste of money to spend hundreds and thousands of rupees in connection with a marriage on gifts to the well-to-do, food to the pampered, on dancers, and songstresses, on processions and illuminations and on the various shows and festivities that are imagined to be an integral part of marriage, but I must do as others do, or I shall be taunted as a miser and suspected even by my friends as a possible renegade ".<sup>6</sup>

We find here the split between the public and the private. There is a victorian hypocrisy behind this rationalization or self justification. It is a clear case of double standard. Bruce Tiebout McCully has succinctly described this state of affairs :

The broad barrier that separated the public, outer life of the educated Hindu, that is, his life as an officer of the state or as a teacher or lawyer from his private inner life, resembled the double life of the somnambulist.<sup>7</sup>



It is a reflection of the split personality of the author that the major creative work he wrote in Tamil was *Kachchikkalambagam*. *Kalambagam* literally 'mixture combination' is a comprehensive hyper *genre* which admits great variety both in metre and theme.\* In Tamil literary tradition it was considered a challenging and demanding *genre*. The maxim "*ellam padi kalambagam padu*", meaning one should take it up having gained experience in handling other forms indicates how onerous it was. The fact that he wrote reasonably good prose befitting his time but chose to labour on a very traditional verse form shows that "he kept his verse and his prose in two different compartments". Ranganada Mudaliar's reaction was not an isolated instance. The next name I like to cite is of slightly later date and certainly better known. A. Madhaviah was another writer, at home both in English and in Tamil. I quote from his English novel *Thillai Govindan*, published under the guise of a posthumous autobiography. These are among the concluding passages :

My quest waa not to unravel the great mystery, or draw the veil from off the unknowable ; I only wanted some principle to guide me in daily life a rudder to my barque which would not appear monstrous to my reason. And this I found in that most amazing and perplexing book, the "Bhagavat Gita"...Do thy duty, and do it with utter indifference to the fruits of action, preached the "Gita" in one place, and I felt that this alone could ensure peace of mind. Theosophical literature also formed a portion of my studies, and mostly through its means I was convinced, as far as conviction is possible in such a subject, of the truth of the doctrines of reincarnation and *Karma*. So far I had become richer in faith, or perhaps duller in reason and the result was not restlessness but peacefulness of mind.

In a work of fiction these words of the hero, Thillai Govindan, need not be ascribed to the author. And yet on circumstantial evidence and other clues they could very well reflect his mind. The temptation to quote from a review of the book is irresistible. The Englishman Frederic Harrison with whom George

Eliot was on intimate terms and held in high regard by her,<sup>9</sup> had this to say :

He goes as a student to Madras, falls in with Christian Missionaries, takes to evil courses, repents and amends his life, becomes a disciple of Ingersoll and Bradlaugh of Beasant Huxley and Tyndall. He takes up the study of law, but eventually becomes a Government inspector of police in a rural district. The inner life of a native official is a curious revelation. Still more is the story of his young wife's maladies, fancies, and the pilgrimages to the shrines, and the domestic and conscientious struggles of a practising Brahmin who was a Spencerian philosopher. He then becomes a political reformer and agitates for a wholesale revision of native laws and customs. He becomes a delegate to the National Congress. His motto is, "India, with all thy faults I love thee still". He studies "Sartor Resartus", "Robert Elsmere", the Bible, Thomas A. Kempis, theosophy and George Eliot. But he finally reverts to "reincarnation and "Karma". He gives himself to meditate on the Vedas and adopts the practices of a Yogi. In that he finds peace and rest. It is a curious book—how far literal memoirs, how far invention we need not inquire. But it is a fascinating picture of the contrasts and confusions of Hindoo antiquity suddenly plunged into the whirlpool of modern Europe.<sup>10</sup>

The sort of regression referred to by Harrison need not be taken on its face value. However, the passage quoted<sup>11</sup> shows a definite trait discernible in a number of Tamil novels : pre-occupation with religion characterizes many of them. From Rajam Iyer's *Kamalambal Charithram* (1896) and K. N. Subramaniam's *Poytevu* (1946), to K. S. Ramamurthi's *Valithunai* (1980), mysticism, *Vedanta*, *Karma*, reincarnation and similar subjects have been the primary concern of many novelists. The question is not one of religion *per se*, but of its compatibility with the novel as a literary form. For, it will be remembered that notwithstanding the prevalence of Puritanism and the presence of religious concerns in the early English novels, they have no priority of status. We see in the history of English



novel, the gradual emergence, and the gradual shaping and ripening of a secular viewpoint which was but a reflection of the "new type of Englishman, empirical, self-reliant, energetic, and with the sense of a direct relation with a God made in his own image." This naturally led to the emphasis on character itself which came to be considered the distinguishing mark of the novelist. Of course, character was seen in the context of its gradual unfolding in its environment. And it is through the interaction of man and his *milieu* that we get a glimpse of the quality of his physical, social, emotional and intellectual experience. This trend in English literature began with Daniel Defoe and that is why he is often considered to be the first English novelist. Ian Watt's observation is pertinent :

The jury does not normally allow divine intervention as an explanation of human actions. It is therefore likely that a measure of secularization was an indispensable condition for the rise of the new genre. The novel could only concentrate on personal relations once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the Church, or transcendent actors, such as the Persons of the Trinity, were allotted the supreme role on the earthly stage.<sup>12</sup>

Here again, the striking difference between the main trend of English and Tamil novel comes into bold relief. If for instance we analyse the novels of Rajam Iyer, Madhaviah, T. M. Ponnusami Pillai, Idaikkadar (T. Nagamuthu), K. N. Subramaniam, Chidambara Subramanian and K. S. Ramamurthi, we at once perceive in them the basic assumption of the reality of the spirit. It is an *a priori* assumption. Whereas spirituality should be presented only through "the subjective experiences of the characters", many Tamil novelists betray something of the reverence accorded to the *Sruti*, the Vedic revelations, in their treatment of religious concepts. In other words the intrinsic merit of religious belief and its innate excellence are taken as articles of faith. But in the west the growth of the novel was surely facilitated by a world view centred on secularism and individualism. It is true that

in a novel like *Valithunai*, an attempt is made to present the idea of religious self-scrutiny from the individualist and subjective plane, and also treat it within the naturalistic tradition. Nonetheless, incidents implying Divine providence, retribution and fate seem to impinge on the consciousness of the characters, and their actions appear to depend upon a transcendental scheme of things. To continue my argument, I would like to touch upon one more novelist—B. R. Rajam Iyer. Widely acclaimed as the first modern novelist, it has become a habit in recent years, of suggesting that the main tradition of the Tamil novel begins with him. A contemporary of Iyer, P. Sundaram Pillai himself no mean scholar, gave the work superlative praise. There is no gainsaying that *Kamalambal* is one of the best achievements in Tamil fiction. What is of interest to notice here is the vast difference between Rajam Iyer's work and the novels of George Eliot despite the assertion of some critics that the two authors are comparable and that Iyer was influenced by Eliot. (There is of course an observation by K. N. Subramaniam that *Kamalambal* was consciously modelled on Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.) Let us consider Rajam Iyer and George Eliot. Historically speaking, it is easy to see that the novels of both the authors mark a definite change in the nature of the fiction in their respective languages. As is well-known, George Eliot was not primarily concerned with offering entertainment but to "explore a significant theme—a theme significant in its bearing on the serious problems and preoccupations of mature life".<sup>18</sup> As Joan Bennett has remarked in her *George Eliot: Her Mind and Art*, unlike many of her contemporaries she never succumbed to the "wish to provide the sort of entertainment the reader demanded", nor was she moved by the "wish to propagate specific views". The same thing may be said of Rajam Iyer, although his wish to propagate *Vedanta* often protruded in his art. In the choice of village life as the substance of the novels, in the portrayal of the social structure in rural societies, in the strong preoccupation with moral issues, in their possession of descriptive powers and many other matters there are no doubt conspicuous similarities between the two. However, the profound dissimilarities too cannot be overlooked. Foremost among the differences is their religious faith. By the time she came to



write her novels George Eliot's conversion to religious agnosticism was complete. Her close association with the Positivists, her translation of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, her study of spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and *Ethics*, her acceptance of the findings of contemporary science, especially heredity, and other intellectual pursuits placed man in the centre of the universe. The study of spinoza had helped her to free herself from the procrustean bed of dogma.<sup>14</sup> As Ian Watt says, novelists like George Eliot have "inherited of Puritanism everything except its religious faith". For her ethical religious and social norms and conventions were products of history "evolved in time and changing with time". After her conversion to agnosticism and her release from dogmatic religious beliefs, "metaphysical speculations did not disturb her and she was content to devote her own attention to the world of all of us".<sup>15</sup> In 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of Species* was Published and much debate and controversy ensued, George Eliot accepted the theory with assent and understanding.

Now when we consider Rajam Iyer the differences are very striking. In religious matters he was the opposite of George Eliot. His life was very short—just 26 years. Although he was a lover of poetry and contemplated leading the life of an aesthetist, he quickly outgrew that thought and began to pursue the Vedantic ideal of religious unity. As has been observed by G. S. K., the editor of *Rambles in Vedanta*, which contains the writings of Rajam Iyer, "already, Mr. Rajam Iyer had apparently come under the influence of Vedanta philosophy of which the conclusions are largely adopted in his novel... Now the Vedantin too works for happiness, but works with the immediate object of realising an absolutely permanent happiness without causing the least injury to others. Now the chief value and peculiarity of Mr. Rajam Iyer's life consists in that he so early felt and recognised the value of such happiness and of an ideal so purely transcendental and impersonal, under conditions apparently out of the way of and hostile to such recognition and, succeeded in realising his own Self—the one without a second". Those two words, 'transcendental' and 'impersonal' describe his works. No doubt like

most of Eliot's novels, Iyer's *Kamalambal* and his unfinished novel in English *A Dewan Bahadur and a C. I. E.*, offer a beautiful microcosm of Tamilian village life in the early years of the last century. There are passages of poetic intensity, particularly in *Kamalambal*. And yet the dominant note is one of mysticism. In the author's own words, the novel records "the innermost experience of a restless soul which struggled much, and after a long course of suffering, has at last found a fountain all undefiled and pure to slake its thirst of ages".<sup>16</sup> It may not be an autobiographical novel, but Sreenivasan bears too close a resemblance to the author in as much as Maggie Tulliver bears a much closer relationship to George Eliot than any character in *The Mill on the Floss*. What is pertinent here is the fact that the making of sublime spiritual experience central to the novel by Iyer, vitiates the emanation of modern consciousness of the characters in the context of a changing and developing society. This is a weakness that has crippled many Tamil novelists since Rajam Iyer's time. The 'commitment' to Vedanta rather than freeing the author, in actual fact restricts his vision of human life which in a deeper sense hampers his art. It is an accepted axiom that character is conditioned by environment and its potential for growth and lack of it is limited by the world around it. In other words, the external world is very much with the novelist and only in its physical context does he presents characters and through them his vision of life. As pointed out by Bennett, "the difference in quality between George Eliot's novels is closely related to the degree of success with which she gives life to the social world surrounding her central characters".<sup>17</sup> This was something which Rajam Iyer, as a *Vedantin*, could not really comprehend and totally subscribe to. I shall allow him to speak for himself:

The ideal society, according to Vedanta, is not a millennium on earth, nor a reign of angels, where there will be nothing but through equality of men, and peace, and joy—the Vedanta indulges in so much Chimeras—but one, where religious toleration, neighbourly charity, and kindness even to animals form the leading features, where the fleeting concerns of life are subordinated to the eternal



*where man strives not to externalise but to internalise himself more and more* and the whole social organism moves, as it were, with a sure instinct towards God. This ideal will be steadily presented in these pages... (italics author's)

This brings us back to the words 'transcendental' and 'impersonal'. On a close analysis we would find that George Eliot's emphasis is very different from Rajam Iyer's. While Iyer believed that man moves instinctively towards God, George Eliot took the position that through his "capacity for resolution and moral effort" man retains his free will. It is this basically contradictory world views that account for the qualitative differences in the works of the two writers. The superficial and technical similarities between the novels such as the author intervening in the narrative and commenting upon his characters, or turning aside to lecture the reader, or even (in the case of George Eliot, in her earlier works) underlining the didactic element, should not lead us to draw dubious conclusions. The question of religious faith and attitude to God let alone the social world they lived in, are of paramount importance in evaluating the nature of their work.

In commenting on Rajam Iyer and others after him, who have handled the spiritual theme, it must be pointed out that they have, consciously or unconsciously been influenced by our epic tradition. The epic as we all know is a closed and established form with built-in conventions. In it there is no separation or contradiction between matter and spirit. But the novel, as we have seen earlier, emerged in a *milieu* which saw secularization as the main intellectual trend. Writing on the historico-philosophical conditioning of the novel and its significance, George Lukas observed :

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God...The novel hero's psychology is the field of action of the demonic. Biological and sociological life has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence ; men want only to live, structures want to remain intact; and because of the remoteness, the absence of an effective

God, the indolent self complacency of this quietly decaying life would be the only power in the world if men did not sometimes fall prey to the power of the demon and over-reach themselves in ways that have not reason and cannot be explained by reason, challenging all the psychological or sociological foundations of their existence.<sup>18</sup>

Fredric Jameson's comment on Lukas's observation is equally interesting :

Each novel is a process in which the very possibility of narration must begin in a void, without any acquired momentum : its privileged subject-matter will therefore be the search, in a world in which neither goals nor paths established are beforehand.<sup>19</sup>

Let me return to my point of departure : I had said that inspite of a liberal education and a certain amount of close acquaintance with science and history—all through English education—our early novelists differed very much from the Western novelists of their time. What is remarkable is that most of the early Tamil novelists were sufficiently familiar with the works of George Eliot and others of her generation. They were also adequately aware of the philosophic and scientific theories of the leading English and to some extent of the European thinkers of the day. We know for certain that men like P. Ranganada, V. P. Subramania Mudaliar and V. G. Suryanarayana Sastriar had a sort of 'direct' access to Herbert Spencer through David Duncan who came to Madras around 1868. Duncan had started working for Spencer about that time, editing his works for publication. Duncan was Professor of Logic and Philosophy in Presidency College, Madras, and people like Ranganada were his personal friends. Not only in Tamilnadu, but all over India, Spencer's immense influence on Indian intellectuals as well as on British Civil Servants has been testified to by S. K. Ratcliff. Charles H. Heimsath has in his *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (1964) gives copious references to the vogue Spencer enjoyed in 19th Century India and to his influence on contemporary Indian writing. Auguste Comte's (1798 - 1857) books too were part of the reading material of Indian intellectuals



through Harriet Martineau's translations. *The Positive Philosophy* of Comte had become popular among the English educated. Yet one cannot help marvelling at the fact that how little the positivist philosophy and scientific theories like Darwinism had *real* influence on the consciousness of most educated Indians. Their writings on these matters were not all of a piece. Heimsath's comment is illuminating :

After the establishment of the University system in Madras there was a rapid spread of western ideas through the ranks of the higher educated...The new ideas however, seemed to affect their thinking without changing to any great extent their religious observance and modes of social behaviour. When the social reform movement did get fully under way in Madras, in later decades, it stressed peripheral issues ; social welfare work was always a more popular form of organized endeavour than social reform.<sup>20</sup>

This sociological fact has far-reaching implications for the understanding of Tamil writings that were done seemingly under western influences. The Tamil elite were at best eclectic, drawing different things from different schools and systems.

An interesting passage occurs in *Prathapa Mudaliar*, the first work of prose fiction in Tamil. In the anecdote related by Devaraja Pillai about the Brahmin Anandaiyyan who aped the Eurasians, Anglo-Indians and other denationalised groups, he is rebuked for reading atheistic authors ; the motley assortment reads like a list of proscribed authors : L. Lecky, Stephen, Bain, Darwin, Comte, Mill, Herbert Spencer, Huxley, Hume, Collins, Tyndall and Voltaire. It is said that as a result of reading these authors, Anandaiyyan had come to deny the existence of God, Good, Evil, heaven, hell and the scripture. He had become an Epicurean. The anecdote is designed to ensure rationalist thought by overt criticism and innuendo. His immoral behaviour is plainly attributed to the corrupting effect of these irreligious tracts. The point is made explicit by Vedanayakam Pillai himself in the Preface.

In writing this story, I have not followed the example of those novelists who depict human nature as it is, not

as it ought to be, and who thus exhibit bad specimens of humanity which are often mistaken by the young and inexperienced for objects of imitation. I have represented the principal personages as perfectly virtuous in accordance with the opinion of the great English moralist, Dr. Johnson.

We see here the lumping together of diverse personalities ranging from social thinkers, political philosophers, Economists and natural scientists. Perhaps what was thought to be common to all of them was their acceptance of philosophical realism with its method of the study of the particulars of experience by individual investigators. Probably almost all of them would have held the scientific inquirer to be "free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs." Students familiar with the philosophical systems of India will at once recognize the striking resemblance between the treatment of the Charvaka school in the Hindu polemical writings and the portrayal of atheistic thinking in *Prathapa Mudaliar*. By painting the 'westernized' Anandaiyyan as despicable and degenerate and describing him as a slave of sensual pleasures who believes in 'eat, drink and be merry', Vedanayakam Pillai was falling back on Indian philosophical orthodoxy to buttress a Christian critique of materialism. Needless to say, neither standpoints are particularly conducive to an objective treatment of character and actuality. Ian Watt has put it laconically:

The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects the individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth; the novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well-named.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense *Prathapa Mudaliar* would appear to have obvious shortcomings.

In the post-Enlightenment era and particularly during the age of industrialisation science became part and parcel of life. Laws of nature were paralleled by natural laws of social



progress ; this was the fundamental thinking of the Positive philosophers. In other words natural philosophy and social philosophy went hand in hand in Europe. There were of course, many variations on this system but it was pervasive. Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903) applied the theory of Evolution to society. As has been described by Hofstadtr, "Spencer was the embodiment of social Darwinism." He took the idea of the survival of the fittest and applied it to the social world. The Indian elite who devoured Spencer's philosophy took to his social thought very readily but discarded the scientific elements in it. The idea of progress naturally appealed to them. But they ignored the fact that the Idea of Providence was incompatible with it. This anomalous separation of ideas affected their creative works adversely. Science is more than mere reasoning. As the pioneers of scientific methodology, Hume and Bacon and others emphasized, reason alone does not constitute the scientific method. "Reason gains its power only when it is joined with observation, which is where the inductive or empirical method enters." It needs no special argument to say how vital observation and empirical method is to the serious novelist. I would like to close my comments on this point with a quotation from Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* :

Natural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly from the common consciousness of so-called educated persons, which is dominated by the relics of long obsolete philosophies, or from the little bit of philosophy compulsorily listened to at the University (which is not only fragmentary, but also a medley of views of people belonging to the most varied and usually the worst schools), or from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

While analysing and assessing the type of influence exerted on Tamil literature by western thoughts it will be worthwhile to ponder upon Engels' perceptive pronouncement.

Speaking of Tamil fiction it may be pointed out that notwithstanding a fairly continuous and consistent connection with English literature, the influence of English fiction has been uneven and generally speaking unproductive. The early novelists Vedanayakam Pillai, Rajam Iyer, Madhaviah, Natesa Sastriar and Ponnusamy Pillai had finished their major works by the first decade of this century. Their staple of English reading comprised the Victorian novelists and their predecessors. They were not exposed to European fiction which began to appear in English translations in the second half of the century. The Russian and French fiction became influential in England and as Walter Allen aptly phrased it, "the result, so far as England was concerned, was the mutation of which the modern English novel was the product."<sup>28</sup>

The early Tamil fiction writers had, if they chose to read, English novels from Defoe (1660 - 1731) to Meredith (1828 - 1909). By the Eighteen-eighties the era of the later Victorians had come to an end. It is a fact to ponder that no major English influence, however weak and ineffective, is to be detected in Tamil fiction after the first world war. During the twenties and thirties of this century, the main motto of our fiction writers appeared to be, 'make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait'. The tradition of Rajam Iyer was revived in the late forties and fifties by novelists like K. N. Subramanian and Chidambara Subramaniam (1912 - 1977) both of whom were avowed Vedantins. In the works of the latter writers one can hear echoes of European novelists. But on the whole Western influences by way of particular authors or books seem to have come to an end. An isolated instance of Gorky's impact on Ragunathan in his *Panchum Paciyum* (1953) do not constitute a definable influence.

What is more tangible and palpable is the growing ascendancy of the psychological novel in contemporary Tamil which ultimately must be traced to Western influences. Looking back, it must be said that K. N. Subramanian's *Oru Nāl* (1950), albeit consciously modelled on Joycean technique heralded the advent of the psychological novel. Sundara Ramasamy, R. Chudamani, Neela-Padmanabhan, T. Janakiraman, L. S. Rama-



mirtham and a few others have dealt with the inner life of characters' making, thereby, private experiences the sum and substance of their novels. Whether the influences have come directly from the propounders of psychological theories or through Virginia Woolf (1882 - 1941), James Joyce (1882 - 1941) and their like is a matter for further study. Someone remarked that there are at least seven schools of psychology battling for recognition and dominance in the fields. I do not know how many schools have reached our writers. But reading Jeyakanthan, Indira Parthasarathy and Janakiraman and a few others one can be certain that Freudian school has come to stay.

But one passing comment may be in place. Whether it be fiction, poetry, drama or criticism it looks as though the impact is felt after atleast three or four decades. We have been several years behind the times. This tradition was established by the early novelists discussed a while ago and maintained by our so-called *avant garde*. Joyce, Proust and Virginia Woolf belong to the decade of the first world war. Tamil writers began to evince interest in them only in the late fifties and sixties. It is true that Puthumaipithan (1906 - 1948), K. N. Subramanian and C. S. Chellappah have made passing remarks about 'interior monologue' and 'stream of consciousness' in their works, somewhat earlier.<sup>24</sup> However, the significance of the psychological novels and an interest in their creators manifested as a phenomenon amidst us almost fifty years behind the times. Even then except for a few journalistic essays of an introductory nature, there is not a single study on this subject. The same thing may be said of the Imagist movement, which crystallised around 1910 in England but had a longer history in France. The revolt against conventional metres and diction was the essential features of this movement. It was only in the sixties that the tenets of the Imagists were invoked by our 'new poets' and critics. The literary magazine *Eluthu*, played a key role in this. And again, if we consider the cult of aestheticism, of Art for Art's sake, associated in the minds of many with Oscar Wilde (1856 - 1900) and in some ways with the Bloomsbury group in London and the literary coterie centred around T. K. C'.

in Tamilnadu, "the thought that good and pleasant states of feeling were the only things in life that were ultimately valuable, and these states of feeling arose primarily from the enjoyment of love of friendship or the admiration of beauty, in art, in nature, or in human beings" seem to have motivated both the groups. Even so, T. K. C. and his associates did not proclaim the credo of art for art's sake; they were too cultured to do that. It is only since the sixties that the cry had assumed a virulent form. These instances would indicate that there is a time lag in Western influences being felt in Tamil and even when they do so they are often metamorphozed into something very different from the originals.

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## II

In dealing with the relation of Tamil literature and Western literatures, I shall now consider the Romantic movement, which probably, has been the most important influence to come from the West. My overall approach is both theoretical and documentary. I shall not try in this lecture to cover all the ground. The main features of the influence and the manner in which the Romantic elements inspired many Tamil writers to reach out for artistic fulfilment will be indicated. The various parts of the general movement will be delineated and traced to their sources of inspiration. The remarkable endurance of the Romantic elements in Tamil culture, often unrecognized and unquestioned but nonetheless germane to much of the literary effusion, is in itself proof of the relevance of these elements to our modern



movement. Every so often, there occur in the arts certain major eruptions which seem to affect all their products and radically change their temper. European Romanticism is a convenient illustration.

The origin of the word Romantic is too well-known to need restatement. However, since there is no indigenous Tamil word synonymous with it, and as I have just said, the impact of Romanticism has resulted in the marking off much of modern Tamil literature from the literature of the previous period, a general explanation of the original meaning of the word and its semantic extensions will be useful. It is interesting to contemplate on the fact that while appropriate terms have been coined in our language for Classicism, Realism, Naturalism and such other technical expressions, a satisfactory and acceptable word, co-extensive in sense for Romanticism is yet to be found. I am sure the implications of this merit some thought. But I should not tarry too much at this point. And I do not wish to give the impression that in saying this, I know the reasons. Perhaps one difficulty is that Romanticism means not one but many things. That will, I hope, become clear in the course of my talk.

Now, the word "romantic", it need hardly be stated here, is derived from romance. And romance as most of us know is a type of medieval tale that originated in the languages which descended from Latin in those lands that had been provinces of Rome. These languages were collectively called romance languages. The romantic tales were mostly tales of chivalry—dealing with love and adventure—and consequently came to be associated with these two things. Written usually in verse, with scenes and incidents remote from ordinary life and interspersed with the improbable, or fairy-tale element, the romance was highly dramatic. From this came the expression "romantic", meaning originally love, adventure, scenic beauty, improbability and make-believe. The romances were popular in Europe in the 15th and 16th Centuries. But Romanticism as a movement flourished in Europe in the Nineteenth Century although its beginnings were in the last quarter of the preceding century. As often

happens different people prefer different dates. Ernst Fischer for instance argues that Romanticism was the dominant attitude of European Art and literature from Rousseau's *Discourses* until *The Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels<sup>26</sup>. From Europe the movement spread to America. As a result it was a European and American movement broadly pervading through the literary and artistic effort of more than a century — if we take into account its prelude and the aftermath of the main achievements. Being a pan-continental and trans-continental movement its efflorescence varied from country to country both in time and degree. But everywhere it manifested a strong reaction to existing cultural and artistic norms and values. Generally speaking, Romanticism as a European phenomenon lasted from about 1780 and 1850. By mid-Nineteenth Century the major figures associated with the movement were dead : Byron, Shelley, Blake, Keats, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Pushkin, Lermontov, Goya, Buchner, Chateaubriand, Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, Bellini, Balzac, Stendhal, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Novalis, and Wackenroder.<sup>26</sup>

What is to be borne in mind is that hardly any creative endeavour was left untouched by these Romantics' Literature, painting, sculpture, and music of course benefited most. As has been pointed out by Jacques Barzun, all the forms, ideas, perceptions, tendencies, genres and critical principles had been put forward which the rest of the nineteenth century was to make use of in its further development.<sup>27</sup> In terms of their attitudes and actions the following may be recapitulated: in poetry, the Romantics chose to admit all words in contrast to what may be called a specialized poetical diction. By 'all words' was meant the 'language such as men do use'; in mythology a departure was made from the sole reliance on the Classical, that is, Graeco-Roman to Celtic and Germanic; in drama they reacted to the strict adherence to the classical "rules" of the unities and exercised great freedom in handling observable diversities; (It is to the lasting credit of the Romantic generation that it admired Shakespeare and extolled his artistic greatness); in painting they rejected the prescription of the Academy which



restricted them to antique subjects and took in a new range of subjects and new artistic methods; in music defying the rules prohibiting "the use of certain chords, tonalities, and modulations" they exploited the sound of instruments in order to achieve musical effects; (the secularization of sacred music was to a large extent accomplished by Romantics); in their attitude to the past, they repudiated the prevalent assumption that nothing worthy had taken place after the fall of the Roman Civilization; they rediscovered the Middle Ages and drew sustenance from them. The novels of Walter Scott (1771 - 1832) particularly the historical novels, which he practically invented exemplify this aspect of the Romantics' interest. In fact, one of the salient aspects of the Romantic movement was its serious concern with history. The reverence for the past shown by some of the Romantic is really remarkable. In their response to cities and urban centres the Romantics shared certain common features. They travelled to far-off lands and continents and gave a new dimension and literary respectability to the word "exotic"; (It is a well-known fact that German Romantics like Schelling, Schleiermacher, Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Schlegel and others responded to the discovery of Indian Culture with cries of ecstasy); their inclusiveness in accommodating folk arts that were despised by the earlier period gave an impetus to the flowering of new art forms enriched by the influx of folk literature and folk music. When we come to religion and politics too, the Romantics were unorthodox in many ways. Not all of them were conformists and some of them were non-believers.

While these were the chief characteristics and positive contributions of the Romantic movement, it must also be remembered that it was at the same time, basically the result of a conscious revolt against the rigid but impotent conventions and rules of Neo-Classicism. This deliberate revolt against dead habit and decadent tradition gave the Romantics a sense of struggle or as Goethe put it, a feeling of strife meaning resistance, opposition and eventual success or failure. Although many Romantics suffered from a deep feeling of melancholy and were often pessimistic, there were others who

were imbued with voluntarism, which was a characteristic feature of romantic art. Byron's poetry reverberates with it.

I spoke before of the English-educated Tamils and their arrival at the literary scene during the middle of the last century. Here dates are relevant. Throughout the 19th Century educational horizons were widening in India. Beginning from the days of Macaulay's reforms in 1835 all higher education in India had been conducted in English. The aim of the British rulers was to bring up a class of men who would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". For this purpose and as a result of a conscious policy of discouraging too much of "scientific" education for the natives, a classical type of curriculum was encouraged by the Britishers. "Right away, this new educational system was weighted down by an almost exclusive emphasis on literary pursuits, as distinct from scientific and technical instruction."<sup>8</sup> Everything was well-set for the Europeanization of India's elite. In 1854 every province had seen the creation of a Department of Public Instruction which tried to help schools run on Western models. Thus, in the 1850s, the study of the English language and its great literature by the Tamil elite became a matter of course. And through the English language a contact was established with the literatures of Europe. It is true that although the Tamil elite felt attracted to the English language and studied with avidity, they never became Anglicized to the extent that some Bengalis were swept off their feet. But there was sufficient necessity to study English, since it was coming to the forefront under the British administration.

So when the study of English was taken up earnestly by Tamils who like all others under British rule, thought it held the key to the power and prestige of the British people in India, it was mainly the literature of the Romantic period that was immediately available to them. Of course, the literature of the previous ages were no doubt there and were eagerly studied, but the past itself was rediscovered and selected and presented by the Romantics. What Buddha Deva



Bose (1908 - 1974) says in connection with Bengali literature may *mutantis mutandis* be said of the Tamil context :

This predisposition, as we might call it, was nowhere more manifest than in literature : it was the literature of Europe, rather than its physical or social sciences which, for the Bengali mind, had extraordinary, elixir-like qualities. Indeed, the elixir was at first used as an intoxicant, for it was really Shelley and Shakespeare that our ancestors got drunk on, Sherry and Champagne being merely pretexts. Shakespeare, Shelley and Blake, the literature of the English tongue, this from the beginning, is what England has meant to certain sections of Bengalis, and in the politically disanglicized future, will mean to increasingly larger numbers. This has been an inspiration in the literal sense : our literature was in-spirited and renascent.<sup>29</sup>

While the new educational system generated a strong inclination towards English, certain other things were also happening, the most important of which was the discovery of ancient Tamil grammatical and literary works. The *Sangam* corpus, *Tolkappiyam* and most of the post-*Sangam* works in particular were almost lost to the Tamil literary world by the Eighteenth Century which was on the whole a period of darkness and desolation for the Tamils.<sup>30</sup> In this situation of degeneration and paralysis, the discovery of the ancient texts came forth as a light of ray and hope. And as I said earlier, the modern movement was paradoxically enough partially fecundated by the springs of the ancient past. In many ways one can see an analogy between the European Renaissance and the Tamil awakening. It will be recalled that the influx of fugitive scholars from the Eastern Roman Empire bringing valuable manuscripts with them, contributed to the rediscovery of Latin writers like Catallus, Lucretius and the main body of Greek literature which led to a revival of classical studies and humanistic pursuits. Of course, there were also other important factors that stimulated and assisted the Renaissance. But the impact of the rediscovered writings of classical antiquity and the revival of learning cannot be undervalued. They determined to a large measure

the forms in which the Renaissance manifested itself. For instance, the structural rigidity of the classical tragedy in Europe resulted from the influences of the early plays.

The discovery of these ancient texts gave a sense of satisfaction and pride to the small group of those Tamil intellectuals who were taught by the English academics and missionaries that the Indians had no classical literatures of antiquity. The rediscovery of these poetical and grammatical works was a sudden revelation of the past glory and greatness of the Tamils. When the reputed English historian James Mill (1775 - 1836) wrote *History of British India* (1818), virtually nothing was known of the period before the Muslim conquest. In fact, Robert Caldwell (1814 - 1891) wrote *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* (1856) a seminal work that has had such an abiding influence over subsequent generations of Tamil scholars, without knowing the existence of the *Sangam* corpus and *Tolkappiyam*. For it was only in 1868 and 1883 that C. W. Thamotaram Pillai published the critical editions of *Collathikaram* and *Porulathikaram* respectively. The complete edition of *Tolkappiyam* was published by him in 1885. In 1887 he brought out the first critical edition of *Kalitokai*, one of the Eight Anthologies of *Sangam* poems. It was only in 1889 that U. V. Swaminatha Iyer's edition of *Pathupattu* saw the light of day and five years later *Purananuru* was published. To put it briefly, the bulk of the *Sangam* texts, *Tolkappiyam* and the post-*Sangam* texts with their medieval commentaries were published between 1890 - 1925.

The rediscovery of *Tolkappiyam* and the *Sangam* poems gave a fillip to the notion of Classicism among the Tamil scholars who at once equated it with the Classicism of which their English mentors took such pride. As much as the Renaissance and post-Renaissance writers and artists in Europe fell under the spell of the works and norms of classical antiquity, the Tamil scholars too, thought it fit to be governed by the prescriptions of the earliest works. In the minds of many Tamil scholars a sort of parity had been established between European and Tamil Classicism.

It has been observed in the European context that Classicism was a movement aiming at uniformity. It was also elitist in attitude,



Tolkappiyar's aphorism *ulakam enpatu uyarntor matre*, 'the term world denotes the noble ones' must have satisfied the ego of several English-educated Tamil scholars who were privileged to have had that education and the attendant benefits. In imitating the early authors and adhering to the ancient grammars, the neo-Classicists of our recent past were seeking a stability within known limits. Given their social status they preferred certainty and stability in literary endeavour which gave them scope, high honours and satisfaction. That is one reason why many of the neo-Classicists had a penchant for poetry than prose. Prose was still in the making and had no classical models to go by. Steeped as they were in a convention of bookish culture, they chose the metres for the several genres on the basis of similarity with ancient usage. Likewise, their subjects too generally were didactic in character. They emphasized the efficacy of the rules or to put it in another way insisted on the priority of rules over meaning. Let us consider a few illustrations : S. Somasundara Bharathi (1879 - 1959) was a childhood friend of Subramania Bharathi, who took up to law and had a lucrative practice. Like many others of that era—K. N. Sivarajah Pillai, K. Subramania Pillai, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai—he turned to Tamil studies and at one time occupied the Chair of Tamil at Annamalai University. It goes without saying that he was one of the English-educated elite. Of the Tamil poems he wrote, *Mari Vayil* and *Mangala Kurichi Pongal Nigalchi* have been praised by traditional scholars as exemplary pieces. In the preface, the author has said that the poem has been executed in accordance with the rules laid by *Tolkappiyam*. The metre chosen is *thalicai koccakam* and the theme falls under the broad category of *akathinai*, 'love'. To a modern reader, the poem along with the commentary-like explanation could easily pass off as an early poem. Except for its virtuosity there is virtually nothing in it to commend itself to a modern reader. (In passing, it may be noted that Somasundara Bharathi's prose was equally pedantic, flat, uninspiring and a pale echo of the scholastic commentators of the late medieval period.) V. G. Suriyanarayana Sastriar wrote essays, plays, novels and poetry. A favourite pupil of Dr. Miller at the Christian College he had studied English, Philosophy and Tamil. Most of his Tamil

poems were in traditional metres — *Kalivenba*, *Aciriyappa*, *Kaliviruttam*, *Aciriya Viruttam* and the like. It is small wonder that N. Balarama Iyer, one of the poet's disciples brought out an annotated edition subsequently. The poems were in need of gloss and commentary if they were to be used by modern readers. Sastriar wrote these 'chaste' poems on various occasions. One was an Elegy on the death of Lord Tennyson (1892) and another Elegy on the death of Queen Victoria. The instances could be multiplied, but hardly necessary. However, I would like to quote the words of another neo-Classicist—M. S. Purnalingam Pillai—himself a teacher of English and the author of *Tamil Literature* (1929) the first history of Tamil literature in English. The passage is taken from his Introduction to Sastriar's *Rupavathi* (1895) which could as well be the literary *credo* of the neo-Classicist. After complimenting Sundaram Pillai's *Manonmaniyam* as "eminently classical as it is in diction, metre and matter," he goes on to comment on *Rupavathi* :

As a drama, what *Manonmaniyam* is in verse, *Rupavathi* is in prose. Though it is no praise to say that both are free from the Pigeon-Tamil which obtains so much even among the Scholars of Southern India, who however imbued with Western knowledge and stirred up by Western example from their wonted lethargy to a sense of national literature, only pander to the tastes of the low and the vulgar, the choice and chaste diction of these two dramas which our new-fledged writers would do well to consult, if they would provide for their earnest readers opportunities of knowing what the classical Tamil is, and what great purposes it can be made to serve. Our Sastriar has in *Rupavathi* pressed into his service whenever necessary, the felicities of Tamil diction, pure and unmixed, and given the reading public not only an intellectual feast but so vivid a portraiture of the ways and manners of princes and people of the age of the literary Witenagemot at Madura that their imagination cannot but be quickened, exalted and ennobled.

Certainly, Purnalingam Pillai has set the neo-classical doctrine in the best light. That scholars like Suriyanarayana



Sastriar were grappling with the concept of Classicism can be seen in other instances too. In an essay entitled *Uyartanic cemmoli*, 'Classical Language', we see Sastriar arguing eloquently that if Sanskrit can be considered a classical language, then Tamil should equally be considered as one. He puts forward arguments against the classification of Tamil as a Vernacular Language by the Universities Commission. Perhaps, Sastriar was the first Tamil scholar to translate the word 'classical' into Tamil. It was under these circumstances that the European Romantic movement began to attract the minds of many Tamil writers. They gravitated towards Romantic faith as a result of the failure of neo-Classicism to satisfy their felt needs. But more important was the immense upheavals that were taking place in the society and consequently in the minds of men. The longing for freedom—both physical and psychological—was tormenting many sensitive persons. As the Romantic Shelley himself said of his time, many were moved by "a passionate desire to transform the world." Boris Suchkov has described the essence of the artistic leap from Classicism to Romanticism.

Romanticism was extremely sensitive to the mobility and pulse of history and, breaking with the canons of Classicism, the static form of Classical works, and with the objective form of realist works, it made subjective freedom of expression its banner, regarding only the free soaring fantasy of the writer, not subject to any laws or prescriptions, as being capable of presenting the dynamics of life. Indeed, the works of romanticists reveal a free treatment of composition, liberties taken with the order of narration, and a free choice of place and time for the action. The author's presence is felt throughout, and many romantic works are really protracted monologues. The feelings in romantic poetry are intensified and exaggerated, and on the whole, romanticism concentrates on man's inner world, looking on life and history as the theatre in which people's passions and ideas are realised, determining by their fortuitous play and flux, the flux of life.<sup>81</sup>

By now, it would have become clear how much of modern Tamil literature answers these descriptions. There are two ways by which we can hope to see the dynamics of an artistic movement : the manner in which it affects the lives of the artists and the extent to which it permeates their creativity. By Romantic life we generally mean a person's deep concern with ideas and things and a passion for realising his aspirations in action—by changing the world or the self. This passion and energy for action can be seen in the Artist's chosen means—studies, researches, involvements, sacrifices and political options. Partly resulting from this passion for involvement and action was the proverbial unhappiness of the Romantic, often due to unhappy love, invalidity, opiate addiction, poverty or persecution. This suffering in turn induces self-pity and egocentric display. The crux of the matter is that the Romantics felt it impossible to go on writing almost entirely in conventions that were already well accepted, and felt that new conventions were urgently needed and had to be created. These remarks, obvious as they may seem, are meant to serve as a convenient frame-work to what follows. For, I wish to discuss a few writers beginning from Bharathi who may be described as generally representative of the Romantic movement. One word of explanation : I have referred to conventions used by our writers—both the neoClassicists and the Romantics—and may probably speak about the Realists. I should not give the impression that these are purely external matters, adopted and articulated by writers by simple choice. These conventions penetrate deeply a writer's personality, and what is more important they are intimately related to and arise from the cultural interest of the social group or class to which the writers concerned belong. This being so, we must not lose sight of the social factors that have vital bearings on the matter.

Now, Bharathi very deliberately turning his back on what our neo-Classicalists of the late Nineteenth Century found "poetic", tried to create his own idiom, although it must be remembered that certain poets within the confines of the religious tradition—like Gopalakrishna Bharathi (1785-1875) and Ramalinga Swami (1823 - 1874)—were intuitively tending towards it.



Bharathi's verse, finding the prevailing forms and metres inadequate to cope with his new creative impulses, breaks through the rigidity of convention and reaches out to the common man. Bharathi analysed the causes of decay of poetry in Tamil. In an article titled *Punarjanmam*, 'Rebirth', in the sense of renaissance, he wrote as follows :

Books of ancient times were written in the language then in vogue. As times change, language too changes, old words became obsolete yielding place to new ones. Poets should adopt words that will be clearly understood by the people of their age. Different epochs require different expressions. Good poetry is that which conveys exquisite inner visions in easy and elegant style. When poetry becomes obscure or ornate it ceases to be enjoyable and will repel the populace.

Elsewhere he said, certainly referring to the neo-Classical verses, "sincerity disappeared giving place to mere verbal embellishments. But the great Kamban thought differently when he compared the bright, clear, cool flow of the Godavari to great poetry". His most lucid proposition on the language of poetry was made in the Preface to *Panchali Sabatham*, 'Vow of Panchali' (1910) :

He who produces an epic in simple style and diction, easily understandable metres and popular tunes will be infusing a new life into our language. The meaning must be crystal clear even to the neo-literates ; at the same time, the poem must not be wanting in the graces and refinements that are expected of an epic.

This was a new poetic manifesto—the manifesto of Tamil poetry of the 20th Century. I don't need to point out that Bharathi was consciously appealing to a general reading public away from the exclusive elite that chiefly read poetry when he began to write. He was describing a style simple to follow and to understand. Needless to say, Bharathi's proclamation is reminiscent of the "advertisement" prefixed by Wordsworth to the volume of *Lyrical Ballads* that he published with Coleridge in 1798. What was most provocative

in Wordsworth's definition was his intent to choose modest and familiar themes, subjects drawn from "humble and rustic life", expressed in "the real language of men". I don't want to make too much of the resemblance between the theory of poetry of Wordsworth and Bharathi, but the similarity is striking and relevant. What is significant is the recognition that poetic modes reflect the degree of the poet's self-awareness and self-knowledge. Bharathi belongs to an overall reawakening of consciousness and self-conscious modernization that took place in India. Poets in other Indian languages shared this trend, proclaiming a "new sensibility, a new meaning, a new abundance" in poetics.

"This intellectual awakening was bound, sooner or later, to percolate down into the world of action and politics", for, "all the great movements of our century, in India as elsewhere in Asia, are all-inclusive movements, grounded at first on a blind revolt against the forcible imposition of a Western culture that is finally rejected, and then on a search for a new world outlook in which ethics, economics, social structures, politics and religion are all bound together."<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising therefore, that Bharathi too had this all-inclusive '*weltanschauung*'. Patriotism in his poetry is metamorphosed into a new religion. The poem 'To Liberty' illustrates this. Politics pervaded his entire being. Even in his most subjective personal moments his imagination is firmly rooted in the mundane realities of the world around him—a world of nationalist aspirations, political persecution and subterfuge. Bharathi maintains fluid lines between his personal and public experiences. For instance, while writing of his adolescent love in 'Autobiography', a poem that shows him in one of his intense lyrical moments, he compares his avid anticipation of his loved one, with that of the British spies waiting in stealth for freedom fighters to pass. The intensity of his longing transcends mere adolescent nostalgia and transforms itself into a mature realistic experience. Likewise, in *Kannan Pattu*, 'The Song of Krishna', while dwelling on the image of Lord Krishna as the father, he cannot help but bring vignettes of contemporary political life—of baton charges and prison life. Bharathi's poetic imagination with



its simultaneous response to the ethereal and the earthy takes politics in its stride. For, he could sing fiery lyrics of resurgent nationalism in the same breath as he sings poems of mysticism. Now, if we turn to the Western Romantics, especially the English Romanticists we see them as active agents in the spreading of political doctrines. Crane Brinton in *The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists* makes the following statement :

In the first place, Romanticism as a way of thought is a part of that vast change in men and things, the Revolution, and as such has many links with the political changes of the Revolution....Almost to a man, the English Romanticists were actively interested in politics. It is just here that the political opinion of men of letters become especially valuable.

Although Bharathi was unique in this among his Indian contemporaries, yet, he can easily be assimilated into the world tradition of romantic poetry. Ernst Fischer says, "Romanticism meant rebellion, pure and simple, a trumpet call to the people to rise against foreign and home-bred oppressors, an appeal to national consciousness, a struggle against feudalism, absolutism and foreign rule". Thus, Byron responded to the distant struggle for Greek independence, Shelley felt for the under-dog in Ireland, Greece and other parts of the world. He had a passion for reforming the world, to purge the world of exploiters and oppressors.

"Kings, priests and statesmen blast the human flower.  
Even in its tender bud; their influence darts  
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins  
of desolate society."

His *Queen Mab* was sweeping in its condemnation of kings, nobles, priests and judges. Like Shelley, Bharathi too was imbued with the spirit of freedom and was equally ecstatic of people in other lands fighting against brute force and tyranny. Bharathi's poem 'New Russia' seems to have been considerably influenced by Shelley's *Ode to Liberty* and Byron's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*. The poetic recapturing

of scenes of the past in *Isles of Greece*—Don Juan—is present in Bharathi's poem *Endaiyum Thayum*. When Bharathi says, "It was on this land, our mothers as maidens spent moonlit nights in dance and frolic" one finds distinct echoes of the following lines in *Isles of Greece*.

The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece  
where burning Sappho loved and sung,  
where grew the arts of war and peace  
where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung  
Eternal summer glides them yet...

Speaking of Byron it may be worthwhile to note that of all the English Romanticists he was the one to be held in high esteem in Europe and elsewhere. The German Goethe acclaimed without any reservations that Byron's *Don Juan* was a "work of boundless genius". And Mazzini, himself a man of vision and action said, "Byron gave a European role to English poetry. He led the genius of England on a pilgrimage through Europe". There is no doubt that Byron who was one of the great emancipatory forces of Nineteenth Century Europe, was during the latter part of the Century and even at the beginning of the present Century giving its mood and colour to Indian literature. Perhaps he exerted the widest influence throughout India more than any English poet except Shakespeare. Arabinda Poddar's graphic account of Byron's influence on Bengali writers is applicable to other parts of India as well. In "*Lord Byron and the Literary Renaissance in Bengal*" he points out that besides H. L. D. Derozio (1807-1831), the poet leader of 'young Bengal', such outstanding poets and dramatists as Madhusudan Datta, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay, Nabinchandra Sen and D. L. Roy were deeply indebted to Byron.<sup>68</sup>

Bharathi's aestheticism drew sustenance from the English Nature poets, especially John Keats. In *Kuyil Pattu*, 'The Song of Kuyil' (Cuckoo) there are definite traces of his acquaintance with Keats' '*Endymion*' and '*Ode to a Nightingale*'. On this I would like to mention Dr. V. Satchi-



thanandan's perceptive article " Keats, Shakespeare and Bharathi's *Kuyil Pattu* " published in *Essays on Bharathi* (1962).

Bharathi expounds the lines of Keats—" Beauty is truth, truth, beauty " in one of his essays. This is not to maintain that Bharathi's appreciation of beauty was derived from external sources. During the dark period, Indian poets, owing to dire poverty, servitude and ignorance had almost forgotten the concept of beauty. In these circumstances the English romantic poets provided the impetus necessary for Bharathi to re-establish aestheticism in the mainstream of Tamil poetry. Thus, in his passionate defence of freedom in all its forms—emancipation of the oppressed, the women, and the under-dog, Bharathi's thoughts were penetrated by the same philosophy of expansion and democracy that inspired many European Romanticists. For instance, Shelley, whom as we all know, Bharathi admired and in some ways emulated, expected a great deal from women ; not the women of his environment and time, but the new woman like Cythna who was also in Shelley's view the natural woman. Once woman is liberated she would become the most precious of allies. Shelley held that emancipated woman will help reconstruct the glorious new world. It has been pointed out by some scholars that Bharathi's *Puthumai Penn* is an amalgam of Shelley's new woman and the concept of *Shakthi* in the Indian tradition. On the whole, it is generally agreed by students of comparative studies that in the pervading lyricism and aestheticism of his poems, Bharathi had much in common with the English Romantic poets. Of course it must be remembered that they were not the only ones who enlivened and enlarged his vision.

Besides his voluntarism and the impelling hunger for freedom which were essentially in the realms of feeling and action, Bharathi also imbibed certain modes of literary expression from the Romantic poets, the most productive of them being the Lyric. It is a common place of aesthetic criticism that lyricism was inseparably connected to European Romantic faith. Hegel in his *Aesthetics* accurately defined its essence :

Lyricism is a kind of basic element of romantic art, the tone in which the epos and drama also speak, and which

pervades, like some universal aroma of the soul, even works of the plastic arts.<sup>84</sup>

Bharathi is essentially a lyrical poet. It is his lyrics that afford ample evidence of his greatness as a poet. Walter Pater considered lyric poetry to be "artistically the highest and most complete form of poetry which is precise because in it we are least able to detach the matter from the form, without a deduction of something from the matter itself". He felt that the very perfection of such poetry often appears to depend, in part, on a certain suppression or vagueness of mere subject, so that the meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding.<sup>85</sup> In his lyrics Bharathi achieved the immediate communication of a dominant emotion; "A stray word or gesture sets his imagination afire, and out of the confrontation and explosion emerged a lyric perpetually alive in an orbit of its own". In one of his brilliant lyrical poems, 'Moonlight, Stars and the Wind' he speaks of poetic inspiration.

Here he comes, the angel of the wind, bringing to my ears  
the thousand and one sounds of men's life on earth. There  
is the voice of a bell swinging towards me, a dog barks, a  
beggar cries piteously for a handful of rice, somebody slams  
the street door, from the east floats the wailing of a conch,  
men talk and argue and quarrel, a child weeps—ah, who  
can count the notes that the wind brings? I sit and weave  
them all joyously into songs.

These are the concluding lines of a poem that begins with the poet urging his mind-bird to freely float in the sky, to reach out to the far star-cluster, and to speed across space in joyous frenzy. And then almost abruptly the poet listens to "the thousand and one sounds of men's life on earth". In a poem like this we see Bharathi making a voyage of the outer and of the inner world. The noteworthy fact about him is that his feet are firmly planted on the earth and his mind is often "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone". A perfect blend of the two voyages is to be found in his *Gnanaratham*, an allegorical work in prose that combines utopia and reality, bringing into



full play the poet's descriptive powers. Here we have the source and strength of his poetry : the unique counterpoint of tumult and peace, of sublimity and mundanity, the ethereal flight of the abstracting mind and the physiological responses that constitute the basic substance of the poet's imagination and impulse.

So much for the most salient features of romantic strains in Bharathi's life and poetry. But these and some other features are to be found, naturally enough in the works of others too. Take for instance the lyric. Although the lyric found its first and best response in Bharathi, a few before him had already begun to prepare the ground. V. G. Suriyanarayana Sastry had published two volumes of poems in 1901 and in 1902. Reference has already been made to *Tani-pacuratogai*. In spite of the very favourable opinion expressed by G. U. Pope who translated the forty-one 'short poems' into English, there was little sign of its influence upon the main stream of poetry in Tamil. The post-Bharathi generation has almost neglected it. The new poetic mood and taste found no place for Sastriar. It is true that he broke some new ground in introducing the sonnet—a form eminently suited for lyricism. In fact, in his Preface, the author spoke with adoration of Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare as great English poets who had enriched the sonnet adapted from Italian. However, as the English translator himself candidly admitted, "these short poems could hardly with propriety be called sonnets". Besides, the prosodical and other 'technical' factors which, in the eyes of the translator vitiated the quality of the poems, there was not the intense depth of feeling and the free play of imagination leading to special insight or intuitive perception. The interplay of insight and imagination is the predominant feature of Romantic poetry. However, Sastriar's second volume showed certain changes. There is in these poems the note of veritable experience. Although the metre and the diction were conventional there was something personal that he was trying to express ; the provenance of all the poems were actual experiences : death of his teachers, eminent personages, and close friends ; walk on a beach ; an evening near the lake ; in memory of his mentor ; and walk through the city. These had personal

reference and meaning to him and did give some "indication of a new departure in Tamil poetry"; but he could never throw off the neo-classical influence upon him. His long rhymed lines were chaste and correct and at times quite expressive of certain moods, but compared to the short lyric measures of Bharathi one feels the absence of a higher musical quality. The value of his work remains chiefly academic and historical.

It is appropriate at this point, to say something of the nature poetry that abounds in Tamil in the modern period and which undoubtedly owes its main inspiration to the English Romanticists. As I mentioned earlier we already notice in Sastriar's poetry descriptive pieces that have no precedent for them. I need not dwell on the treatment and interpretation of nature in *Sangam* poetry. Scholars like T. P. Meenakshisundaram, Rev. X. S. Thaninayagam and M. Varadarajan have dealt with it. Clearly, the emphasis of nature in *Sangam* poems is as the necessary and sympathetic background or 'situation' for the human act. Nature has no independent existence on its own merit for its own sake. As Father Thaninayagam has aptly said, "the scenery was changed to keep in harmony with the human sentiments that were dramatized."<sup>66</sup> There was no indulging in nature description nor extolling of nature-rapture. It was as though the luxuriant tropical nature had to be kept under careful control by the human beings. Nature finds an insignificant place and role in the manifestly didactic works of the post-*Sangam* period. It finds an incidental role in the devotional hymns of Sambandhar in whom 'divine' nature generated the poetic spark and brought about the instant incandescence. But generally speaking, the *bhakthi* poets were animated by puranic mythology rather than by natural scenery. The place of natural scenery in the epics is purely functional and in late medieval literature nature virtually disappears. Therefore, the appearance of nature poetry in twentieth century Tamil is almost entirely due to the Western impact. And in this the influence of the Romanticists were of cardinal importance.



At about the time when Suriyanarayana Sastriar (1870-1903) published his 'short poems'—*Poets' Feast* (1902)—Subramania Bharathi began writing his first poems : *Thanimai Irakkam*, 'Sorrow in Loneliness', *Yan*, 'I' and *Chandrihai*, 'Moonlight'. These too, were sonnets. At first sight, these poems appear to be no different from those of Sastriar. Here is late Nineteenth Century elitist subject-matter, bookish and literary. The familiar features of scholastic style and form—archaisms of vocabulary and syntax, conventional epithets, stock allusions and metrical patterns—that were to be seen in current works. For instance, the poem *Chandrihai* begins with the word '*yanar*' meaning freshness, goodness, fertility and new income. It is part of the *Sangam* diction. Young Bharathi himself must have given some thought about its usage. For, in a footnote he has given a gloss : *yanar* means beauty. The Wordsworthian inspiration is evident. And yet, a second glance at these early specimens gives an inkling of Bharathi's poetic craft. We get the impression that a more subtle process than the mere reproduction or worse. Imitation of certain models is involved in his art. As Periyasami Thooran observed, already we can see Bharathi's poetic fire sparkling in these poems. Considering the totality of his work it is quite clear that Bharathi did not engage himself in pure descriptive poetry. Both in his lyrics and in the longer poems like *Kuyil Pattu* and *Panchali Sabatham* are interspersed exquisite passages exhibiting great power. And in these passages, the mature poet absorbs and re-creates some imageries and descriptions of English Nature Poets. I shall limit myself to one single illustration. Towards the end of the first canto in *Panchali Sabatham* the Pandavas are on their way to Hastinapura at the invitation of Duryodana. During the journey while resting, Arjuna takes Draupadi for an evening walk. Under the pretext of adhering to the epical requirement of describing the sunset, Bharathi allows Arjuna describe with the minuteness of a painter, "the modifications of effect as the sun goes down and the lights change." The passage shows Bharathi in one of his inspired moments. Not satisfied with his poetic portraiture he has added a prose description in the notes. While reading this glorious passage

one is suddenly reminded of "An Evening Walk". The corresponding passage in Wordsworth's poem runs as follows :

How pleasant, as the sun declines, to view  
 The spacious landscape change in form and hue !  
 Here, vanish, as in mist, before a flood  
 Of bright obscurity, hill, lawn, and wood ;  
 There, objects, by the searching beams betrayed,  
 Come forth, and here retire in purple shade ;  
 Even the white stems of birch, the cottage white,  
 Soften their glare before the mellow light ;  
 The skiffs, at anchor where with umbrage wide  
 Yon chestnuts half the latticed boat-house hide,  
 Shed from their sides, that face the sun's slant beam,  
 Strong flakes of radiance on the tremulous stream :

To a careful observer Bharathi's evocatory passage will be oddly reminiscent but not all an echo of Wordsworth's poem. After Bharathi, nature poems have become regular subjects. Indeed hardly any volume of poetry comes out without containing a section 'on nature'. Such is the insistence on landscape as a subject—an important subject—for our poets that one has to remind oneself that the idea should be traced back to the English nature poets. It is to be observed in this connection that almost all the major lyrical poets after Bharathi—Bharathidasan, Desikavinayakam Pillai, S. D. S. Yogi, Kambadasan, Nanal, Somu, Pattukottai, Kalai-vanan, Vanidasan, Thiruloka Sitaram, 'Mahakavi' (T. Rudramurti), Murugaiyan and Nuhuman—the last three from Sri Lanka—have to their credit admirable nature poems. Bharathidasan's *Alagin Cirippu* is indeed a *tour de force*, exhibiting the poet at his best. Avoiding pure description which can at best be an aesthetic exercise, he has successfully accomplished the task of once again making nature become the "theatrical property" in the way the *Sangam* poets did. In passing, it may be noted, that the English nature poets had an original advantage which our moderns lack. Wordsworth and his contemporaries had a tradition of nature poetry before them and what is more crucial, were able to draw from the landscape painting of their day. The parallel that comes to my mind in the Tamil literary tradition, is one of a later time and belonging to a different context—the poetry of the



*Bhakthi* poets whose descriptions of feminine figures were matched by the temple sculptures of their time.

Besides the Romantic poems on nature, there were also other influences at work. Swami Vedachalam (1876 - 1950) who later renamed himself as Maraimalaiyadigal, translated six essays of Joseph Addison (1672 - 1719) the leading English essayist of the early 18th Century. Addison, as is well-known, propounded a theory of artistic imitation. Through his tangled and tortuous arguments he presented a theory on the relationship between art and nature. He was apparently inspired by the sensationalist philosophy of John Locke. The calm and moderate Addison was no Romanticist, but his analogy between a poem and a picture had considerable attraction for *belletristic* scholars. Vedachalam's translations of Addison's essays appeared between 1904 - 1905 in his journal *Gnanasagaram*. They were published in book form in 1908 under the title *Cintanaikkatturaikal*.<sup>37</sup> Later, when Maraimalaiyadigal came to write *Kumutavalli* (1911)—an adaptation of a mediocre story from English—he included many lengthy descriptions in it.

In the twenties and thirties there arose a movement in India calling upon people to return to nature. The slogan 'Back to Nature' had its genesis in Gandhian anti-industrialism and Tagorean natural life. It also had echoes of Rousseau and Tolstoy. Rousseau preached the idea of the true relationship between men and nature. Although Rousseau has been assailed by his critics for idealizing the "natural man" or "noble savage" his essential teaching was against the artificialities of civilization. Something of Rousseauism entered the Tamil poetic consciousness through the English nature poets. The concept of 'Back to Nature' evoked sympathetic chords in many Tamil minds already attuned to the Romantic quest for transcendental unity. While the response was greater in poetry, prose writers too were not completely free from its influence. For example, K. S. Venkataramani's *Murugan the Tiller* (1927), idealises villagers and the village life, clearly projecting the message of back to the villages. Few others followed suit. T. L. Nadesan who wrote under the pseudonym of Sangararam, published two books in English : *The Children of the Kaveri* (1926)

and *The Love of Dust* (1938). The latter was translated by the author himself as *Mannasai* (1941)—perhaps the first Tamil novel dealing with village life. Certainly it was a landmark in the history of Tamil fiction. R. Shanmugasundaram's *Nagammal* (1941) is another novel that belongs to this category. In the process of writing a novel on village life, Shanmugasundaram created the vogue for the regional novel. Kongunadu became a symbolic locality in his novels. It must be said, however, that there is nothing nostalgic in his treatment of village life. In *Nagammal* for instance, strained relations in a family unit creates innumerable problems, especially for the heroine, where only the mental toughness of the characters and a steely adherence to rational self-interest guarantee survival. Shanmugasundaram's novel owes something to Hardy's novels like *Return of the Native* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in the balanced treatment of the relationship between man and nature. The nature novels lost their vitality by the late fifties.

Intimately related to the interest in Nature, and the notion of the nobility of village life is the Romanticists' enthusiasm for popular cultures. The Germans took a lead in this matter and evolved the concept of the *Volk*. Out of this grew the passion for folk-lore and folk studies which have become the basic ingredients of cultural nationalism. It is not wrong to assume that the revival of folk studies and its growing importance in our literature is largely due to the romantic impulse.

I said earlier that there were also other influences at work. Besides the Romanticists, Shakespeare has always been with us. A glance at *Shakespeare in Tamil Translation* (1974)—a critical Bibliography published by Madurai-Kamaraj University will demonstrate the abiding interest of the Tamils in that great poet. The earliest translation of one of his plays appeared in 1874. But it must be recognised that interest in Shakespeare has been largely confined to either academic or highly amateurish circles. It never kindled the creative sparks. Likewise, there were other major and minor Western writers whose influences are conspicuous on individuals. Whitman has certainly been a powerful force. In the case of Whitman, there has been a two-way traffic. Even a little known Belgian poet like Emile Verhaeren (1855 - 1916)



seems to have inspired Bharathi. But on the whole the most significant influence on 20th Century Tamil poetry has been the Romantic Movement. One sure way to ascertain this would be to look at the scanty but available translations. Of the major poets, probably Desigavinayagam Pillai did the most number of translations : Blake, Emerson, Tennyson, Fitzgerald, Swinburne and Edwin Arnold were rendered into Tamil. In some other poems his indebtedness to Wordsworth and Burns is patent. If one were to take at random two volumes of translations, the range of poets translated will become clear. *Cintanai Katirkal* (1945) contains translations from English poets. The choice and selection of poets reveals the translator's predilection : Shakespeare, Charles Kingsley, E.W. Wilcox, James Montgomery, Thomas Randolph, Francis Bacon, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, Wordsworth, Carlyle, James Shirley, Byron, Samuel Johnson, John Dyer, Thomas Cooper, Walter Raleigh, Southwell, Robert Burns, Longfellow, George Crabbe, Anna Barbauld, Beaumont and a few anonymous poets. It will be evident that most of the poets and poems chosen have a moral purpose. The next slender volume is *Oru Varam* (1964), translations by the Sri Lankan poet, R. Murugaiyan. Here again, the choice indicates the personality of the translator : Michael Drayton, Shakespeare, John Donne, Robert Herrick, John Suckling, William Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, John Lehman and Ezra Pound.

It now remains to say a few words on the intellectual atmosphere of the Romantic poets and the interplay of literature and science in Europe.<sup>22</sup> To the Tamil literati in general, the very idea of the interplay of science and literature might sound incongruous, if not absurd. Owing to various factors arising out of our history and in particular our social organisation and values, there has occurred, over the last few centuries, a bifurcation that has taken the two on different trajectories. But when we remember that the whole of the development of what is called modern literature in the West has taken place during the last two hundred years are so, it cannot escape our recognition that this development has also taken place under the shadow of the multifarious fructification of science. Consequently, it is logical to expect that a mutual fertilization would have enriched both.

This is not the place to trace in detail the various scientific theories and hypotheses that stood behind some of the literary concepts and statements of the great poets and novelists. Although their approach was different, their interest in science was deep-rooted and enduring. For instance, Whitehead has pointed out how Shelley's knowledge of astronomy, meteorology and physics coloured the imagery of some of his more mature poems. As F. A. Lea has remarked in *Shelley and the Romantic Revolution* (1945), "the stained carpets and tea-cups full of chemicals in Shelley's rooms at University College symbolize one of its characteristic developments."

Coleridge too, it will be recalled, was very widely read in not only philosophical literature but also in scientific treatises. Those familiar with John Livingston Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu* which is a microscopic analysis of the genesis of Coleridge's masterpiece, will know something of the "strange alchemical process of its creation".

The German Romanticists were even more absorbed in scientific lore. Schlegel, Von Kleist, Goethe and Novalis were up-to-date with the scientific discoveries of their time. Those who imagine the Romanticists, in particular the Germans, to have been preoccupied with the occult and macabre should remember this close link between science and literature that has existed during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. As much as the men of letters were attracted and hypnotized by the dazzling developments of science, men of science too have had a fascination, for the poet's way of knowledge. Eminent scientists like Erasmus Darwin, Sir Humphry Davy, Dalton, Oken, Faraday and Henry Vaughan and many others were equally at home in the world of poetry. In fact, in recent years, some English thinkers have opined that the gap that separates the two may be unhealthy and potentially dangerous. I do not mean the provocative words of Sir C. P. Snow alone; others have expressed similar ideas and sentiments in slightly different ways.

School textbooks and popular writings have exaggerated the opposition between the two and portrayed the European



romantic writers as purely speculative and subjective. Subjective they were, but not without inhaling and absorbing the scientific spirit that was all around them. At the higher realms, the minds met and cherished one another. Biographers of Wordsworth have not failed to draw our attention to the sublime admiration in which he held Newton. It has been said that among the inspirations of Wordsworth's life at Cambridge none was more enduring and ever-fresh than the memory of the statue of Newton—the embodiment of pure intelligence :

I could behold  
 ...Newton with his prism and silent face,  
 The marble index of a mind for ever  
 voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone...

The general attitude of the poets of the 19th Century towards science was perhaps best articulated by Wordsworth himself. To do justice to the man and the subject I have to quote a lengthy passage :

If the labours of the men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present ; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or the Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time shall ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.

I do not want to labour the point. Although Romantic literature of the West, along with other literatures of the preceding and subsequent periods have profoundly influenced modern Tamil literature, there has been a distillation and rarefaction on the part of the recipients. There has even been a strong tendency to mystify the essentially rational and philosophic Western works. It is true that a poet like Blake may be an exception to the rule. But even he was not immune to scientific ideas. It need hardly be emphasized that such rarefaction has resulted in stupefying the minds of our writers who have often taken the shadow for the real. But I think I have spoken enough of this unproductive approach. It is only in recent years that poetic apertures have been opened to view science and its implications in their proper perspective. In this, two names come to my mind immediately : Kulottungan (Dr. V. C. Kulandaiswamy) and Murugaiyan. Both these poets have made our poetry intellectually serious than many usually think it is. There are a few younger writers who are struggling to resolve the apparent conflict between naturalistic and imaginative views of the world. This is very vital for us, for, in English, Romantic poetry was successful and momentous, it was because it was able to synthesize points of view, which to many of us remain irreconcilable. A clear understanding of this problem will help our writers to decide not only the type of literary culture but also the world which they would want to build. The analysis of the relation between Tamil and Western literatures brought to my mind forcefully and astute observation of that pioneer sociologist Adam Ferguson (1723 - 1816). "Nations borrow only what they are nearly in a condition to have invented themselves". A comparative study of Tamil and English literatures seem to confirm the veracity of this statement.

#### NOTES

1. V. R. M. Chettiar, *Critical Essays*, Karaikudi, 1955, p. 23.
2. Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India*, California, 1969, p. 279. Pope, along with Caldwell contributed in no small measure to what is called the "Oriental Renaissance" in Europe. These men helped open the minds of many European scholars and researchers of "entirely new influences blowing from the



- Orient." See, Amaury De Riencourt, *The Soul of India*, London, 1961, p. 258.
3. On some aspects of Christian Missionary activities in Jaffna, see K. Kailasapathy, "*Arumuka Navalar : the Central Years (1834-1848)*," The Central, Jaffna, 1979 ; K Kailasapathy, "Arnold Sathasivampillai and the Tamil Renaissance," *Jaffna College Miscellany* (Centenary Publication), Jaffna, 1981, pp 81 - 87.
  4. E. Morris Miller, "The Relation of English and Australian Literatures," in *20th Century Australian Literary Criticism*, Ed. Clement Semmler, Melbourne, 1967, p. 13.
  5. Bruce Tiebout McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*, New York, 1940, p. 221.
  6. *A Professor's Holiday* (2nd edn.), Madras, 1896, p. 73.
  7. McCully, op. cit., p. 220.
  8. See K. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Naval Ilakkiyam*, 2nd edn., Madras, 1977, p. 31.
  9. On George Eliot's association with Harrison, see, Joan Bennett, *George Eliot—Her Mind and her Art*, Paperback edn., Cambridge, 1962, p. 26.
  10. *Thillai Govindan*, London, 1916. Introduction, Harrison's passages are quoted from the *Positivist Review*, 1908.
  11. Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Pelican Books), London, 1959, p. 38.
  12. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, (Penguin Books), London, 1963, p. 87.
  13. See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London, 1948, p. 7.
  14. Joan Bennett, op. cit., p. 42.
  15. *Ibid*, p. 72.
  16. *Rambles in Vedanta*, Reprint, Delhi, 1974, p. 72.
  17. *Ibid*, p. 82.
  18. George Lukas, *The Theory of the Novel*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, pp. 88 - 90.
  19. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, New Jersey, 1971, p. 172.
  20. *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, New Jersey, 1964, p. 112.
  21. *Ibid*, p. 13.
  22. *Dialectics of Nature*, Moscow, 1954, pp. 278 - 279.
  23. *Ibid*, p. 219.

24. Puthumaipithan's short story entitled " *Kayittaravu* " is a clear example of a piece of writing in the Joycean mould written in the early forties.
25. *The Necessity of Art* (Pelican Books), London, 1963, p. 53.
26. Jacques Barzun, *Classic Romantic and Modern*, New York, 1961, p. 98.
27. *Ibid*, p. 99.
28. Amaury De Riencourt, *The Soul of India*, London, 1961, p. 290.
29. Buddhadeva Bose, *An Acre of Green Grass*, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 60 - 61.
30. The pathetic state of traditional Tamil scholarship during the 18th and 19th Centuries, is vividly described in an article in the *Siddhanta Deepika* (Nov., 1897). " Within our own time we know of a whole class of Pandits who neither knew nor heard of any of these Idylls except the first *Tirumurugarrupadai*, which, as part of the 40 Books of Saiva lore, has even been popular, though not well learnt and understood by all. When *Maturaikkanchi* was first introduced as a text for the B. A. Examination of 1894, we know how even Pandits of first grade colleges were grumbling and murmuring against it. We know also of some cases in which some Pandits, who owned stray copies (Mss.) of some of these Idylls, gave up in despair all hopes of deciphering what the nature of their contents were. Even in print now, these are only bitter cups in the hands of some of the otherwise able scholars. "
31. *A History of Realism*, Moscow, 1973, pp. 75 - 76.
32. Riencourt, *op. cit.*, pp. 296 - 298.
33. *Indian Literature* (Proceedings of a Seminar), ed. by Arabinda Poddar, Simla, 1972, pp. 116-124.
34. Quoted by Suchkov, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
35. Walter Pater, " The School of Giorgione " in *The Renaissance* (Modern Library edition), pp. 110 - 111.
36. Xavier, S. Thaninayagam, *Landscape and Poetry* (2nd edn.), Bombay, 1966, p. 139.
37. Maraimalaiyadigal wrote a lengthy Preface in English to the second edition of the book. Although the greater part of the Preface is taken up with the author's favourite theme of the " Aryan - Tamil " controversy, he also writes his appreciation of Addison. The following is typical of his praise : " In English literature, leaving aside the immense good rendered by the immortal works of such master poets as Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley and others, when we come to take into account the numerous benefits that accrued first to the English people and next through them to humanity at large, from the prose writings of literary



men no name stands higher in our estimation than that of Joseph Addison. " The Preface is interesting for several reasons, of which the most important is the manifestation of his elitist attitude.

38. On this I am indebted to Ernest De Selincourt whose chapter " The Interplay of Literature and Science during the last three centuries, " in *Wordsworthian and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1947) is illuminating. I have also leaned heavily on Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets* (London, 1953) and F. A. Lea, *Shelley* (London, 1945).

## 7. The Concept of Destiny in Early Tamil Literature

In his introductory note on the Chapter on *Ul*, 'Fate', in *Tirukkural* (*Kural*), Parimelazhakar, the renowned commentator, makes the following gloss : "*Ul, pal, murai, unmai, teyvam, niyati* and *viti* are synonyms". In other words, the seven words he enumerates are synonymous with one another<sup>1</sup>. It is however observable that some of the seven words are not of Tamil origin and were not in vogue at all times.<sup>2</sup> At some point in time these words came to mean among other things 'destiny' or 'fate'. Historically speaking, *ul* and *pal* occur in the earliest strata of Tamil poetry while the other words begin to appear in relatively later works such as the Eighteen *Kilkanakku* Poems, the Saiva and Vaishnava Hymns and the Epics. By the time of the Epics like Kamban's *Ramayanam*, *viti* was the most common word for fate.

The word *pal* occurs in *Purananuru* (PN) meaning milk, part, side, place, portion, nature, land, caste and fate.\* The Tamil Lexicon lists the following meanings to the word : part, portion, share, section, fraction, dividing, apportioning, moiety, middle, side, line, point of the compass, quarter, place, region, location, situation, quality, property, condition, nature, state, right, title, classification of nouns and verbs, fitness, fate,



destiny and milk.<sup>4</sup> It is clear from this that the word basically connotes the sense of 'part' portion or share. This is further strengthened by the fact that in other Dravidian languages too, the word (*pal*) has the same connotation :

For instance

In Malayalam, part ;

In Kota, portion, division ;

In Toda, share, sub-division of patrilineal sib ;

In Kannada, division, part, portion, share ;

In Kodagu, to divide, distribute ;

In Tulu, share, portion, part, division ;

In Telugu, lot, division ;

In Parji, portion.<sup>5</sup>

Another Tamil word that has similar meaning is *paku* to be split, divided, separate, to distribute, apportion, classify, give, cut into pieces.<sup>6</sup> The concept of share occurs frequently in Sangam poems. The poets often speak about the division or more often the distribution of food, booty, catch, and other things. For instance, in a poem in *Akananuru* (AN) the poet describes the sandy beach where fishermen divide (and share) the heap of fish.<sup>7</sup> The poem clearly suggests distribution of equal shares of fish among the fisherfolk.<sup>8</sup> The word used is *pakukkum*, dividing, sharing. Likewise, another poet refers to the division of *Ayilai*, fish in the seaside village of little huts.<sup>9</sup> The poets also speak of the division of booty, especially cattle. As is well-known, cattle capture and cattle recovery are common themes treated in the early Tamil heroic poems and constant reference is made to dividing the cattle after a raid.<sup>10</sup> For instance in AN : 97, the poet speaks of the warriors stealing the cattle at night from fortified places and dividing it. The phenomenon is so common that *Tolkappiyam*, the earliest known grammatical work, has a technical term for it : *patitu*, "theme describing the apportioning of cows captured from an enemy among the soldiers."<sup>11</sup>

Although medieval commentators dramatised the theme as the noble and generous act of a chieftain or king, a careful reading of the poems and the contexts in which the act of apportioning of cattle is described would leave no doubt as to the spontaneous nature of the division. It would appear to

be the natural thing known to the warriors. It was part of their way of life. Such apportioning of catch, booty and other material things, reflects the collective distribution of wealth in early societies.

Perhaps the most significant division is of food in primitive tribal societies. This again is found in early Tamil poems, although such references in the earliest strata of the poems themselves seem to allude to bygone times. For instance, in PN : 46, the poet speaks of the forefathers of two princes "who shared their food". The fact that the poet sings of the "noble tradition of sharing food" implies a thing of the past.<sup>12</sup> In another poem a minor chieftain is praised for sharing his food with others.<sup>13</sup> Here again, the word *pakukkum*, sharing is used. The same idea is expressed in some later works by the word *kuttun*, 'jointly eating'. In *Cilapatikaram*, the hunters who are referred to as "ancient tribe", are said to eat their common meal in the village common ground. As it was with catch and booty, so it was with food : *kuttun* was common meal. This was another reflection of regular collective distribution found in ancient societies all over the world. George Thomson has discussed this point with copious ethnological examples and convincingly demonstrated that the "method of division originated in primitive tribal society, where the result of joint work, common property, is distributed among the members of the tribal collective." The concept of dividing or sharing the food equally is idealised in the *Kural* which uses the phrase *pattun*, sharing one's food with others.

The *Kural*, a didactic work with Jaina leanings, this is open to question. An Editor belonging to the post-Sangam period, puts it thus :

"He who shares his meal with others in dread of committing sin will never suffer from want." (44)

The word *pattu*, 'having divided' is derived from the verb *paku*. It has, by usage, come to mean many things. It means dividing, sharing, share, half, moiety, and fixed payments of grain out of the gross produce of a village.<sup>14</sup> This is very significant. Properly analysed it would elucidate



many aspects of land tenure in early society. It is well-known that there was no private ownership of land in ancient times and even much later, land was divided for use, not for ownership.

George Thomson in his analysis of the ancient Greek law of division has this to say :

It may therefore be concluded that in its application to food, booty and land, the idea of *Moirai* reflects the collective distribution of wealth through three successive stages in the evolution of tribal society. Oldest of all was the distribution of food, which goes back to the hunting period. Next came the distribution of chattels and inanimate movables acquired by warfare, which was a development of hunting ; and last, the division of land for the purpose of agriculture.

The use of the lot was, of course, a guarantee of equality. The goods were divided as equally as possible, and then the portions were distributed by a process which, since it lay outside human control, was impartial. And for the same reason it was regarded as magical, as an appeal to the *moirai* or spirits of the lot, who determined each man's portion. With the growth of private property, the use of the lot became increasingly restricted, and the popular conception of the *moirai* was modified accordingly. They became the goddesses who determined for each man his lot in life.

Besides these divisions of wealth, the *moirai* was also applied to divisions of function. Here again, we find traces of a social order which had vanished from the real world reflected in the ideal world of the Olympus.<sup>10</sup>

What is to be noted here is that while *paku* and *pal* are etymologically connected and used interchangeably, *paku* being a verbal form denotes more often the act of dividing and sharing ; *pal* is a noun and denotes portion, moiety, share, etc. Its varied use in early literary works and the

grammars bears out the predominance of the concept of division and share and through it the notion of equality.

It is of interest to note that the word *pal* which basically denoted portion or lot, in terms of material things, such as food, booty, catch, land, etc., came to be construed as something defined and determined. As Thomson says, "it was regarded as magical, as an appeal to the *moirai* or spirits of the lot, who determined each man's portion". In primitive society where everything was equally divided, each person's lot or share was inviolable. And hence it was sacred and divine; dividing or sharing was natural. We see the process of the word *pal*, acquiring the sense of being determined by the addition of a verb to it: the verb *varai*, besides meaning to write, draw, inscribe, etc., also means to fix, appoint and to limit.<sup>16</sup> As a noun *varai* means limit, boundary, measure and extent. This word in the sense of fixing or limiting is used in conjunction with *pal* to mean that portion of a thing which is limited or fixed or determined. The word *varai* both in its verbal and nominal forms has rich and varied uses in literary and grammatical works. For instance in *Cilappatikaram*<sup>17</sup> the phrase *varai porul* means the acquisition or earning by legitimate means. In *Kural* (150) the phrase *aran varaiyan* means he who does not make virtue his own. In *Malaipatukatam*, one of the earliest literary works, we get the phrase *varainta nal* meaning the days apportioned (to a person). In other words, the phrase signifies the period of time a person is destined to live.<sup>18</sup> In these instances we see the semantic extensions of the word *varai*. The grammarians by virtue of their need for precision and definition have used both the words, i.e., *pal* and *varai* in a manner that shows us the mutual fusion of the meaning of the two words. In *Tolkappiyam* we come across the phrase *palvarai kilavi*<sup>19</sup> 'word denoting a fraction or portion'. Literally the phrase means, "the word that defines the portion". The author uses the phrase to denote fractions of numbers and measures. Thus, we see that the word *pal* means a portion and the word *varai* used along with it helps to fix or determine the amount or nature of the portion. This is crucial



for a full understanding of the concept of destiny. The phrase *palvarai kilavi* is very much in the world of objects and things. From the physical world it had been absorbed into the mental world. Sociology of cognition and knowledge has demonstrated again and again that the material meaning of every word has actually preceded the mental meaning. One need not labour the point. Commenting on the *moirai*, Thomson said :

The functions of the *Moirai* were not confined to birth. They were also associated with re-birth, with marriage and with death. In myth, it was the *Moirai* who attended at the bridal bed of Zeus and Hera.<sup>20</sup>

In many early Tamil poems the function of *pal* is associated with love, marriage, well-being and death. A few instances may be cited. A theme in traditional love poetry is *arattotu nirral*, "revealing by successive steps to the parents of the heroine her secret union". This is also enumerated in *Tolkappiyam*. A sub-theme under this is called *talaippatu* 'chance occurrence', i.e., lovers meeting by chance.<sup>21</sup> Although it appears as a chance occurrence it is said that fate brings them together. Thus, a poem in *Kuruntokai* (366) speaks of *pal varaintamaittal*, union determined by destiny. Here again, we see the occurrence of the word *varai*, to determine, fix, etc. In another poem, fate is praised as beneficent because it had united a boy and a girl. The meaning is clear : the union had been possible by the irresistible force or fate. Similar ideas are found in other poems too.<sup>22</sup> As much as it is praised for its beneficial aspects, at times it is also referred to disparagingly : *arani pal*, evil destiny, is an expression found in *Ainkurunuru*.<sup>23</sup> The belief that destiny brings together a well-matched man and woman is enunciated by Tolkappiyar.<sup>24</sup> He says that they are united by the command of fate, *palatu anai*. Likewise, *Purapporul Venpa Malai*,<sup>25</sup> a grammatical treatise dealing with the heroic themes, refers to *palmullai*,<sup>26</sup> 'theme of a lover who has married his lady-love praising the destiny that brought them together'. The *sutra* that defines the theme and the illustrative verse cited therein portray *pal* as the God responsible for such dispensation.

This idea is elaborated in the commentary on *Iraiyanar Akapporul* where the contexts of sexual union are described.<sup>27</sup> The commentary, a later work ascribable to about 7th century A. D. uses the word *Paanmai*, in the sense of fitness and propriety. The word is derived from *paal* by the addition of the particle *mai* (*paal+mai*) which expresses an abstract quality or condition. *Paanmai* means nature, equality, property, state, division, portion: class, fitness, propriety, order, regularity and fruit of good deeds.<sup>28</sup> Explaining minutely the nature of the (sexual) desire that unites them, the commentator on *Kalaviyal* says, "This desire is in the order of things and unites them in physical union", *paanmai* means the natural inevitable order of things.<sup>29</sup> We can observe the gradual extension of the connotation of the word *paal*. In the *Kural*, again a post-Sangam work, we come across the use of three other derivatives from *paal* : *palatu*, *pala* and *parru* signifying that which is befitting or appropriate.<sup>30</sup> The meaning of these words has the force of injunction.

We shall next adduce a few instances illustrating the function of *paal* in other situations. Like love and marriage, even ideal friendship is attributed to destiny. In a poem lamenting the tragic death of the munificent chieftain Pari, Kapilar expresses the wish that destiny would enable him to live in friendship with Pari in his next birth as he had lived in this life. The poet uses the epithet *uyarnta*, 'exalted', to qualify destiny.<sup>31</sup> We may cite an instance of *pal* being used in connection with the life span of a person. In *Maturaikkanci* and *Malaipatu-katam* the phrase *varainta nal*, 'fixed days' denotes the life-time allotted to a person. We have already seen earlier how the verb base *varai* has been used with *pal*. In a gloss on the phrase *varainta nal*, Naccinarkkiniyar, the celebrated commentator, (circa 14 C. A. D.) made the following perceptive remark : "Fixed days means the life-time apportioned by the God of destiny". He refers to *palvarai teyvam*.<sup>32</sup>

We have discussed some cases where *pal* occurs in connection with love, marriage, friendship and death. It remains to show its use in connection with inheritance and land. In a statement attributed to the Chola prince, Nalankilli, reference is made to "the right of inheritance granted by destiny". (*pal tara*



*vanta pala viral teyvam*).<sup>88</sup> An interesting example of the use of the word in inscriptions may also be noted. The Velvikkuti plates of Pantiyan Netuncataiyan (circa 770 A. D.) mention the grant of the village Velvikkuti to a family of Brahmins by an earlier Pantiyan king named Mutukutumi Peruvaluti.<sup>89</sup> During the reign of the Kalabhras this charity was dis-established but was restored to the descendants of the original grantees by Netuncataiyan.<sup>90</sup> In the words of the descendants of the original beneficiaries, "the village of Velvikkuti was granted by your forefathers who never failed to observe propriety and order." The phrase used in the inscription is *pal murai*, literally, 'the order of destiny'. We should translate it as 'natural order' or 'natural constitution.' The phrase occurs twice in the plates.<sup>91</sup>

It has been argued that the word *pal* initially meant portion, share, land, lot, division, etc., and later connoted the superior force or God that ensured such dispensations. This is clear from the fact that *pal* meaning God came into vogue in later works, especially in the grammatical treatises; perhaps the *locus classicus* for this is to be found in a *sutra* in *Tolkappiyam* which lists a number of nouns denoting personal class of beings, including men, Gods and demons. The treatise enumerates the following: Time, world, soul, body, God that fixes the shares (destiny), God of good and evil, demon, Sun, Moon, goddess of words (Muse), etc.<sup>92</sup> The expression used here is significant. *Pal varai teyvam*, literally means 'portion determining God'. The evolution of the concept is complete here. From the primitive meaning of a portion, share, lot, etc., *pal* had undergone a semantic evolution to mean the God that apportions the lot of persons. The notion of a Divisor, i. e., the spirit or God deciding the lot for every mortal<sup>93</sup> is crystallized in a verse in *Kural*.

*Vakuttan vakutta vakaiyallal koti*  
*tokuttarkkum tuyttal aritu.*

"Even the man who hath amassed ten millions cannot enjoy his riches except as the Ordainer hath ordained".

The word *vakuttan*, a verbal noun in the form of a finite verb, is derived from the verb *vaku*, 'to separate, divide, apportion,

distribute, allot, assign, ' etc. Literally, the word means ' Divisor '. The commentators explain the word by its synonyms *ul* and *teyvam*.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, we see that from a natural social practice, *pal* had become a divine dispensation. With the concept of a ' god of apportioning ' there had grown *pari passu*, other concepts too. The commentators have made this very clear. In a gloss on *pal varai teyvam*, Naccinarkkiniyar says thus : " The author says ' the god that apportions ' since it regulates the two classes of moral actions, good and evil which are the causes of happiness and sorrow ".<sup>40</sup> It may be pointed out that by the time Tolkappiyar describes ' the god that apportions ', the intellectual and moral milieu had changed. Professor N. Subrahmanian says :

Careful students of Tamil History will notice that there is a great difference between the culture and civilization of the Sangam age and those of the imperial Pallava and subsequent ages ; the difference is noticed not only in the normal changes which occur and are inevitable but in the very quality of the way of the life of the people. The secular-minded, commercial, worldly Tamil of the Sangam age is transformed into one given to devotion and other-worldliness. The robust optimism of the Sangam Tamil and the heroic urges in it fade away yielding place to a philosophically justified pessimism.<sup>41</sup>

From optimism to pessimism : One might ask whence this transformation. The real causes are to be found in the economic and social conditions of the two periods. In primitive-tribal society *pal* was the equal share or portion of a member of that socially integrated organic body. Since the division was equal and considered to be natural, there was ' robust optimism '. But with the rise of private property and the emergence of the State, there arose inequality and the dissolution of tribal life. " Division was originally a matter for all the members of a collective."<sup>42</sup> In the State where the force of private property reigned supreme, the very concept of division itself had receded to the background. Prevailing inequalities and disparities had to be explained away. *Pal* was not only share of food, booty, catch, etc., but also misfortune, evil, suffering and death. In



such a situation there naturally arises pessimism. The Hindu concept of *viti*, the Jaina oriented *ul*, the Ajivaka concept *niyati*—all of these intrinsically connected to the basic idea of *karma*—flooded Tamil literary, grammatical and ethical works.<sup>48</sup> They speak of “philosophically justified pessimism”. Suffering itself became apportioned by *pal*.

As Borecky aptly says in the context of the Greek evidence,<sup>44</sup> “fate imagined as a share, lot falling to man or allotted to him by some higher power”, was referred to by the expression *pal varai teyvam*. The real had become metaphorical. The *Kural* exemplifies this great transformation. Although *pal* occurs in it, henceforth it would be *ul* and *aram* that would be the key words. No better example for the “philosophically justified pessimism” can be found than an aphorism in the *Kural*. In the chapter entitled “Emphasis on the Potency of Virtue” is found the following stanza :

*Arattarituvena venta civikai*  
*poruttano turntan itai*<sup>45</sup>

“Why search for the fruits of *Dharma* ?  
Behold the one in the palanquin and the palanquin-bearer”

The commentary is revealing :

“The obvious fact that some persons have the good fortune to be carried in a palanquin by other persons who have to toil along the path with the load of the palanquin on their shoulders, would make it distinctly clear what the result of virtuous conduct would be, because the experience of these two individuals is but the result of their former conduct in a past birth ; one by his good deed is able to obtain the happiness of riding in a palanquin and the other because of the lack of it is condemned to work hard by having to carry the palanquin.”<sup>46</sup>

That the concept of the existence of inequality permeates through the entire *Kural* and is accepted as such philosophically is too self-evident to need further proof or arguments.

However, one more verse may be cited.

*Ilar palor akiya karanam norpar  
cilar palar nolatavar*<sup>47</sup>

“The have-nots in the world are many. The reason for this is plain. Those that do penance are few. Many don’t perform penance.”<sup>48</sup>

At this point Tamil literature began to speak of “both fate as well as many of man’s qualities as a portion, share, lot that fell to him or was assigned to him by God and also as a result of his own deeds”.<sup>49</sup> *Pal* which symbolised social equality and guaranteed it in early society was transformed into a justification for inequality and an indicator for individual salvation.

#### REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Kural, Ch. 38, Valluvar himself uses the two words *ul* and *pal* interchangeably in this Chapter. In verse 619 he uses the word *teyvam* as a synonym.
2. The word *niyati* is not found in Sangam works.
3. See Subramoniam, V. I., *Index of Purananuru*, Trivandrum, 1962, pp. 448 ff.
4. MTL, s. v. V, p. 2625.
5. Burrow, T., and Emeneau, M. B., *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*, Oxford, 1961, s. v. 3371, p. 274.
6. MTL, s. v. IV, p. 2384.
7. AN 10 : 12.
8. Cf. Thomson, G., *Aeschylus and Athens*, London, 1946, p. 430. “It is still used by fishermen in Ireland and elsewhere to divide the catch.” Also, Briffault, R., *The Mothers*, London, 1927, Vol. II, p. 495. “Among the Eskimos, the hunter has no personal right to his catch, it is divided among all the inhabitants of the village.”
9. AN 70 : 4.
10. Kailasapathy, K., *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, Oxford, 1968, p. 23, and *passim*.
11. *Tol. Puratt*. 58 ; also *Nama-Deepa-Nighantu*, Madras, 1930, V. 741 ;, On Tol. and its relationship to the heroic poems see Kailsapathy, *op. cit.* pp. 48 - 52.



12. It may be noted that the main body of poems in the Sangam corpus reflect the Heroic Age when earlier tribal and communal societies are broken up with the rise of new chieftaincies under princes. Private property is the basis of social and economic relationships. We only hear an occasional echo of the earlier times—see Kailasapathy, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
13. PN 13.
14. Besides the *Kural*, Epics like *Manimekalai* and *Civakacintamani* speak of this in ideal terms. Of course in later ages it was not the collective distribution but the obligation of the householder to share his meal with his forefathers, Gods, guests and relatives. See *Kural*, Ch. 5 *Manimekalai*, Ch. 16 ; *Cilappatikaram*, Ch. 12 : 10 ; also Kailasapathy. K., *Samookaviyalum Ilakkiyamum*, Madras, 1979, pp. 88 - 100.
15. Thomson, *op. cit.*, 3rd edn., 1966, p. 41.
16. MTL, s. v. VI, p. 3524.
17. 10 : 51.
18. The epics are full of epigrammatic expressions describing the time measured out to every person, e.g., *Civakacintamani*, 213 ; see Jagannathan, K. V. ; *Tirukkural* (Critical edition), Coimbatore, 1963, pp. 259 - 262.
19. *Tol. Elut.* 165.
20. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
21. *Tol. Porul*, 206 : see also PN 70 : 18 ; *Kuruntokai*, 229.
22. This idea of destiny bringing together lovers naturally finds a central place in *kovai* poems which began to be composed from about 7 C. A. D. The *Kovai* is a kind of long poem usually comprising 400 verses dealing with love themes in the form of a story. For a useful discussion on this subject, see Zvelebil, K. V., *Tamil Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1974, pp. 202 - 204.
23. 110 : 5.
24. Kailasapathy, *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, p. 11.
25. For a brief discussion of the importance of this treatise see *ibid*, p. 52.
26. MTL, s. v. V., p. 2642 ; also *Purapporul Venpa Malai*, 281. (U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar's edition, Madras, 1953.)
27. For the date and significance of the work, see Meenakshisundaram, T. P., *A History of Tamil Literature*, Annamalainagar, 1965, p. 63, 89. T. P. M. has observed " The treatise is the authoritative exposition of the philosophy of pre-marital love. "

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28. The word is widely used in post-Sangam works ; see *Manimekala*, *passim*.
29. *Kalaviyal*, commentary on sutra 2. Here again *pal* and *ul* are used interchangeably.
30. For a brief but perspicuous discussion on these words, see Sathiam, T. S., *Elil Nanku*, Madras, 1979, pp. 30-40.
31. PN 236 : 12. Cf. PN 267.
32. Naccinarkkiniyar was probably " the last of the great medieval commentators " who in spite of his Puranic predilection, produced glosses full of insights—see Zvelebil, *op. cit.*, p. 233. His reference to *pal varai teyvam* here is truly illuminating.
33. PN 75 : 2.
34. There are five poems on this King in PN. 6, 9, 12, 15, 64.
35. For a short discussion on this subject see Subrahmanian, N., *History of Tamil Nad*, Madras, 1976, p. 131.
36. *Cacana Malai*, (Rajam Publications), Madras, 1960, p. 9-10.
37. *Collatikaram*, 58, also Naccinarkkiniyar's commentary on the *sutra*.
38. For comparative instances from Greek, see Borecky, B., *Survivals of some Tribal Ideas in Classical Greek*, Prague, 1965, p. 12. Also the sources cited therein.
39. Cf. Meenakshisundaram, T. P., *Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar*, Madurai, 1969, p. 44.
40. See Commentary on *Collatikaram*, *sutra* 58.
41. Subrahmaniam, N., *op. cit.*, p. 104-105. The author does not put forward economic and social causes but says that ' barbarism and religion ' were the reasons. They were no doubt there ; but we have to look for the fundamental causes. For a sociological approach by a Tamil researcher see Ramakrishnan, S., *Valluvan Kanta Valviyal*, Madras, 1957, p. 65-66.
42. Borecky, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
43. For a modern exposition of the concept of *Karma* as embodied in the *Kural* see Chakravarti, A., *Tirukkural* (with English translation and commentary and an Introduction), Madras, 1953.
44. *Ibid*, p. 47.
45. Ch. IV, p. 37.
46. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
47. Ch. 27 : 270.
48. Chakravarti, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
49. Borecky, *op. cit.*, p. 49.











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