Chapter II

Religion, Tamil Literary Practices and Modernisation: The influence of the European Textual Practices on Tamil Literary Activities

Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth radiates under the sign of disaster triumphant. (Adorno 210)

All that was original and excellent in the literature of the Tamils was written before the ninth century, and what followed was, for the most part, but a base imitation or translation of Sanskrit works. (Kanakasabhai 3)

Locating the study in context:

More than anything a dramatic starting would perhaps well explain the context of this study. Therefore, the discussion of the study begins with two different instances which are indeed belonging to and thus representing the two different temporalities. These two events however characterize two consecutive centuries; the former belongs to the second half of the 19th century whereas the latter is from the mid 20th century. The first event is basically a conversation, indeed a rather lengthy one, between a well-known Tamil scholar and a judge. The minute description of this conversation is found in the well known autobiography of the Tamil scholar who is engaged in the conversation. The second one is an opinion by a great academician and a renowned Tamil scholar that appeared in one of his prefaces to a known

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Tamil book Civaṁñapōtam, which is considered as the base text for the Caivacittānta religious philosophy. However, in the first event the erudite Tamil scholar who engaged in a conversation with Justice Cēlam Rāmacāmi Mutaliyār (1855-1942; henceforth, C.R.M) is U. Vē. Cāmināta Aiyar (1855-1942; U.Ve.Ca). U.Ve.Ca was a student and later the Pandit of Tiruvāṭuturai Ātiṃam, the great learning centre of those days. This conversation has been considered as one the milestones in the history of Tamil literature mainly due to its influence on U.Ve.Ca’s life, notably as a consequence of the conversation U.Ve.Ca’s reading quest is directed towards a set of Tamil literature which was hardly known in that period. Further, U.Ve.Ca’s engagement with these less known texts indeed resulted in the publication of this ancient Tamil works one after the other. This publication introduced different literary practices that actually existed among the Tamils over the centuries. Moreover, this endeavour is later recognised as the act of rediscovering Tamil literary past. Nonetheless, the conversation as narrated in U.Ve.Ca’s autobiography goes as follows:

‘With who did you study’, Cēlam Rāmacāmi Mutaliyār queried.

‘Makāvittuvān Miṇāṭci Cuntaram Pillai,’ I replied.

2Civaṁñapōtam is considered to be the principal work of Caivacittāntam. It is believed to have been composed probably during the 13th century A.D., by Meykaṇṭēvar. The text includes 12 Sutras which contain in all 41 Tamil verses of four feet, in the Agaval metre.

3Caivacittāntam (Saiva Siddhantam) is the philosophy of Caiva (Saiva) religion which considers Lord Siva as its primary deity. cittānta means the final conclusion (reached after taking into consideration all other important views). It is the popular philosophical system of the Saivism of India, based on Saiva Agamas, Ancient Tamil works, Thirumuruis and MeykandaSastra works.

4Tiruvāṭuturai Ātiṃam is one of the Saiva Muttas, located in Tiruvāṭuturai, a small town in present Nagapattinām district of Tamil Nadu. Mutt was founded by sri Namaivyayamurthi towards the end of the 15th century A.D. It is not only an abode for its monks and also a resting place for pilgrims but also the place for poets and literary activities in Tamil over the ages.
I expected the mention of Pillai’s name to create a ripple. Even if he did not respect my official position, perhaps he could at least open out to me as a student of Pillai? He did not and spoke in a measured manner.

...He continued with his questions ‘What did you study?’ came the next question. Certain that I could dazzle him with a reply. I listed the texts that I had studied:

*Kuṭantai antāti, Maracai antāti, Pukāḷur antāti, Tiruvanaitkai antāti, Aḻakar antāti,*

*Kampar antāti, Mullai antāti, Miṇṭciyammai Piḷḷaitamil, Mutṭukumāraṇāmi Piḷḷaitamil, Akilāṇṭanāya ki Piḷḷaitamil, Cēkkilār Piḷḷaitamil, Tirukkōvaiyar, Taṇcaivāṇaṅkōvai....Twenty Antāṭis*, twenty Kaḷampakams*, fifteen Kōvais*, thirty

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5 Andadi is one of the several minor literary forms in Tamil. It is usually made of a hundred verses in which the last word, phrase or line of the proceeding verse forms the succeeding one.

6 Kaḷampakam is also a minor literary form in Tamil. Two words Kalapo (mixed) and Akam (inside) constitute the form and those words explain the nature of the form as various types of verses are put together in it.

7 Kovai is another productive genre in minor literature. It basically comments on the inner universe of its protagonists and codifies the behaviour concerning their love, courtship and marriage. The ‘aga ozhukkam’ (inner life) of the lover (thalaivan) and his beloved (thalaivi) forms the subject of this text.
Pillaitamil\textsuperscript{8}, twenty Ula\textsuperscript{9} — thus I listed a number of Pirapantā\textsuperscript{10}. There was not a trace of wonderment on his face.

Suddenly, he interjected, ‘what is it worth?’ I was not a little disappointed..... I did not give up and began a list of Purāṇams\textsuperscript{11}: ‘Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇams, Tirukahkaikoṇṭa Purāṇams, Kanta Purāṇams, Periya Purāṇams, Kurṟāla Purāṇams....’

He continued to look still like a graven image.

‘Naitatam\textsuperscript{12}, Pirapulikalīṭāl\textsuperscript{13}, Civaiiapōṭam, Civaniioacittiyiir\textsuperscript{14},’ I continued.

Gave the names of some grammars, he continued to remain unmoved. With the

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\textsuperscript{8} Pillaiatham is a popular minor literary genre in Tamil. In Pillaiatham, the poet imagines his protagonist, who may be a god, a king, a saint, a great hero or a renowned personality to be a child and sings in praise of him or her. The poet takes on the role of a loving mother and traces the different stages in the protagonist’s childhood with great affection.

\textsuperscript{9} In Ula form, the nature of theme depicts female of all the seven types based on their ages are eagerly waiting to see the protagonist, mostly the kings or gods who passes by the road. By seeing him, the female of all ages fall love on him.

\textsuperscript{10} Pirapantā in Sanskrit refers Cirrilakkiyam in Tamil. ‘Pērilakkiyam’ or major literary genres and ‘Cirrilakkiyam’ or minor literary genres are two broad classification of Tamil literature. Pērilakkiyam discusses the grand theme in lofty style whereas Cirrilakkiyam could be composed in a simple meter and style, particularly dealing with the life of rural deities, patrons and ordinary men and women. Cirrilakkiyam are largely flourished in Tamil Nadu during the reign of the Nayakkars which dates from 1350 A.D. to 1750 A.D. Although it has been commonly said that Cirrilakkiyam in Tamil could be categorized into 96 forms, the extant forms actually go beyond some 300 in numbers.

\textsuperscript{11} Purāṇam means the long poetry or the Epics.

\textsuperscript{12} A poem in Tamil by Ativirarāma Pāṇṭiyar, said to be composed in-between 1564-1610, adapted from Sri Harsha’s Naisadha.

\textsuperscript{13} Pirapulikalīṭāl is composed by Siva Prakasar during the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. It is said to be a translation of chronicles the life and deeds of Allama Prabhu, a 12th-century Virasaiva saint and teacher.

\textsuperscript{14} Civaniioacittiyiir was composed by Saint Arul Nandhi Sivachariyar. It is the second of the fourteen Siddhanta Sastras, is believed to be composed around 1200 A.D.
thought that I had forgotten the most important of them all, I said, ‘I have read *Kamparāmāyanam*\(^{15}\) in full two to three times over....’

‘It is good that you have read all these later day works. Have you read any of the ancient texts?’ he asked....

‘There are so many old works among those I have listed!’ I replied.

Only when he countered me with the question ‘Have you read the texts which are the wellsprings of these texts?’ did I realise that he was up to something.

‘I don’t know the texts you are talking about?’

‘Have you read *Cīvakacintāmani*\(^{16}\) *Maṇimekalai*?\(^{17}\)’

I had not read the books he mentioned. Nor had my teacher. I had never even set my eyes on these works. I thought to myself, ‘Without considering the many books I had studied, why should this man make a big issue of my not having read these couple of books’ and prided myself on this. ‘I had no access to these books, If I did I am confident of reading them’ I replied emphatically. (U.Vē.Cā as quoted in Veṅkaṭaḥalapaṭi, 91-92).

\(^{15}\) *Kamparāmāyanam*, also known as Ramavataram, is an Epic written by Kamban during the 12th century. It sets Sanskrit Valmiki’s Ramayana as its source. This voluminous work of more than 10000 verses is divided into six chapters.

\(^{16}\) *Cīvakacintāmani*, a Jain Epic authored by Tirutakkatevar means ‘fabulous gem’ and also known as *Manannul* (Book of Marriages). It is one of the five Great Epics in Tamil, contains 3147 verses and is divided into 13 sections called *illambakams*.

\(^{17}\) *Maṇimekalai*, also one of the five Great Epics was composed by Chitthalai Chathanar, a Buddhist poet. It is divided into 30 chapters called *Kātai*. It is believed to be composed in-between 2nd to 6th centuries A.D.
This detailed conversation has intentionally been quoted here for two specific reasons: the first would be its extensive description of the literary activities practiced during the 19th century. The latter reason would indicate U.Ve.Ca’s own confidence that ‘I had no access to these books; If I did I am confident of reading them’. Remarkably, his assertion that he could read and understand any texts composed in Tamil language became a complex phenomenon which would be later described in detail by his toiling attempts to understand those books, amidst the Himalayan hurdles that came along while accessing them.

The second event noted above is an observation of an erudite Tamil scholar, Auvai Duraicămi Pillai\(^\text{18}\) (1902-1981; A.D.Pillai), found in his introduction to Civañānapōtam, published in 1953 as follows:

‘The temples of Siva are everywhere; the wisdom of Siva lies in the hearts of all beings; the name of Siva is all around in the language of people; all the people’s appearances resemble Siva; the duties of the people is the duty of Siva, as all the things in this place fully become Siva himself, the whole south Tamil Nadu resembles ‘Civalōka (The World of Siva)’\(^\text{2}\)

Interestingly, around the same time when A.D.Pillai was unable to distinguish Tamil Nadu from the Civalōka, the common Tamil speaking public were happily clapping and whistling for the dialogue in the movie Parācakti\(^\text{19}\). In the movie, the protagonist is loudly

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\(^{18}\) Auvai Duraicămi Pillai, a renowned Tamil academician served in Tiyākārīya College at Madurai and Annamalai University at Chidambaram. He was authored and edited more than 30 books. He is popularly known as Urai vēntar, the king commentator due to his extensive commentaries to the ancient works.

\(^{19}\) Parācakti, a Tamil film was released on 17 October 1952. It becomes a commercial success and had a theatrical run of over 175 days. It also acquired cult status in Tamil cinema and became a trendsetter for
accusing the atrocities prevailing over the society in the name of the God. The protagonist while standing in the witness box roars:

‘Even God’s devotees were coming forward to protect Kalyāṇī, but in return they were expected a sign for sexual acceptance from her eyes, among them this priest topped the order and asked of her chastity as donation. That too in the name of Parācakti, the mother of the whole universe... devotion made my sister fear, she ran away, away, away till the ends of her life... whose mistake was it for allowing the fake priests in the land who played amorous-sport in the name of the God, Is it the mistake by the God? Or by the filthy-people who were living their life describing things as their wish in the name of the God’

The impact of Parācakti on the life of the Tamils and also the history of the Tamil cinema is beyond any doubt. This movie sets a new era in Tamil cinema primarily by deviating from religious subjects which were the order of the day in that age and establishing freshness in content, narration and dialogues of Tamil cinema. The direct attack on the faith of God and its consequences over social activities discussed in the above dialogue which strips the veil of religion becomes one of the factors for the success of the movie. This potentiality of stripping down of this religious cowardliness owes grounding in the Dravidian/self-respect movement.

The increasing popularity of the movies surrounding Dravidian ideology and the mass appeal to the principles of the self-respect movement however depicts at least the Tamil

dialogues and acting for later Tamil films. The film is known for its screenplay and dialogues that was by Karunanidhi, who would later become the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

20 Protagonist’s sister in the film, Sriranjani Jr acted the role.
speaking society during the mid-20th century does not simply appear as the world of Siva which was perceived by A.D.Pillai. Contrarily, the activities such as the annihilation of caste, emphasizing the reservation system in order to promote the marginalized sections, Sutras attempts to enter into the temple’s sanctum, the burning of Ramayana and the various ways of criticizing the Brahmin’s hegemony and their hypocrisy in the social life are actually damaging the supremacy of the Vaithika21 religion among the common people. The continuous movement against the baseless beliefs, irrational legends and their repository called religion among the Tamils over the centuries are actually appeasing the common masses towards the rational thinking and as a result the masses’ aspirations had been converted into political success of the Dravidian party which in fact deeply stems into the thoughts against the religion and its cruelty in the social life. Notably at this point where the common mass were fulfilling their wishes by viewing and listening the dialogues of the movies like Parācakti and their aspirations were translated into the political success of the Dravidian movement, how come A.D.Pillai, a renowned Tamil scholar could make the statement as quoted above in a more assertive tone?

At the same time, A.D.Pillai’s observation could also not simply be omitted by referring to it as the opinion of an individual. Until recently, many scholars and the historians of Tamil literature were largely sharing the views that chiefly resemble A.D.Pillai’s of the above quoted. While the common people as quoted above were logically distancing themselves from the clutches of the religious centered identity due to the widespread of the rational thoughts, the scholars and the historians of Tamil literature spent their energy to assertively establish the intimacy between the Vaithika religion and the very meaning of

21 The word Vaithika denotes the Vedic in Tamil.
Tamil as one or the same in the literary sphere. To put it differently, the meaning of Tamil has been changed largely in the socio-political sphere by the rise of the Dravidian consciousness and as a result the mythical web of the Vaithika religious philosophy that centers on the meaning of Tamil until then it has been critically questioned. The success of the rational thought promoted by the Dravidian movement is in fact marked by the large amount of its cadres comprised of the marginalized sections of the society. On the one hand when the Dravidian propaganda is vehemently criticizing the irrational and the cunningness of the Vaithika religious supremacy among the Tamils, the Tamil scholarship is on the other hand reiterating the meaning of Tamil in relation with the Vaithika religious world views as it was practiced in the early 19th century and prior to it.

However, the reason behind quoting the above two instances primarily lies in their striking similarity in defining the meaning of the literature and the literary activities in Tamil. A.D.Pillai’s assertion regarding the meaning of Tamil language and about the Tamils does not deviate much from the views of U.Ve.Ca articulated during the late 19th century. The changes that advance the understanding on the ways of perceiving things beyond the limitations of the religious order marked by the rational thoughts are however invisible in the assertion of A.D.Pillai. The similarity in both U.Ve.Ca’s and A.D.Pillai’s views invariably explains the meaning of Tamil as the possession of the Vaithika religion. They indeed create an impression that Tamil and the Vaithika religion are actually not the two different entities, but the single whole. However, this inseparability between the Vaithika religion and the very word Tamil has subtly reiterated in many ways and as a result the Tamil-Vaithika bond subtly constitutes an impression that it is an actual nature of the Tamils and their language among the scholars and historians. The point that proposes an invitation to
further probe into the event is the contradiction between the social and the literary meanings of the Tamil language and also the Tamil people. In spite of the dominance of the Vaithika religion, its social practices were largely criticized by the Dravidian movement during the 20th century and as a result, the hegemony of the Vaithika religion was largely mellowed down in the socio-political spheres, but in turn, the Vaithika world views were continuing its supremacy in the realm of the literary activities in Tamil as it was in the previous centuries. When the Tamils are largely withdrawing their self-position from the clutches of the Vaithika religious domination by the wide spread of the rational thoughts, the literary activities and thus the intellectual thoughts are indifferently traveling in the same direction as it was in the earlier centuries and as a result the Tamil- Vaithika bond is subtly justified even in the modern domain as the actuality.

However, the Vaithika monopoly over Tamil language is not simply transported from the supremacy of the religion practiced during the pre-modern age. In other words, the Vaithika dominance in history of Tamil literature is not alone derived from the traditionally practiced hegemonic status, but also constituted through the spirit of the modern logic. Many strategies have been adopted to constitute the intimacy of the Vaithika religion with Tamil language while constituting the linear structure of Tamil literature. For instance, the literature of the Christian and Islam orientation was largely categorized as ‘the contribution of the Christianity or the Islam to Tamil’. However, this usage of the word ‘contribution’ and the sense in Tamil that it has been used in this context are evidently exposing the dominance of the Vaithika religious world views in the very understanding of the literary activities in Tamil language. Moreover, the numbers, particularly the number of the texts become one of the aspects that indeed strengthen the Vaithika supremacy. In order to do so, many texts of the
non-Vaithika origin have been marginalized by labeling them as translations from the other languages. The construction of the dichotomy that the Vaithika-Tamil vs Non-Vaithika-other evidently plays a subtle role in the process of retrieving the Vaithika dominance into the modern structure as it was in the pre-modern age. However, to understand the nature and the argument of the study, one should clearly have some ideas about the multiple ways through which the notion of Tamil and its literary activities are understood over the different temporalities. Therefore, before entering into the central concern of the study, an attempt is initiated to understand the contexts by which the central issue of the research is actually constituted.

The very idea of Tamil literature as commonly understood now that it includes the texts from various religions, regions and castes in its structure is principally modern in the sense that it is a recent development and also very much influenced by the modernist thoughts. By emphasizing the intimacy between the modern and the meaning of Tamil literature, this study would like to argue that there was no such concept as ‘Tamil literature’ in the pre-modern times, instead literature in Tamil existed. In other words, the study by substantiating various events discusses that in the pre-modern age the texts written in Tamil existed and practiced in multiple ways primarily centering on religions, regions and castes discriminations. These discriminations and the exclusiveness of the literary activities in Tamil region directly pose resistance to understand literature and its circulation in Tamil as a unified whole. Therefore, the meaning of literature during the pre-modern age is very much limited to the aforesaid discriminations. The very idea of Tamil literature as an inclusive act begins with the attempts of imagining the multiple ways of practicing the literary activities in Tamil into a single linear chronological pattern. However, the beginning of the linear mode
of thinking and the chronological consciousness among the Tamil is marked by the encounter of the European literary endeavors in Tamil. However, the point here is that the beginning of the concept of Tamil literature as it has been commonly understood now is invariably associated with the European literary activities in Tamil. Moreover, this inference does not negate the existence of the Tamil texts in the pre-modern times, rather it emphasizes that these multiply located pre-modern texts are only understood as Tamil literature beyond limitations such as religion, caste and regions in the recent past, principally by the contact of the European textual practices and their influences on the traditionally practiced literary activities in Tamil over the ages.

Therefore, the newly emerged sense of Tamil literature which is marked by the influences of the European thoughts into Tamil represents the modern and the modern way of understanding. Further, the modern is relatively defined and explained in terms of the pre-modern activities. The modern-ness needs to be understood in terms of further development from the traditionally perceived ways and not antagonistic in nature with one another. In other words, the modernity or the modern refers to the fresh mode of perceiving the things introduced by the European renaissance thought and this modern mode gradually becomes the center by logically interrogating with traditional modes. The modern is therefore not the mere opposite of the traditional mode/s; rather it is in fact the advancement from the traditional modes of perceiving things.

Nonetheless, as already quoted in the beginning, these two events explain the dialogues between the pre-modern and the modern thoughts and by doing so they subtly discuss the trajectory of the politics behind the act of constituting the modern way of chronologically understanding the Tamil literary past. However, these two events actually
represent the two consecutive centuries. The temporal gap between these two events, although less than a century, is marked by many changes. The changes are visibly found even in the very understanding of the terms such as Tamil, literature and the history of Tamil literature. Further, the changes are evidently associated with the advancements in the production, dissemination and the reception of literature and the literary practices in Tamil language. Hence the period starting from the 19th century till the mid-20th century that covers the temporal distance of the aforementioned events is remarkably marked by drastic changes in the literary subjects, form, materiality and also the readership of Tamil literature. In the first event where U.Ve.Ca explains the nature of literary practices in the Caiva mutt to C.R.M, the dominant and thus popularly known meaning of Tamil literature and its intimate nexus with the Vaithika religion has been well explained. Moreover, the core part of discussion between U.Ve.Ca and C.R.M is evidently describing the inseparability of the Vaithika religious connection with the very meaning of Tamil language and its literature practiced during his age. In addition, it also reveals that the presence of the non-Vaithika religious literary activities and their structure are unknown to the major literary activities of that period. Both U.Ve.Ca’s complete ignorance and C.R.M’s knowledge of the names of the texts alone would clearly narrate the structure of the literary sphere/s during the 19th century.

In addition, U.Ve.Ca’s long list clearly produces the names and the nature of the literary activities practiced in higher learning centers like mutts during the 19th century. Further, it also subtly exposes the fact that in the higher learning centers the texts from other religious or non-religious affiliation were not only kept away from practices but also were largely unknown to the scholars of that age. Therefore the supreme limit of the scholarship
during the days of U.Ve.Ca is highly limited to the Vaithika religious world views. As a consequence, even the great minds in Tamil literature which were actually endorsed by the Vaithika mutts become insufficient to interpret and thus understand the literature beyond the Vaithika religious structure. This limitation however creates an impression that the literature in Tamil is nothing but an integral activity of the Vaithika religion. Moreover, the absence of the important texts principally belonging to the non-Vaithika origin, which later became the identity of the glorious Tamil past would also indirectly support the Tamil-Vaithika wholeness. Further, the texts that are mentioned by U.Ve.Ca as the proof of his scholarship and which indeed decided the scholarship of his age are largely composed only after the 15th century. The texts composed prior to the 15th century are largely unknown and away from the practices in the higher learning centers.

In contrast, the 20th century understanding of Tamil and its literary culture is doubtlessly extended to the literature of the non-Vaithika origin and also the oral cultures in some extent unlike the Vaithika religious structure of the 19th century. Notably, the literature of the non-Vaithika origin is remarkably celebrated and proudly pronounced as the literature of Tamil and by doing so the magnanimity of the Tamil literature with two millennia of the continuous literary activities is constituted. Further, the texts from non-Vaithika religions enter into modern structure with the modern material form. The unknown texts over the centuries entered into the structure of Tamil literature with printed form and the print circulates the texts widely and receives larger attention. The non-Vaithika religious texts as noted in the conversation were commonly known as ‘the ancient literature’ mainly because these literary works were largely produced prior to the 15th century AD and after the 15th century, the non-Vaithika literary canon largely disappeared from the popular activities due
to the rise of the Vaithika religion. However, the re-arrival of these non-Vaithika texts into the mainstream activities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is undoubtedly in conflict with the already existing structure which was centered by the Vaithika religion. Even though the publication of the ancient texts started appearing in print form as early as 1848 with the publication of the first volume of Tolkāppiyam\(^{22}\), many texts are printed and circulated widely at the closing decades of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th centuries. Many ancient texts that are rich in content and also their structure pose challenges to the traditional scholarship primarily trained in the Vaithika religious institutions mainly due to their non-Vaithika affiliations in their themes and dictions. The attempts to understand the texts and their content as well as syntax extend the limitation of understanding the literary activities in Tamil language beyond the confined territory of the Vaithika order. This extension marked by the non-Vaithika orientation is evidently questioning the incompatible authority of the Vaithika religion on the literary practices in Tamil. Further, so far celebrated texts and their genres by the Vaithika religious institutions are simply marginalized by emphasizing the temporal antiquity of the non-Vaithika texts.

As discussed above, various socio-political changes challenged the supremacy of the Vaithika religion in understanding the Tamil identity. The religious Tamil identity valorized over the centuries is sharply differentiated by the dichotomies such as Aryan vs Dravidian, Sanskrit vs Tamil and so on. The so far believed Tamil identity which was marked by the Vaithika world views is now associated with the Aryans and the Aryans was considered as the intruders from the outside of the Tamil region. The Dravidian consciousness in the socio-

\(^{22}\) *Tolkāppiyam* is an earliest extant grammatical treatise in Tamil language, said to be composed during pre-Christian era. It has three parts dealing with Formation of words and combination of words, Syntax and poetic substance respectively.
political realms therefore constitutes an impression that the Tamils were living once without any religion in the past and the Aryans entered into Tamil region with the Vadic religion and as a result the Tamils were religiously/ideologically subjugated. Further, the rise of the Buddhism in Tamil speaking region initiated by Ayōttitāca Paṇṭitār the closet of the 19th century became the logical threat to the hegemony of the Vaithika religion among the Tamils. Ayōttitācar rereads the hierarchal caste ladder which bears the Vaithika supremacy and concludes that the marginalized in the ladder are actually Buddhists. His entire discourse that operates in the dichotomy of Ātītamilan (the Tamils from the origin) vs Pātītamilan (half-Tamils) interprets the meaning of the Tamils as the one who does not believe the birth-based discrimination and that caste-less way of life is the actual life of the Tamil Buddhist. However, Ayōttitācar’s readings on the social structure of the Tamils and his findings are considerably marking the decline of the Vaithika dominance among the Tamils. Nonetheless, in this context, where on the one hand by the rise of Dravidian consciousness and the Tamil Buddhism, the supremacy of the Vaithika religion faced a huge crisis in the socio-political life of the Tamils, on the other hand the inclusion of the ancient literary texts suspends the sole authority of the Vaithika world views in the realm of the literary activities. How come the Vaithika religious domination which was the authority of the Tamil literary activities during the 19th century plays the same dominant position even in the 20th century where the non-Vaithika affiliated literary texts center the literary sphere and the rational/Dravidian

23 Ayōttitāca Paṇṭitār (1845–1914) was a prominent Dalit and anti-caste activist and a practitioner of Siddha medicine. He famously converted to Buddhism and called upon the Paraiyars to do the same, arguing that this was their original religion. He also founded the Punchmar Mahajana Sabha in 1891 along with Rettimalai Srinivasan.
consciousness is actually diffusing the supremacy of the Vaithika religion in the socio-political spheres?

In other words, when the entire understanding of the literature and the literary activities in Tamil practiced during the 19th century had undergone great changes at the end of the same and the early decades of the following centuries, how did the above quoted events which represent the period of the great changes are largely unaffected by the changes when it comes to defining the meaning of literature in Tamil? However, studying the ways through which the Vaithika religious supremacy in defining and understanding the literary activities in Tamil over the centuries without a larger change amidst the drastic changes would set the background of the study. In short, in the 19th century context there was no much information regarding the multiple literary activities in Tamil except the Vaithika religious centered literary canon.

The ways by which the dominance of the Vaithika religion is retrieved in the 20th century understanding of Tamil is one of the prime concerns of the study and this would also makes the platform to discuss the central argument of the study. However, the central argument of the study is related to the concept of translation, particularly how the concept of translation is understood in many ways and has been employed as a tool to maintain the supremacy of Vaithika religion in the modern structure as it was practiced in the traditional order. Before entering into the central concern of this research, a careful study on the above quoted events and their context would provide a clear picture regarding the nature of the study. Therefore staying a little more time on the aforementioned events would help to read them in detail. Nevertheless, the two things are evidently exposed in the conversation where U.Ve.Ca is proudly explaining to C.R.M regarding his mastery over almost all the known
texts in Tamil language during his time. The first thing would be the detailed list of the texts he produced and their sequential order by their genres. This list is however depicting not only the strength of the scholarship acquired by U.Ve.Ca alone, but also typically naming out the texts through which one’s scholarship is in fact measured during the 19th century. Further, the texts and their genres such as Antāti, Pillaiettamīl, Kōvai and Pirapantams that topped the list belongs to the later origin, possibly after the 15th century and largely associated with the Vaithika religious world views. The second one is the negligent tone heard in the reply to U.Ve.Ca by C.R.M. This conversation therefore records the contradictory tone principally present within it. By doing so, it also portrays the conflicting elements in understanding what could actually be the literature in Tamil language. Further, the as assertive tone in U.Ve.Ca’s expression and his suspicion on C.R.M that ‘why should this man make a big issue of my not having read these couple of books’ are clearly narrating the nature of Tamil literature perceived during that age. Therefore, the conversation is evidently archiving the two different ways through which the attempts to understand the literary activities in Tamil during this period are actually initiated: the age old practice defined and endorsed by the Vaithika religious world views that are represented by U.Ve.Ca and the doubt as well as some uncertainties on the Vaithika centred canon due to the ‘rediscovered’ texts of the non-Vaithika canon and their different structure which had been expressed through C.R.M’s queries.

In addition, the disagreement in the conversation between the two could sharply be distinguished in terms of their different modes of perceiving literary texts in Tamil. U.Ve.Ca’s description has undoubtedly exposed his understanding that the meaning of literature in Tamil is limited to the texts practiced in the mutts, the higher learning centers of
the 19th century. Mostly the texts that are practiced and also composed in the higher learning centers during that age structurally falls under the categories of ‘Cirrilakkiya vaṭivaṅkal’, such as Antāti, Pillaittamil, Kōvai and so on. The scholarship of this century is therefore limited and has been assessed by the ability of the mastery over these categories. Moreover, the pride of one’s scholarship is indeed expressed by his mastery over the genres as explained in the list produced by U.Ve.Ca than that of the temporality of the text’s origin. C.R.M on the other hand is frequently emphasising on the ancientness of the texts in his quires. However, U.Ve.Ca’s inability to understand the very word ‘old’ and ‘the old texts’ enquired by C.R.M and his reply with astonishment that ‘not only me but also my teacher haven’t heard of the texts’ are clearly exposing the absence of the chronological consciousness among the majorly practiced literary activities of that century. These two ways of understanding the literary texts: based on the genres that is a-historical and the historical linearity, have been typically exposed in the conversation and that difference decides the flow of the conversation. In short, the two modes of understanding the literary activities discussed in the conversation could be described as: the first indicates a-historical mode of understanding which was shaping up U.Ve.Ca’s notion of Tamil literature is mainly structured by the religious content- multiple genres that are later known as ‘Cirrilakkiya Vaṭivaṅkal,’ popularly practiced during the pre-20th centuries and the second appears to be C.R.M’s queries that aim to understand the literary texts in a linear chronological order.

24 Cirrilakkiya vaṭivaṅkal means the forms of Cirrilakkiyam. Although it has been commonly said that Cirrilakkiyam in Tamil could be categorized into 96 forms, the extant forms actually go beyond some 300 in numbers.
Nonetheless, the detailed study of the above quoted two events and their contexts invariably expose the traces of the transformation from the Vaithika centred structure to the present form which includes largely the non-Vaithika texts into it. Further, the transformation is subtly associated with the ways of perceiving the literary activities and their meanings in Tamil. It is marked by the development of the linear historical consciousness among the Tamils regarding their literary past. One was the traditionally practiced way. The other was introduced by the European textual practices in Tamil. It begins with the European Christian missionaries’ attempt to spread the Christianity among the Tamils. Moreover, the entire European textual activities in Tamil begin with the translation, particularly the translations of the song, prayer books to the Bible to the modern science treatise. However, the European textual thoughts and their modes of approaching the texts create the contradictions with traditionally practiced meanings in Tamil. Further, the meaning of translation could be discussed and critically studied in terms of the source and the target starts only with the European textual practices and its impact on the literary activities in Tamil. Therefore, the European textual practices marked by the translations initiate the transformation of the traditionally understood meaning of Tamil and its literary activities into the meaning we understand presently.

Modern education and the printing technology were the two major components through which the hegemony of the traditional meaning of the literature in Tamil is largely interrogated and as a result the traditional order was gradually translated into the modern. However, the process through which the limitations of the traditional order has been expanded and becomes the present is commonly understood as the process of modernisation. The larger difference in conceptualising what is Tamil literature during the 19th century and
the same in the 20th century would narrate the trajectory of the modernisation in Tamil literary sphere. But as discussed earlier, the meaning of literature, modes of understanding and canonical limitation of the 19th century Vaithika centred structure has largely been changed in the 20th century modern structure. The exception is the Vaithika supremacy. Nonetheless, the concept of translation played a major role in retrieving the Vaithika supremacy into the modern structure as it was in the traditional order. The study is therefore principally centres on the various meanings and the role/s played by translation and the politics behind them while transforming the meaning of Tamil literature from the Vaithika centred religious views to the modern. Further, the modern thoughts and their influences in the act of constituting the modern structure of understanding the literary practices in Tamil as noted earlier are invariably linked with the linear chronological mode of ordering the literary texts.

Thus far discussed various things related to the understanding of terms such as Tamil, literary activities and the meaning of literature and the politics around them during the late 19th and the 20th centuries are typically explaining the following things clearly: the meaning of Tamil during and prior to the 19th century is invariably related to the Vaithika religion. Therefore the concept of literature in Tamil is undoubtedly linked with the dominant Vaithika religious world view, primarily in terms of the subject and the meaning of the literature. Further, the absence of the non-Vaithika religious affiliated texts in Tamil are logically made the Tamil-Vaithika bond as a natural one. Contrary to the Vaithika centred meanings, the meaning of literature across the religion has been introduced by the European textual practices in Tamil. Further, the influence of the European textual activities attempt to understand the texts in Tamil language produced over the centuries in a linear chronological
pattern. As a result, multiple practiced textual canons in Tamil language in terms of the religion and the regions are brought together in a single order. This singularity however redefines the meaning of literature which is more accommodative in its structure unlike the traditionally practiced ways. Although the modern structure logically negates the traditionally practiced structures and their narrowness in defining and thus understanding the meaning of literature in Tamil. At last, it is also reflecting the Vaithika supremacy in a more subtle ways and reiterating the impression that Tamil is the possession of the Vaithika religion as it was understood during the pre-modern age. Therefore, modern attempts of writing the history of Tamil literature have also conditioned to support the Vaithika monopoly over Tamil language. Hence, the concept of translation has strategically been employed by the act of constituting the linear history of Tamil literature in order to assert the Vaithika supremacy in the modern structure. Hence, the focus of the study could be defined as the study of how the concept of translation is employed while writing the history of Tamil literature in order to retain the traditionally practiced Vaithika religious supremacy in understanding the meaning of literature in Tamil into the modern literary structure as it was earlier.

Modernity, Literary Historiography in Tamil and the concept of Translation

The study argues the intimate relationship between the concept of translation and the act of imagining and thus writing the history of Tamil literature needs to clarify some of the fundamental issues in detail before it dwells into the central argument. One of the prime issues would be the understandings of the rudiments of the concepts like the linearity, chronology and history among the various literary practices in Tamil over the ages. However, the commonly understood present notion of the concept of the history of Tamil literature is
invariably associated with the idea of a single linear Tamil literary past. This single order of Tamil literary past has created an impression that it is a long continuous literary tradition of uninterrupted literary lineage of at least two millennia. Further, it also regarded as an independent literary culture over the past two thousand years. Nonetheless, these understandings regarding the history of literature in Tamil are not actually the ‘real’ entities that exist as the tangible objects or as the ‘tradition’ that has indeed been continuously practiced over the centuries. Rather, these are mere constructs of the modern times and only exist in the conceptual state. The temporal constrain of these kinds of imaginations of Tamil literary past is very much confined to the past three centuries and could not trace out any events prior to this period that evidently substantiate the presence of such acts are actually existed amidst the multiple ways of practicing literature in Tamil language. Further, the very understanding of the texts that were produced in the past in a single linear fashion is indeed introduced and further developed by the European textual activities in the early decades of the 18th century and has been adopted by the native Tamils in the later period. Notably, the arrival of linear mode of understanding the literary past initiated by the modern thoughts has indeed forced the multiple traditional practices to be transformed into a single chronological order.

The linear mode as an offshoot of the European renaissance thoughts emphasizes the rational logic in the very understanding of the literary activities and the canonical formation. However, the modernity and its influences on the traditionally practiced orders in Tamil constitute the constant pressure on the centuries old understanding of the meanings of the terms, literature, texts and canonical organization of the literary texts and by doing so the entire traditional logic through which the supremacy of the textual status of a particular text
is decided has been questioned. Therefore, in the chronological order, the texts either traditionally dominant ones or the ‘invisible’ to the traditional practices are advised to prove their traditional supremacy in terms of the modern socio-ethical of that age. In other words, the monopoly of the particular religion, the Vaithika sects over the entire world of Tamil literary activities has been questioned by the arrival of the modern modes of understanding the literary practices in Tamil. As a result, the privileges of certain texts in the traditional order have been critically ruled out in the modern structure and allowed to be in the same status in the modern order as it was in the past provided that those texts have necessarily to be proven their importance by the logic of the modern-rational. Therefore, the sudden presence of the God in front of the poet and offering him the first word of the verse to be composed as a long poem or the Epic would not be enough to earn the fame of the text. And these traditional logic through which the status of the text are regarded highly appear to be irrational thing in the modern chronological structure. The God’s collaboration and his supreme position in the literary act are undoubtedly stolen by the presence of the modern thoughts. Further, the transcendental-Vaithika monopoly has lost its hegemony and become gradually succumbed or conditioned upon the socio-moral/ethical of the modern thoughts which become the center of the newly emerging social order of the late 19th and the 20th centuries. To put it precisely, any understanding of the meaning of literature that opposes travels against or simply de-promotes the core of the modern thoughts that commonly reflect the principles of humanism-social egalitarianism, the equality and the social justice could be considered as irrational and would not be given any prominence in the modern structure. The modern linear chronology is therefore structurally emphasis the rational order by interrogating and rejecting the mythical base of the traditional order.
On the other hand, the conceptual structure of the linear history of Tamil literature could also not simply be categorized as the structure that transcends the discriminations which actually determined the nature and the function of the traditional order/s. Therefore, defining the modernist thought and their influences on the literary activities in Tamil as the radical departure from the multiple modes of the traditional practices would lead to false conclusions. Rather, the influences of the modernity could perhaps be understood as they inevitably create situations which indeed compel or force the traditional order/s to be transformed into the structure which is now commonly regarded as the modern. Moreover, the process which converts the traditional mode/s into the modern might be christened as ‘the process of modernization’. Nevertheless, if the very ‘being’ of the structure of the history of Tamil literature is considered as the conceptual construction, then the politics that involved in the construction act would doubtlessly be the central factor of the history of Tamil literature. The multiple attempts to prepare the history of the Tamil literary past are evidently exposing the dominant ideologies which are invariably associated with the sections of people who are actually participating in the construction acts. Undoubtedly the participation of this act is largely marked by the presence of the dominant elite sections of Tamil society. As a result the structure of the history of Tamil literature indisputably appears to be the reflection of the interests of the dominant/elite section’s aspirations.

Nevertheless, the translations or the very concept of translation fulfil the dominant aspirations. In other words, the concept of translation, either as a concrete product or the conceptual understanding, has subtly been employed as a vehicle to transport the dominant ideology into the act of transformation from the traditional order to the modern. Modernization as an ideological act that by nature has been occupied by the dominant
sections is subtly conscious in structuring the history of Tamil literature; however by structuring the historical order, the concept of translation in fact helped them to weed away their threatening counterpart parts and thereby revive their same old hegemony into the newly emerging order. Conversely, prior to discussing the ways in which the concept of translation has actually been employed in the act of literary historiography in Tamil and also their politics, a concise study on the genesis of the concept of the linear chronological sensibility among the Tamils become necessary to further probe into the discussion. Nonetheless, as mentioned above the very understanding of the linear Tamil literary past is in fact constructed by modern age and the one who actively participated in the act was the dominant section of the society. In addition, the construction of the linear history is merely not to chronologically organize the texts composed in Tamil language over the centuries as commonly believed. Contrarily, it is a conscious act that subtly practices the inclusion and the exclusion of certain texts into it, which actually suit its own interest. Along with this, as a by-product of the linear construction the very meaning of the term Tamil literature is also changed significantly. In other words, the attempts of writing a linear history of Tamil literature are not initiated principally by foregrounding the meaning of the term Tamil literature which was traditionally followed; instead by their inclusion and exclusion of the texts the new meaning of the term literature is constituted. Therefore, the present mode of chronologically understanding the literary activities in Tamil literature and the literary sensibility are actually belonging to the modern age and are particularly connected to the process of modernization.

Nevertheless, the politics of imagining the history of Tamil literature and the role of the concept of translation into it is the central object of the discussion in this study. And the
central concern of the study in itself is not a concrete entity but a conceptual ‘being’, initiated and developed by the influences of the western textual practices in Tamil. Further, the modern is referring the ‘new’ ways of perceiving the notions of Tamil, Tamil literature and literary tradition and culture that are marked by the act of modernization. The influence of the modernity in the construction of the terms such as Tamil literature and the literary history is not merely related to their recent origin, probably within some three or four centuries of time limit, but also to the changes brought out by it in the earlier structures, for instance, the modern thoughts understand a text as a written material which perhaps belonging not only any religion but also no religion, become one of the changes that mark the new perception. Further, the changes include the material aspects of the text as well. The print is indeed a modern material introduced by the Europeans along with the European’s textual practices. The prose form and its importance in introducing the scientific writings into Tamil are also invariably related to translations and the modern thoughts. Therefore the term modern refers much more than the mere indication of the time limit. In other words, the changing the sense of these terms, from traditional order to the modern, is subtly related to the concept of modernity which influenced and redefined the literary activities in Tamil through the translations of the European/renaissance thoughts into Tamil.

Not only the process of modernization employs the concept of translation effectively in order to retain certain pre-modern elements into the modern structure, but also the very idea of modernity in Tamil itself is a translated concept, a translation from the European renaissance thoughts. Although differences of opinion are centring on it, it could be still believed and discussed that the modernity in Tamil context is marked its genesis by the encounter with the western thoughts. However, as noted above the term modernity is not
simply referring the modern times as a mere periodical marker, rather it may be understood as a theoretical construction of/about the modern times. Therefore, the modernity and its functions that influence the traditionally practiced literary activities in Tamil are generally identified with some of characteristic features. And those characteristics are not part of the pre-modern activities and only related to the process of modernization.

The transformation from the traditional orders to the modern, the structure of modern social order, the socio-economical function of the modern society, the modern social experiences and their problems have been critically studied by many scholars in both the western and the oriental school of social science- Karl Marx, Max Weber, M.N. Srinivas, subaltern historians, to name only some of the outstanding ones. However in general, the term modernity is said to be the by-product of the enlightenment project which constitutes a drastic changes in understanding the world by replacing the God’s authority into the human rational. It is discussed as a shift in perceiving the entire universe in a ‘new’ way by foregrounding the faculty of the human rational. Although it includes the social changes such as industrialization, nation formation and the feeling of nationalism, the emergence of the European dialects become the languages and steadily growing scepticism on the religious order, the term modernity is well defined as a strict mode of understanding the world through the human rational. However, this dichotomy between the divine supreme versus the human centred is actually setting the characteristics of the structure of the traditional and the modern mode of understanding the world.

In general, the term modernity is said to be the by-product of the enlightenment project which constitutes a drastic changes in understanding the world by replacing God’s authority into the human rational. Moreover, if the base of the term modernity is associated
with the mode of change in perceiving the meaning of the universe, preferably the change could be marked and divided as the pre-modern and the modern; then the precise point of the origin of this thought could not be clearly pointed out. In spite of differences of opinion among the scholars who grappled with this line of thinking, roughly the sixteenth century sets the beginning of the modern thoughts. In his discussion about the modern thoughts and its genesis, Cahoone writes:

Any century from the sixteenth through the nineteenth could be, and has been, named as the first ‘modern’ century. The Copernican system, for example, arguably a cornerstone of modernity, dates from the sixteenth century, while democratic government, which can claim to be the essence of modern politics, did not become the dominant Western political form until very recently (1)

The socio-political changes brought out by the modern thoughts in the European society have been well studied by the sociologists like Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and many others. Although the influences of the enlightenment thoughts on the European society could not be simply comprehended in few words, Felski attempts to compress the Charles Taylor’s view on modernity would provide an overall sense about the modernity. He condenses the Taylor’s view as ‘a general philosophical distinction between traditional societies, which are structured around the omnipresence of divine authority, and a modern secularized universe predicated upon an individuated and self-conscious subjectivity’. (12) Further, the modern characteristic has well described by Antony Giddens as:
It (Modernity) is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society—more technically, a complex of institutions—which, unlike any preceding culture, lives in the future, rather than the past (94).

However, the core-spirit of the western modernity is although the same across the globe as it was in the Europe, the way the modern thoughts have been received by various societies in different temporalities in multiple ways. Therefore understanding the modernity in terms of its European origin and the changes it brought in the European socio-political attitude could not simply be applicable as a tool to understand the modernity and its influences on various non-European societies. In the different societies, the multiple traditional elements and their complex structure play a crucial role in defining the nature and the path of the modernization process. The functional aspects of the modernity in various geo-regions and their particular mark have been rightly summarized by Sankar Roy as:

'The modern belongs everywhere. It may have started in the west for it owes its inception to a special set of historical circumstances. But there is nothing specifically Western about the printing press, the printed book, the newspaper, the periodical, the novel, or the short story. Nor about the railway, the steamship, the telegraph, the motor car, or the aeroplane'. (64)
Breckenridge and Appadurai are also emphasizing the broad nature of the modernity beyond their actual European inception. Their discussion on modernity and its association with globalization typically depicts the wider spectrum of understanding the modernity in the present age. They explain that the modernity transcends the limits of the European spatiality and now it could only be understood as the global phenomenon. They however assert the global experience as:

Every national society now creates its own ways of playing with modernity . . . As far as this sort of play with the 'means of modernity' is concerned, the advanced capitalist countries may have a head start, but they are no longer gatekeepers. The genie is out of the bottle . . . particular societies become locations not of pristine cultures, but rather of complex and specific negotiations between history and globality. (15-16)

But, however although the present experiences of modernity and its social function become the global experiences, the influence of the modern thoughts in the non-European ethnic/national cultures in the early days were marked by the translation of the European texts into these cultures. In other words, the translations from the European languages into Tamil during the early age, roughly from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, are not simply the translations that introduce certain new content and genres to Tamil, rather these translations subtly translate the new modes of understanding the universe directed by the renaissance/modern thoughts into Tamil. These new ways of approaching and understanding the universe, through the translations, influenced and gradually translated the multiple pre-modern ways of the textual activities into the modern Tamil literary culture. However, the origin and the development of the modern thoughts into Tamil are closely associated with
the translation activities. In other words, the genesis of the modern thought or the seed of the modernization process in Tamil context is invariably related to the activities of translation, largely the translations from the European languages into Tamil.

**Popularisation of the print and the secularisation of Tamil literature:**

The modernization activities in Tamil have invariably associated with the printing mode of reading practices which is an integral part of formal education system. Therefore, the entire argument of this study would falls under the triangle relationship between the emergence of the printing as the solely medium of the literary activities, the democratization of the literary culture which subtly connected to the popularity of the prose format and the emergence of new readership that is an outcome of the secular educational endeavours promoted by the Europeans. This European educational system however sets the platform for the common education which helped the marginalized sections of the society who thus far kept away from any literary activities gradually emerged into a strong critique against the hegemony of caste discriminations practiced in the realm of the Tamil literary activities over the ages. By critically engaging with the interrelationship among the aforementioned three points, this study attempts to draw the trajectory of the influences the translations marked on the ages old practices of the Tamil literature and as a result the notion of ‘Tamil literature’ itself had largely been modified. In other words, the continuous production of the translations in print particularly the translation from the European languages into Tamil subtly interrogate the centuries old believed concepts like ‘Tamil literature’, ‘literary production’ and ‘textual activities’ and by doing so the translations negotiate, modify and reconstitute the meaning of textual production and the literary activities in Tamil that were seemingly much closer to the European concepts. Further, by translating the various modes of practicing literature in Tamil
into seemingly closer to the post-renaissance European textual practices, the translations largely rewrite the meaning of the concept of literature itself in Tamil.

As noted earlier, the history of the European’s translation endeavours in Tamil is also turning out to be the history of the early printing in Tamil language due to the fact that almost all the earlier printed materials in Tamil are invariably the translations. The European’s translation endeavours were not only limited to the common notion of translation that would be explained in terms of the proper source and target relationship, but could also be further expanded as the translation of new genres into Tamil such as the prose style, scientific literature, dictionaries and glossaries, language learning grammars and so on. These various kinds of translations however set the platform for uniting the multiple modes of traditionally practicing the literature in Tamil into the single label ‘Tamil literature’. Although the nature and the intention of the translations printed in Tamil, reception and the impact of the translations in Tamil culture, the role of translation in introducing new thoughts and genres into Tamil and the subtle impact the translations hold on the act modernizing Tamil are some of the key issues discussed as part of the argument in this study, the main stream of the argument is to highlight how the traditional literary activities in Tamil are responding to the drastic changes brought out by the European texts mainly in the form of translations and as a result the changes are occurred in the multiple modes of practicing Tamil literature traditionally.

However, before discussing the translations activities principally promoted by the arrival of the Europeans into Tamil region, two points need to be discussed clearly in order to avoid the common false preconceptions regarding the literary practices in Tamil speaking region. The first one would be the notions of Tamil literature and Tamil culture.
Notwithstanding the ideas of Tamil, Tamil literature and the Tamils as a distinct ethnic group existed since from the beginning and many references are also found in the oldest extant text in Tamil *Tholkappiyam*, the secular and more inclusiveness of these terms at least in the conceptual level were constituted only in the 20th century. Prior to that, these terms are largely coloured by the religious discourses and the regional customs. All the religions that are associated with the life of Tamils have maintained their own literary canons, production, re-production and the dissemination of the texts of their religions. Also every religion have associated with Tamil language and made attempts to establish their own canon is indeed representing the Tamil literary culture. This religious domination in the literary practices is not only excluding the texts of the other/s from the practices, but also maintaining the ignorance of even knowing the names of the texts produced by the other religions.

The print and its easy accessibility is indeed literally brought the texts of different canons together and by doing so finding some commonalities among the texts across the religions set in fact the modern canonical structure of the Tamil literary history. It should not be misunderstood based on the common structure of the Tamil literary history that the early face was in the hands of Jain people then followed by Buddhist and later by the Vaithika religions; rather this order is itself the product of the modern-chronological pattern and it could evidently be substantiated that these various canons supported by the religions are all existed hand in hand even in the 19th century. Nonetheless, in the long running literary practices in Tamil although diverse in nature have no traces about the lower sections of society’s literary participation perhaps due to the fact that the strict following of the caste discriminations in the society. Further, even among the ‘touchable’ castes the religion plays a dividing role that controls what has to be read and what must not. This restriction of reading
the texts were not only practiced among the direct rivalry religions such as the Jainism or the Buddhism vs the Vaithika religions, but also within the Vaithika religions themselves, for instance, between the Saivism and the Vaishnavism. The concept of Tamil literature and the Tamil culture as a unified whole which at least seemingly including all the sections of Tamil speaking people was solely constituted during the 20th century and prior to it what was considered as the Tamil culture or the Tamil literature had indeed represented only some sections of Tamil speaking people but not all. Moreover, the idea of the Tamil literature and culture as the single entity is the outcome of the ‘modernization project’ which majorly leaves its traces in the various activities of the European initiations and their influences in Tamil socio-literary culture in the past five centuries.

The emergence of the printed textual practices as the dominant mode of literary activities, the formal education system which includes the various sections of society, the spread of the book that becomes easily accessible to all the people and the participation of all the sections of the society in the literary production are principally related to the process of modernizing Tamil. Contrarily, over the ages Religious contents became predominantly the subject and theme for the literature in Tamil. Most part of the literature in Tamil language except the Cankam collections were largely affiliated to the religious ideology and also become the seminal part of the religious propagating mission among the Tamils. Even the Cankam corpus although majorly not referring any religion in its content, was preserved over the centuries and also transformed into print by the efforts of the pious Saivite scholars. In short, the extant literature of Tamil produced over the ages could not be read, understood and interpreted without the support of the religious world views. However, travelling against the religious hegemony in the realm of the literary activities in Tamil indeed set the modern tone
to the literary activities in Tamil. Modernization is generally associated to the progressive transition from the old, traditional social order to the ‘modern’. Relating to the issues of Tamil literary activities, modernization could commonly be understood as the act of freeness or the democratization of the literature and the literary activities of Tamil language from the hegemony of the religions and the religious mutts.1. This act of modernization is invariably linked with the release of literature and their meaning/interpretative possibilities from the clutches of the religions. However, principally from the fall of the religious hegemony in the literary activities in Tamil, the site for the secular Tamil literature emerged. This site appears directly not belonging to any particular religion and seems more inclusive in nature that makes room for the literature produced by various religious canons. This cross-religious reading, the emergence of the prose form with the arrival of the marginalized people into the literary activities and every reader could own the copy of the texts which makes the accessible easily possible are some of the salient characteristics of the process of modernizing Tamil.

However, thinking across the religious canons and acknowledging the other religion’s literature as the literature of Tamil, particularly recognizing the literature in Tamil produced by the Jain and Buddhist writers and including them into ‘The Tamil literary canon’ of that time which was till then believed to be comprised of only the literature of the Vaithika religious order and also dominated by the Vaithika disciples, itself possibly made by the process of modernization. But, as the project of modernization expected and worked towards it that the complete autonomy from the religious hegemony and setting up the secular space for the literary activities in Tamil has indeed not been entirely successful. In other words, although the religious supremacy was largely cracked down by the act of modernizing Tamil,
the modern structure could not be completely kept away from the religious dominations in
the literary practices and the pre-modern pride and supremacy of the religions was also subtly
translated into the secular modern structure of the history of Tamil language. In this junction,
the dichotomy between the pre-modern religious centered and the modern secular based
structure of understanding entered into the complex structure of relations. The absoluteness
of the pre-modern religious hegemony was indeed translated into the subtleness in the
modern structure. However, the pre-modern or the pre-European influential textual activities
in Tamil and their rationalization were no more valid in the modern structure and in order to
retain the same old dominance the literature must have to be rationally justified through the
moral-ethical of the modern thoughts. The God’s presence or the God himself came down
and scribed the literature and thus the literature topped the order like pre-modern logics hold
no meaning/s in the modernized structure and to maintain the top order as it was in the
traditional realm the literature needs to be explained in terms of its structural aspects or the
social values it attained are more important than that of the pre-modern myths regarding the
holiness of the text or the scribe.

The pre-modern canons and their traditional order/s of literature were not seemingly
providing the base for the structure of modern literary history. The various canonical orders
of traditional Tamil literary practices were indeed compelled to justify their supremacy in
the terms of modern-secular thoughts and the literature which unable to do the same was kept
away from their old legacy and was given prominence in the modern literary history.
Although this logic of justification were at work, the inclusion of more Saivite works created
the tone that Tamil and Saivism were closely connected with each other than that of any
other religion and this tone was indeed raising the suspicion on the ‘modern’ history of Tamil

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literature. It was quite true that the literary practices of some five centuries until the late 19th century was controlled by the Saiva mutts and produced many puranas and literature which was commonly known as ‘minor literature’ on the Saiva religious themes and the Gods. But, many of the literature principally composed during the 18th and 19th centuries and were celebrated as the great poetic achievements of that period could not be placed forefront while writing the history of Tamil literature and even then the Saivite tone of Tamil literature was subtly retained. Nevertheless, this act of retrieving the pre-modern Saivite dominance into the modern literary history attracts our attention towards it and the subtle politics lies behind the event. Moreover, the great literature which represent the pride of Tamil now, either the Cankam collections or the moral/ethical literature or the grand or minor epics or the early grammar treatises were all belonging to the non-Saivate canons and yet it had been argued that ‘the Tamil is none other than the lord Siva himself’ in the modern literary history.

In fact this could be the common understanding regarding the Tamils and Tamil literature even in the mid-20th century even though many other views rejecting this generalised notion have started appearing in literature. However, not only translations but also the concept of translation played a subtle role in retrieving the pre-modern dominance of the Saivism and interpreting the Tamil region as ‘Siva loga’ even in the 20th century.

The politics of retrieving the Saiva dominance in the modern literary history of Tamil is made possible primarily by the exclusion of the multiple events which in fact interrogating the pre-modern literary activities and the religious hegemony such as the interrelation among the arrival of the Christianity into Tamil speaking region, the catholic and the protestant’s engagements with Tamil language and culture, the printing press and its influences in the production and the dissemination of textual practices in Tamil language and the emergence
of the marginalized people into the literary activities with the newly emerged prose form. The aforesaid events have some coherence influences on the traditional literary activities and constitute the trajectory that explains the footprints of the act of modernization in Tamil and as their continuation the history of Tamil literature has established. However the interesting fact is that many works on the history of Tamil literature have hardly mentions of the abovementioned events in their leaner chronological ladder. As discussed above the four hundred years of long history of printing activities are not found any references in the scholarly works on the history of Tamil literature and the chronological historical narrative only meets the printing activities in the 19th century, linked to Sir Charles Matecalfe’s order in 1835. Of course the 1835 is important landmark in the printing history of Tamil language mainly because after this point only the literature of Tamil largely entered into the printing mode and as a result the many great unknown literature of Tamil came into the scholarly attention. The ‘rediscovery’ of the Cankam literature and the ‘renaissance’ of Tamil literature are the continuation of the printing endeavour of the native Tamils that was initiated soon after the order of Sir Charles Matecalfe in 1835. Moreover, the significance of this point of time would be the native’s participation and their investment into the printing world. Nonetheless, this narrative, mainly by focusing the early 19th century as a period when the Tamils participation increased in the printing activities, by and large constitutes the order that until the 19th century the literary practices in Tamil were centred on the palm-leaf manuscripts and from the 19th century they were gradually transformed into the printing. This understanding of the transformation from palm-leaves to paper seems to explain more changes in the materiality of the literature. This order does not include the traces of the printing activities and its influences on the traditional literary practices. But, while discussing
the history of Tamil literature the importance of printing activities and its sociology in the Tamil context needs to be understood by including the vibrant changes the printed texts marked in the pre-19th century literary practices.

The understanding of various socio-cultural events and their influences on the literary activities in Tamil for the past five centuries therefore constitutes two different trajectories. The commonly accepted trajectory of the chronological order simply excludes the various events that influenced and changed the direction of the literary practices of the pre 19th century which gradually became the cause for the chronological consciousness during the pre-19th century. Moreover, the linear chronological order narrated the literary culture until the 19th century was marked by the form of Sittrilakiyam (Minor literature), a common category that includes at least 96 various poetic forms. Contrary to this popular practices, the literature produced by the Europeans or by the influences of the Europeans in Tamil were largely the translations from the European languages and further these translations were not composed in the elegant dictions and forms as it was quite common in the texts of Sittrilakiyam; rather they used the prose form by adopting the ordinary people's words which indeed considered as 'the paraiya' language by the 'high' literary activities of that age. Furthermore, by excluding the textual activities of the Europeans into Tamil that principally related to the various debates and the social changes of that time as not meeting the standard of 'literary status' of that period, the literary history subtly retrieved the ages old the Saiva religious dominance into the modern literary domain. On the other side, the European's attempts to learn Tamil and their translations endeavours in Tamil were not only introducing the European textual culture into Tamil language but also worked as an intermediary activity that negotiates between the 'high' literary culture and the uneducated masses. As a result the
deep cleavage between ‘high poetic’ literary activities and ‘low Paraiya words’ were in some
extant bridged and the gap was filled with the newly emerged prose form.

Nevertheless, travel against the commonly understood structure prepared by the
history of Tamil literature which as mentioned earlier had not even mentions regarding the
various socio-political changes and their consequences on the practices of literature during
the pre-19th century, the following chapters focus the various events connected to the changes
in the ages old modes of practicing literature and by doing so they describe the story of how
Tamil is ‘modernized’. Further, this study investigates into various debates on
modernization process and multiple ways of imagining a single linear chronological literary
past. By concentrating on modernization processes, it subtly reveals the discontinuity
presence in the conceptual idea of modernization and what had actually happened as the
result of the modernization process. In other words, the idea of modernity although set
seemingly the democratic space in the literary activities in Tamil, largely contradicts with
the outcome of its own results. This contradiction between what conceptually understood the
act of modernization and what as it result happened in the understanding the literary culture
and linear tradition of Tamil clearly expose the politics of literary production and reception
in Tamil over the ages. Moreover, the process of modernization in Tamil could not be merely
understood based on the European structure of modernization. In European context, the
modernization process is closely associated with the emergence of the Protestant religion
against the Roman Catholic, the fall of the feudal social structure, democratization of the
European society, the spread of education and the popularity of the printing activities and so
on. Nonetheless, although all the aforementioned events were indeed quite visible in the
process of Tamil modernization, there was some difference in the temporal constrains
between these two processes. In the European society all these events were closely associated with one another and appeared in a particular temporal limit whereas in Tamil context the aforesaid events were occurred in different times over the centuries. For instance, the printing activities initiated by the Protestant missionaries during the 18th century could perhaps be considered as the ‘proper’ beginning of the printing activities in Tamil mainly because from this point only Tamil received the modern print technology and the continuous printing activities in Tamil commence from this point onwards. But, the art printing and the printed books in Tamil was actually introduced by the Roman Catholic missionaries as early as the 16th century. Therefore, the point to be remembered here is the modernization in Tamil literature did not happen in a specific temporal constrain as it was in the European society; rather it had a long history of some centuries which included many events that were related to one another and become cause for later transformation of social-cultural and thus literary activities. However, the translations and their influences are one of the major components that paved the way to the social transformation.

However, as indicated above, by critically engaging with the unrecognized and less focused trajectory that includes majorly the European’s attempts of learning Tamil and their translation activities which set the way to engage with the traditional textual activities in Tamil and by doing so prepare the space for modernizing Tamil, the nature and the role of translation and its influences on the traditional literary practices are the prime focus of the following chapters.