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Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion:  
J. M. Nallasvami Pillai (1864–1920)  
and Hinduism in colonial South India

J. M. Nallasvami Pillai (Tam. je. em. nallacāmi-p piḷḷai) is a household name in the history of Tamil culture and religion.<sup>1</sup> Arguably, he was the most influential propagator of Saiva Siddhanta (Tam. caiva cittāntam, Skt. śaiva siddhānta) in late 19th and early 20th-century India, and the main coordinator of a vast network of regional Saiva Siddhanta organizations all over South India and Ceylon. These had a considerable impact on cultural and religious debates in South India, which we know, for instance, from contemporary missionary reports.<sup>2</sup> Nallasvami was a typical representative of the English educated Vellalar (Tam. veḷḷāḷar) elite in colonial South India. He earned a law degree in 1886. From 1887–1893, he worked as a lawyer in Madurai and then became District Munsiff in different places of the Madras Presidency, a position he maintained for nearly 20 years. From 1912 onwards, he worked again as a lawyer in Madurai.<sup>3</sup> He was a prolific writer and conference speaker, translator of Tamil classics into English, and the main editor of the journal *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika* (referred to here on as *Siddhanta Deepika*), the central mouthpiece of the Saiva Siddhanta revival.

However, in sharp contrast to Nallasvami's undisputed importance stands his treatment in scholarly research, where he has been widely neglected.<sup>4</sup> One reason for this could be that he does not fit into the established scholarly narrative of Tamil Saivism in colonial South India. Gene Irschick set the tone. On the one hand, he emphasized that many non-Brahman Hindus in the Justice Party favoured Saiva Siddhanta; and he declared Nallasvami to be the leading propagator of Saivism as *the* 'Dravidian religion'. To prove further the close link to the Dravidian movement, he did not forget to mention that Nallasvami's son, J. N. Ramanathan, was "a prominent exponent of Tamil interests in the Justice

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<sup>1</sup> The English transliteration of 'nallacāmi' varies; common are also the versions 'J. M. Nallaswamy Pillai' and 'J. M. Nallaswami Pillai'.

<sup>2</sup> See Nehring 2003: 335–341.

<sup>3</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 158–178.

<sup>4</sup> The small monograph of Balasubramaniam is not a scholarly biography (Balasubramaniam 1965). The best scholarly summary of Nallasvami's life and work is in Vaitheespara 1999: 158–178.

Party”.<sup>5</sup> Yet, on the other hand, in Irschick’s judgement, Nallasvami failed in his attempt to promote the Dravidian case:

He had hoped through his work to unite non-Brahmans, but as he told a Justice Party conference in 1918, Saiva Siddhanta did not have the same force in mobilizing non-Brahman opinion as the Justice Party did.<sup>6</sup>

Other scholars have followed this path of interpretation. S. Kailasapathy acknowledges that Nallasvami’s journal, *Siddhanta Deepika*, had “served for many years as the rallying forum for non-Brahmin Saiva protagonists”.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, he also certifies that Nallasvami did not go along with the core convictions of other Tamil Saiva revivalists, since “Nallasvami Pillai was not anti-Sanskrit like Vedachalam”, alias Maraimalai Adigal (Tam. maraimalai aṭikaḷ, 1876–1950), the leading figure of the Pure Tamil movement (*taṇittamiḷ iyakkam*). These circles would have considered him “too moderate”.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Vaitheespara observes a lack of clarity in Nallasvami’s work:

There was much ambiguity in Nallaswamy Pillai’s revivalist efforts. Though he worked with great passion for the revivalism of Saiva Siddhanta and Tamil, his revivalist efforts were not characterized by the pronounced anti-Aryan or anti-Brahman ideology that was typical of many Dravidian ideologues. ... he did not wish to alienate the Tamil Brahmins.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, Nallasvami is seen as someone who was inconsistent in his views on Tamil revivalism and, in addition, there are certain doubts about the coherence of his views. This perspective regards the revival of Tamil Saivism and Saiva Siddhanta, in the 19th and early 20th century, as a mere precursor of the later Tamil nationalist and Dravidian movement. However, these developments only took on a clear shape as late as 1916, when the Justice Party was founded and, at least according to common historiography, the Pure Tamil movement was established.<sup>10</sup> Reading the whole Tamil Saiva renaissance, which started much earlier in the 19th century, against the background of these later developments makes it difficult to do justice to its complex and different identity positionings. The discursive context of prominent thinkers and activists, like Nallasvami, is measured by its contribution to later developments and not in its

<sup>5</sup> Irschick 1969: 292, see also Ryerson 1988: 61.

<sup>6</sup> Irschick 1969: 292–293.

<sup>7</sup> Kailasapathy 1979: 27.

<sup>8</sup> Kailasapathy 1979: 27, 45 note 13. Cf. also Sumathi Ramaswamy, who also says Nallasvami represents a “moderate’ Shaivism” (Ramaswamy 1997:30).

<sup>9</sup> Vaitheespara 1999: 159 note 103, 175.

<sup>10</sup> See Irschick 1969: 44–54; Vaitheespara has shown that there is no historical evidence to show that the Pure Tamil movement formally started in 1916, as later claimed (see Vaitheespara 1999: 462–480).

own right. Moreover, the later developments propose a dichotomy of identities (for instance, Brahman / Non-Brahman, Dravidian / Non-Dravidian) as an analytical starting point, which was itself the product of the colonial discourse. This needs to be historicized, but not reified through its application to earlier contexts.<sup>11</sup>

In any case, freeing the view of Nallasvami from preconceived notions proves to be very fruitful. It opens up the space to see that his understanding of Saivism was neither “moderate” nor incoherent, but in its own way quite radical; claiming no less than Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion, far superior to the heavily criticized Advaita Vedanta oriented Neo-Hinduism. As Nallasvami’s positions are widely unknown, a close reading of his most programmatic essay will be undertaken first of all, in order to trace his specific way of argumentation and analyse the sources he refers to. Next, Nallasvami’s concept of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion will be located within the then contemporary debates on Hinduism in colonial India. This is followed by a closer look into the broader historical context of South Indian Saivism in the late 19th and early 20th century. The relationship between the South Indian Saiva Siddhanta revival, led by Nallasvami, and the emergent Tamil nationalism will be discussed; it will be asked whether universalist concepts, in 19th-century Tamil Saivism, existed before Nallasvami. In conclusion, some broader theoretical implications, raised by a universalist interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta, will be addressed.

*‘The Saiva Religion and Saiva Advaita Siddhanta Philosophy’ (1909)*

In 1909, the first issue of the journal *Siddhanta Deepika* published an article of Nallasvami with the programmatic title ‘The Saiva Religion and Saiva Advaita Siddhanta Philosophy’. This article summarizes Nallasvami’s ideas on Saiva Siddhanta in a comprehensive way and can be taken as a guide to his thought. The argument of the text is highly sophisticated and not easy to summarize. Nallasvami argued in at least three directions. Firstly, he tried to elaborate how “Modern Śaivism”<sup>12</sup>, i. e. “Śaivism of the South”<sup>13</sup> or Saiva Siddhanta, stands in relation to the Sanskrit tradition; secondly, how it is related and superior to other Indian philosophies, especially Advaita Vedanta; finally, he defended Saivism against the Western critique of Hinduism, and conceptualized it as a universal religion in its own right.

<sup>11</sup> See Bergunder 2004; Srinivasan 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 274.

<sup>13</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 315.

Nallasvami started his discourse with reference to Max Müller, who had suggested that behind the six systems of philosophy stood an older ancient Indian tradition, a “National or Popular Philosophy”<sup>14</sup>. Saivism and Vaishnavism, as “the two popular Hindu religions of modern India”,<sup>15</sup> are the direct heirs of this old philosophical tradition. Comparing them, Saivism is described as the religion of the “majority of Hindus”<sup>16</sup> and it represents, particularly, the “old traditional and parent religion of the days of the Vēdas and Upanishats, Āgamas or Tantras, and Itihāsas and Purāṇas, and bases its authority on these ancient revealed books and histories. It claims God Śiva to be the author of the Vēdas and Āgamas.”<sup>17</sup>

Nallasvami then went on to explain this historical claim in greater detail, starting with a discussion of passages from the Rigveda (Skt. ṛgveda) on Rudra. He interpreted Rudra’s (i. e., implicitly, Siva’s) peculiar position there as if Rudra was already considered a supreme god.<sup>18</sup> He quoted directly from the Vedic texts, and his argument was not explicitly based on any Indian or Orientalist authority. For certain etymological proofs, he referred to Sayana (Skt. sāyaṇa), the famous 14th-century commentator, whose views were also widely adopted by Western Orientalists in the 19th century.<sup>19</sup> Nallasvami made the case that core elements of Saivite cosmology could already be found in the Rigveda, quoting the first four verses from the creation hymn in X,129.<sup>20</sup> Though he did not mention it, he used a well-known translation by Monier Monier-Williams (1819–1899) with slight alterations, which suggests that he might have compared it to the original Sanskrit.<sup>21</sup> This method of using English Orientalist translations of Sanskrit classics, is characteristic of Nallasvami in all of his writings. The hymn deals with the “One” that existed before the universe, and Nallasvami laid special emphasis on the phrase “in the beginning there was neither sat nor asat”<sup>22</sup> as pointing to the core of later Saivite cosmology. When the hymn speaks

<sup>14</sup> See Müller 1899a: xviii. The book received a lengthy review in *Siddhanta Deepika* by V. V. Ramana Sastrin, see *Siddhanta Deepika* 3 (1899/1900) 59–81.

<sup>15</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 273.

<sup>16</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 273.

<sup>17</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 274.

<sup>18</sup> For Rudra’s position in the Vedas see Gonda 1978: 85–89.

<sup>19</sup> For a good overview of the contemporary Orientalist discussion of Sayana, see Griffith 1973: vii–x.

<sup>20</sup> For a modern indological interpretation of Rigveda X.129 see, for instance, Mehlig 1987: 67–76.

<sup>21</sup> Monier-Williams 1875: 22; Monier-Williams 1883: 13.

<sup>22</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 277. Instead of “sat (being) nor asat (non-being)”, Monier-Williams translated it into the more poetical “naught nor aught” (Monier-Williams 1883: 13). Nallasvami probably changed to the original “sat / asat” because of the central usage of these terms in the Saiva Siddhanta.

of “desire” as the “primal germ” that brings the universe into being, he identified this desire with the concept of *icchā-śakti* (Tam. *iccā catti*) in Saiva Siddhanta, where it was the main original cause of cosmological evolution.<sup>23</sup> It seems likely that Nallasvami, in his interpretation of Rigveda X.129, not only relied on the translation of Monier-Williams but also on his interpretation. Monier-Williams also suggested that this hymn was the “first dim outline of the later philosophical theories, both Sāṅkhyan and Vedāntic”, and that the “idea of the female principle as necessary to the act of creation” is already “vaguely implied” in the mentioning of “desire”.<sup>24</sup>

In his final discussion on the Rigveda, Nallasvami pointed to a well-known two-birds metaphor: “Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruits, the other ‘Anyā’ looks without eating.”<sup>25</sup> He highlighted the frequent quotation of the verse in the Atharvaveda and the later Svetasvatara (Skt. *śvetāśvatara*) Upanishad, the Katha (Skt. *kaṭha*) Upanishad, and the Mundaka (Skt. *muṇḍaka*) Upanishad. He characterized it as “the chief stronghold of Indian Theism against Idealism [i. e., Advaita Vedanta]”<sup>26</sup>, which probably refers to Srikantha’s or Ramanuja’s interpretation of the two birds as showing the difference between the individual soul and the supreme soul; but Nallasvami did not explain it further.<sup>27</sup>

To further prove his point that theistic Saivism is rooted in the Vedas, he took a look at the Yajurveda in a similar way to the Rigveda. In the Yajurveda, he saw “the position of Rudra ... more established as Paśupati ... and as The One without a second”<sup>28</sup>, and it contained already “the words Pati, Paśu and Pāśam”<sup>29</sup>, the core terms of later Saiva Siddhanta. In the Tamil Saiva tradition, Siva is often referred to as the destroyer of the

<sup>23</sup> See Schomerus 1912: 68–69. In the Sanskrit original, “*kāma*” stands for “desire”.

<sup>24</sup> Monier-Williams 1883: 14, see also 183; see also Monier-Williams 1875: 502.

<sup>25</sup> Rigveda I.164,20 (Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 277). Nallasvami quoted from the translation of Max Müller, see Müller 1884: 38 (Mundaka Upanishad III.1.1), 251 (Svetasvatara Upanishad IV.9,6), but Nallasvami did not acknowledge his source. Moreover, ‘Anyā’ was added by him and shows again that the translation was checked with the Sanskrit original. For an interpretation of Rigveda I.164 see Mehlig 1987: 56–67.

<sup>26</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 277. See Atharvaveda IX.9,20 and Katha Upanishad III.1 (which is not a direct parallel, but given as a cross reference in Müller’s translation, see Müller 1884: 12, 38 note 1).

<sup>27</sup> The two birds are mentioned in Srikantha’s commentary of the Vedānta Sūtras on several occasions, see Sastry 1897–1906: 2:73 (I.2.4.), 2:98 (I.3.1.), 3:159 (III.2.5.). For Ramanuja, see the translation of Ramanuja’s commentary of the Vedānta Sūtras by Thibaut, which Nallasvami knew fairly well (Thibaut 1904: 98). However, in this translation, the verse is not given special attention; though see Monier-Williams, who gave it more prominence in his discussion on Ramanuja (Monier-Williams 1883: 120).

<sup>28</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 277.

<sup>29</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 280.

three cities (Skt. tripura, Tam. muppuram) of demons.<sup>30</sup> Nallasvami quoted from Tirumantiram, where the three cities are metaphorically explained as the three impurities (Tam. mummalam), which is a central theme in Tamil Saiva Siddhanta.<sup>31</sup> Nallasvami showed that this narrative goes back to a story of the destruction of three cities (Skt. tripurasamhāra) in the Yajurveda, which again provided for him a link to the Vedas.<sup>32</sup>

Nallasvami proceeded to the Upanishads. The development from the Vedas to the Upanishads resulted, in his view, in a further deepening of the belief in one God and the spiritualisation of rituals:

the worship of the many Gods was being given up in favour of the one God, and the efficacy of sacrifices in general were being doubted, and a more spiritual form of worship was being substituted in its place.<sup>33</sup>

He referred to the Kena Upanishad, where he saw the beginning of this development. He quoted a lengthy passage,<sup>34</sup> where Uma (Tam. / Skt. umā), commonly identified as the wife of Siva, points to her "Lord", the "One Supreme Brahma" which, for Nallasvami, is identical with Siva. However, his main interest was in the Svetasvatara Upanishad belonging to the Yajurveda (Taittirīya), which he considered one of the founding texts of Saiva Siddhanta:

The Śvetāśvatara Upanishat, the greatest authority of the Śaiva School, repeats the text of the Yajur Veda 'Eka Eva Rudrō Nadvītyāya Taste',<sup>35</sup> and the philosophy of Advaita Siddhānta is fully expounded in this Upanishat. This Advaita is neither the Śāṅkhya nor the Yōga, neither Dvaita nor Advaita, as ordinarily understood. Hence, Oriental Scholars like Monier Williams, Professor Macdonnel [sic] and Garbe regard this Upanishat as the oldest representative of the ancient eclectic school of Hindu philosophy. With this book they couple the Bhagavat Gītā.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For references in the Tamil Saiva literature, see e. g., Pope 1900: 175, 178; Peterson 1989: 34–35, 68, 116–117, 122, 128, 154, 169, 173, 181, 255, 288, 292, 303–304.

<sup>31</sup> He quoted Tirumantiram Nr. 343, probably in his own translation. Nallasvami had published a translation of the First Tantra of Tirumantiram in Siddhanta Deepika, which was only finished in volume 13. See also Schomerus 1912: 101–179.

<sup>32</sup> He referred to Taittirīya Samhita (Skt. taittirīya saṃhitā) vi.2.3. (see, for instance, the translation in Keith 1914: 504). Nallasvami directly quoted a longer passage where he gave both the original Sanskrit text and an English translation. As this is unique for him, one might assume he got the passage and translation from a pandit and not from the literature.

<sup>33</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 281.

<sup>34</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 281–282; the translation is from Max Müller, see Müller 1879: 149–151 (3.1–12, 4.1) (There are slight but unimportant modifications in Nallasvami's quotation).

<sup>35</sup> Nallasvami probably referred to Yajurveda 1.8.6 and Svetasvatara Upanishad 3.2. (see also Nallasvami Pillai 1911l: 245). Max Müller translated: "For there is one Rudra only, they do not allow a second" (Müller 1884: 244).

<sup>36</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 283.

Nallasvami's main interest lay in the peculiar concept of God as a person in this Upanishad. He illustrated the notion of a personal God in the Svetasvatara Upanishad by long quotations,<sup>37</sup> and he emphasized that Max Müller compared the concept of a personal God in the Svetasvatara Upanishad to the Christian counterpart.<sup>38</sup> Although God is called "without qualities" (Skt. nirguṇa) in the Svetasvatara Upanishad, Nallasvami insisted that it does not mean he is impersonal, as taught by Sankara. He interpreted "without qualities" from the background of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, where this does not mean that God is without any quality but only without the three qualities of matter (Skt. sattva, raja, tamas).<sup>39</sup>

Here, Nallasvami did not follow Müller's monistic interpretation of the Svetasvatara Upanishad,<sup>40</sup> but referred to other leading contemporary indologists, who were of the opinion that there existed an old eclecticism in the Indian tradition. He quoted Arthur Anthony MacDonell (1841–1930):

Of the eclectic movement combining Śāṅkhya, Yōga and Vēdānta doctrines, the oldest representative is the Śvētāśvatara Upanishat, more famous is the Bhagavat Gītā.<sup>41</sup>

He also referred to Monier-Williams and Richard Garbe (1857–1927) as having the same opinion.<sup>42</sup> Nallasvami, thus, found a way to legitimize his argument with contemporary indological research. In a similar way, Neo-Hinduism backed up its claim of Advaita Vedanta as the central philosophy of Hinduism.<sup>43</sup>

Nallasvami continued his journey through the Sanskrit tradition and discussed the Puranas as the "earliest interpreters of the Vēda and the Upanishats"<sup>44</sup>. He claimed that not only the oldest Purana (i. e. the Vāyu-Purāṇa) but also the largest number of all Puranas was Saivite. He treated

<sup>37</sup> The translation is from Max Müller; see Müller 1884: 263–265. The quotations were taken from Svetasvatara Upanishad in the following order: 6.11, 6.19, 6.7 (here, Nallasvami gives a paraphrase of the verse and does not quote Müller), 6.14.

<sup>38</sup> The general reference probably refers to the following statement of Max Müller: "... the nearest approach to our own ideas of a personal God" (Müller 1884: xxxvi).

<sup>39</sup> See also Schomerus 1912: 59–60. The quote "without qualities" is from Svetasvatara Upanishad 6.11.

<sup>40</sup> See Müller 1884: xxxvi–xlii.

<sup>41</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 283 note. With slight variations in spelling and the omission of one word, the quote is taken from Macdonell 1900: 282.

<sup>42</sup> See also Nallasvami Pillai 1911h: 118, where Nallasvami rightly pointed out that the idea of an eclectic school came first from Monier-Williams. However, he did not give specific references from Garbe or Monier-Williams, though they could have easily been found – see, for example, Monier-Williams 1875: 134–154 (where he explicitly coins the phrase "eclectic school"); Garbe 1897: 23–24 (Garbe speaks of an "eclectic movement").

<sup>43</sup> See King 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 287.

the Mahabharata in similar fashion. He saw Saivism as the “only worship universal” and as the worship of the “superior castes” in the time of the Mahabharata.<sup>45</sup> The Mahabharata showed Rudra or Siva in “the beneficent and apparently terrible forms, as the Creator, Protector, and Destroyer”<sup>46</sup>, and Nallasvami illustrated this by quoting a longer passage from the Mahabharata.<sup>47</sup> Nallasvami viewed this threefold aspect of Siva, as creator, protector and destroyer, also as a basic principle of Saiva Siddhanta. He referred to Sivagnana Botham (Tam. *civañña pōtam*, Skt. *śivajñāna bodha*),<sup>48</sup> and he cited portions from Srikantha’s commentary of the Vedanta Sūtras, where the trembling of the universe is seen as part of God’s (Skt. *parameśvara*) command over it. As will be seen later, the commentary of the less known Srikantha (Skt. *śrīkaṇṭha*) became one of Nallasvami’s traditional authorities. As this ambivalence of Siva was constantly criticized by Western researchers and Christian missionaries,<sup>49</sup> Nallasvami also took some pains to prove that the Christian tradition also knew a “fierce” and “terrible” picture of God, and curiously quoted from an English Sunday School book that taught the “consuming fire and the love that passeth knowledge are two different sides of the same God”<sup>50</sup>.

It is noteworthy that Nallasvami, when referring to the Mahabharata, did not enter into any deeper discussion of the Bhagavadgita. Nevertheless, he stated, throughout the text, that the Bhagavadgita “epitomizes the philosophy of the Śvētāśvatara Upaniṣat”<sup>51</sup>; but its content is nowhere discussed in detail. As the Bhagavadgita had become a central text for Neo-Hinduism in the late 19th century,<sup>52</sup> it was apparently of strategic importance for Nallasvami to claim the text for the Saiva tradition. On the other hand, this was not without difficulties, not only because of its Vaishnava context, but even more because the “Tamil reader knows

<sup>45</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 288.

<sup>46</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 288.

<sup>47</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 288. The passage is the last portion of section 160 of the Anusasana Parva (vv. 7458–7501). Apparently, he used John Muir’s translation, which can be found in Muir 1873: 197–205 (including the original Sanskrit text). Muir provided the whole section 160 without any special comment towards Siva, which makes one ask why Nallasvami chose his passage. Perhaps this passage was reprinted in another book relating specifically to Siva, but it was not possible to trace a probable source.

<sup>48</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 289; Nallasvami Pillai 1984: 6 (to Sivagnana Botham 1).

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Dubois 1906: 627–628.

<sup>50</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 289–290. The passage is, with slight alterations, taken from M. 1879: 79. Nallasvami quoted two different passages from this book (M. 1879: 46–47, 78–79).

<sup>51</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 291.

<sup>52</sup> See Bergunder 2006.



nothing about it [the Bhagavadgita]”,<sup>53</sup> as he pointed out in the introduction to his Sivagnana Botham translation from 1895. It seems that, at one point, Nallasvami had tried to engage deeper in a discussion on the content of the Bhagavadgita. In his translation of Tiruvaruṭṭayan (Tam. tiruvaruṭṭayan) from 1896, which had already been partially published in the Neo-Hindu journal *Brahmavadin*, he annotated his English translation with cross-references to the Bhagavadgita to show “the great resemblance ... in language and thought between the two”<sup>54</sup>. However, in his later texts, he never came back to a detailed analysis of the Bhagavadgita. He consigned it, with his overall claim on the text, as belonging to the old “eclectic school of Hindu Philosophy”<sup>55</sup>.

Next to the Mahabharata, Nallasvami discussed the Vaishnava Ramayana and tried to show that the “worship of Śiva and Śiva-Liṅga was Universal [at that time] as shown by the establishment of the temple at Rāmeśvaram”, where the Stalapurana said that Rama and Sita worshipped the Linga upon successfully returning from Lanka.<sup>56</sup>

His passage through the classical Sanskrit tradition culminated in a re-reading of the Vedānta Sūtras and a strong rejection of Sankara’s commentary on them. Following a typical structure of argumentation, he first referred to the German indologist George Thibaut (1848–1914), who had translated Sankara’s and Ramanuja’s commentaries of the Vedānta Sūtras for the “Sacred Books of the East”.<sup>57</sup> Thibaut expressed the opinion that the Vedānta Sūtras did not teach a distinction between brahman and God (Skt. īśvara), nor the unreality of the world, as Sankara proposed.<sup>58</sup> Nallasvami pointed out that, lately, even Max Müller had conceded to this interpretation.<sup>59</sup> Regarding the Sanskrit tradition, Nallasvami claimed that Sankara’s commentary was not the oldest one, but the much lesser known commentary of Srikantha, which provided a theistic and Saivite interpretation of the Vedānta Sūtras. So, Nallasvami made his case that both contemporary indological research and the old Sanskrit tradition supported his views. For Nallasvami, Srikantha’s commentary was “the accepted authority by the Southern Śaiva School”<sup>60</sup> and, being the oldest and the most appropriate interpretation of the Vedānta Sūtras, it provided the firm link between the Vedānta tradition and Saivism.

<sup>53</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1984: vii. For the popularization of the Bhagavadgita in the 19th and early 20th century see also Bergunder 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1896: iii.

<sup>55</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 291.

<sup>56</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 291–292.

<sup>57</sup> See Thibaut 1890/1896; Thibaut 1904.

<sup>58</sup> Thibaut 1890/1896: I. c. The passage is quoted in Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 292.

<sup>59</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 293.

<sup>60</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 292.

After establishing this historical argument, Nallasvami turned to the exposition of the central doctrines of Saiva Siddhanta. His strong reliance on Srikantha, as the historical link between the Sanskrit tradition and Tamil Saiva Siddhanta, made it necessary to present the central teachings of Saiva Siddhanta as being nearly identical with Srikantha's system, which is called Sivadvaita (Skt. śivādvaita). He pointed affirmatively to Srikantha's equation of the supreme brahman with Siva, and his illustration of the relationship between God and the soul with that of soul and body. He downplayed a "slight difference" in the notion of advaita, as it was apparently difficult to reconcile Srikantha's conception of identity, which sees the soul as a transformation (Skt. parināma) of Siva, with the elaborate and central argument in Saiva Siddhanta about the eternal and separate existence of God, soul, and matter.<sup>61</sup> Nallasvami marked a significant difference at this point, so it is somewhat surprising that he went on to repeatedly claim that the concepts of advaita of Srikantha and of Saiva Siddhanta are more or less the same.<sup>62</sup>

Nallasvami's exposition of Saiva Siddhanta teachings tried to avoid being too technical. He also paid little attention to ritualistic aspects and declared that Saiva Siddhanta did not support external ritualism, though it was based on the ritual-oriented Agamas (Skt. āgama, Tam. ākamam). The Saivite who entered the temple offers "his self as sacrifice; and the self-sacrifice thus becomes the centre of Hindu and Śaivite Philosophy, on which the whole process of salvation depends"<sup>63</sup>. This he called "Arpaṇa [offering] or Śivārpaṇa", and he saw a parallel to it in the Bhagavadgita.<sup>64</sup> His main strategy of argument was to show that the real understanding of advaita is not that of Sankara, but is to be found in the Sivadvaita of Srikantha and Saiva Siddhanta. He was mainly concentrating on topics that were also central to Neo-Hinduism and Theosophy, to

<sup>61</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 266–267. See also Suryanarayana Sastri 1930: 24–25. For the notion of the soul and its relation to God in Tamil Saiva Siddhanta, see Schomerus 1912: 180–208.

<sup>62</sup> The difference between Saiva Siddhanta and Sivadvaita is not easy to establish, but they are far reaching, and include fundamental issues: 1. In Sivadvaita, the non-intelligent world is the result of the transformation of Lord Siva and of the same kind as the soul; 2. Srikantha does not anywhere mention anavamala, the basic principle of matter encasing the soul in Saiva Siddhanta; 3. For Srikantha, past karma could not cease to exist in the present life of a person (Skt. jīvanmukti) even after he has attained salvation; 4. Srikantha is legitimizing his teachings with reference to revelation alone (Skt. śruti) and does not hold reasoning in high esteem. (See Suryanarayana Sastri 1930: 22–27.)

<sup>63</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 296.

<sup>64</sup> The reference is to the Bhagavadgita 18,57, see Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 296. However, the Sanskrit original of the Bhagavadgita does not know arpaṇa and the reference remains unclear in its meaning. Perhaps Nallasvami referred to a certain interpretation of the verse, which he read somewhere, but I have not yet been able to trace a possible source.

show how Saiva Siddhanta could treat and explain them better. Parallel to this, he repeatedly developed the argument that the concept of God and the human being in Saiva Siddhanta was, in many ways, similar to that of Christianity, as it was different to Advaita Vedanta.

Nallasvami made clear that Siva in Saiva Siddhanta is identical with the supreme brahman of Vedanta. Siva is without a specific gender and not part of any trimurti. Siva cannot “be born as a man through the womb of the women” and has, therefore, no avataras (Skt. *avatāra*); still, that did not prevent Siva from “appearing as Guru and Saviour in the form of a man, out of His Great Love and feeling for the sin and sorrow of mankind”.<sup>65</sup> In this context, he explicitly mentioned the Theosophist Subba Row in order to give him credit for having made clear that God cannot have avataras.<sup>66</sup>

Nallasvami reiterated that God is nirguna and that nirguna does not mean “impersonal”<sup>67</sup>. God is both nirguna and personal, in the same way as he “neither has form nor is formless”.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, Nallasvami also explicitly rejected the notion that saguna (Skt. *saguṇa*) means “personal”, as it is commonly interpreted in Advaita Vedanta. Hence, God is both immanent and transcendent, and Nallasvami brought this into a threefold terminology that characterized God as “being”, “light” and “love”:

As Pure Being, the absolute, God is unknowable; and as Light and Love He links himself to Man; and it is possible to Man to approach Him through Love.<sup>69</sup>

This threefold terminology was explained through the concepts of *saccidananda* (Skt. *saccidānanda*) and *somaskanda* (Skt. *somāskanda*). The use of the term *saccidananda* is especially noteworthy. In Tamil Saiva Siddhanta the threefold compound (Skt. *sat-cit-ānanda*), as a technical term, was not unknown, but apparently not often used, although its respective components played a central role in describing Siva’s supreme status, especially as *sat* and *cit*.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, *saccidananda* was firmly established in Vedanta philosophy and, accordingly, Srikantha’s commentary on the Vedanta Sutras began with a reference to Siva as *saccidananda* and mentioned it on several other occasions. However, even in Srikantha’s commentary, *saccidananda* remains a formula that is

<sup>65</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 299.

<sup>66</sup> Apparently, he referred to Subba Row 1994: 57–68. In this passage, Subba Row interpreted the Vaishnava belief in avataras from a Theosophical perspective that certainly has no room for a personal God in the sense that Nallasvami propagated.

<sup>67</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 297.

<sup>68</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 298.

<sup>69</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 301.

<sup>70</sup> See Schomerus 1912: 49–62; Murtti 1998: 103. It is noteworthy that Schomerus does not give any reference from the Tamil sources as to where the term *saccidananda* occurs.

neither explained nor explicitly introduced as a central concept.<sup>71</sup> This makes it most likely that Nallasvami's application of the term was a reaction to its prominent and widespread use by contemporary Neo-Hindu thinkers, like Vivekananda and his Tamil Brahman disciples.<sup>72</sup> Nallasvami claimed *saccidananda* for Saiva Siddhanta and provided it with a theistic interpretation. It is obvious that Nallasvami gave the term a meaning which was completely different from Advaita Vedanta and its reception in Neo-Hinduism, especially when he equated it with *somaskanda*. *Somaskanda* (Skt. *sa-umā-skanda*) is a classical image of Siva together with his wife Uma – which Nallasvami pointed out originally means light –, and his son Skanda (Tam. *murukan*). *Somaskanda* was widely used as the main processional deity in Tamil Saiva temples. As its prominence goes back to medieval times, it was often subject to reinterpretation,<sup>73</sup> but its equation with *saccidananda* is rather far-fetched. However, as both *saccidananda* and *somaskanda* are three-part conceptions of the supreme god, occasionally, this equation already occurred in the Tamil Saiva tradition, for instance through the 17th-century prolific Tamil poet Kumarakuruparar.<sup>74</sup>

In any case, the threefold terminology “being”, “light” and “love” is probably Nallasvami's own, and it might have been inspired by seeking an expression that was compatible to the Christian understanding of God. He pointed out that the liberal Anglican theologian Brooke Foss Westcott (1825–1901) understood the Christian trinity as “Spirit, Light, and Love”<sup>75</sup> in the same way.

Light and Love were, for Nallasvami, the immanent aspects of God, his central Sakti, the “Mother of the Universe”<sup>76</sup>, but categorically different from *Māyā*. Nallasvami emphasized the peculiar concept of *Maya* (Skt. *māyā*, Tam. *māyai*) in Saiva Siddhanta, which he equated with the

<sup>71</sup> In the version of the commentary that was published by Nallasvami in *Siddhanta Deepika*, it is detectable in only four places and, on each occasion, as an unexplained formula (see Sastry 1897–1906: 1:193, 1:220, 2:4, 2:193; see also Chaudhury 2004: 32).

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Vivekananda 1959: I.365; II.194, III.37, 336, 453; IV.334; V.385, 432–433; VIII.11–12. For a Tamil Brahman disciple of Vivekananda see, for example, Aiyar 1946: 297–298.

<sup>73</sup> See Younger 1995: 76 note 25; Smith 1996: 203–206; Ghose 1996: 11–54; Ekambaranathan 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Ghose 1996: 125. For Kumarakurupara see Zvebil 1975: 229–230.

<sup>75</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 301, see also Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 355. Perhaps Nallasvami collected the phrase from Westcott's correspondence with Lady Welby-Gregory (1837–1912) on the Gospel of John and Christian mysticism (see Westcott 1903: II.72, 78). The exact phrase in the other writings of Westcott could not be traced, though similar expression can be found in his exegetical works on John's Gospel.

<sup>76</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 302.

Western notion of “matter” as the “‘object’ of Western philosophy”,<sup>77</sup> and which he described in positive terms, probably to make a clear distinction from its usage in Neo-Hindu circles. To make his point, Nallasvami referred to Sivagnana Siddhiyar (Tam. *civaññacittiyār*) and quoted long passages from it.<sup>78</sup> For the reader unfamiliar with Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, his description at this point might sound technical, but this was probably unintentional, since much of the complicated philosophical context in which the Maya concept is embedded in Saiva Siddhanta is left out. Nallasvami concentrated fully on a twofold argument. Firstly, Maya has to be seen positively. Maya and its products have to be understood in the context of cosmological evolution, through the interplay of thirty-six elements (Skt. *tattvas*), and Maya also comprises higher spiritual spheres (Skt. *śuddha māyā*).<sup>79</sup> Maya is different from God and soul, but plays a positive role in the way to liberation and is not the cause of the soul’s blindness. It is external to the soul, and acts as a perceptive tool for the soul that enables it to wish, to know and to act,<sup>80</sup> and thus helps it search for the way to liberation. However, liberation itself can only be provided by God directly. This specific aspect of Maya was central for Nallasvami:

According to the Pūrvapakshin [opponent], Māyā is the cloud that hides the light of the Sun. But the Siddhāntin answers ... Māyā acts as the lamp-light ... in darkness. But when the sun [i. e. God] rises, all darkness and night vanish and there is no need of any lamp, however powerful ...<sup>81</sup>

Secondly, it is not the external world, or Maya, which hinders the soul in realizing its spiritual destiny, but another principle, which is peculiar to Saiva Siddhanta, and which is called Āṇava Mala. Āṇava Mala forms a close bond with the soul and instigates ignorance (Skt. *avidya*):

Understand well, that Māyā causes Ichcha [wish], Jñāna [knowledge] and Kriyā [action] to arise in the Jīvas [souls], but Āṇava causes the same to disappear.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 303.

<sup>78</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 303–305. The argument is based mainly on Sivagnana Siddhiyar II, 80–85. The English quotes are from Nallasvami’s own translation (Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:237). His definition of Maya came from Sivagnana Siddhiyar II, 53 (Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:203, see also Schomerus 1981: 153–154, and Schomerus 1912: 131).

<sup>79</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 304.

<sup>80</sup> See Sivagnana Siddhiyar II, 81, see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:237; Schomerus 1981: I.184–185.

<sup>81</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 304–305. The quotation paraphrases Sivagnana Siddhiyar II, 82–83, see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:237; Schomerus 1981: 185.

<sup>82</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 304. This is an English translation from Sivagnana Siddhiyar II, 81, see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:237; Schomerus 1981: 184–185. Note that the original Tamil text has “uyir” for “Jīva”. Nallasvami’s use of “Jīva”, which is not a core technical term in Saiva Siddhanta, hints at his intention to make a broader appeal.

Nallasvami focused on the principal difference between Maya and Āṇava Mala, but he did not discuss the aspect in Saiva Siddhanta where Maya, together with Āṇava Mala, belong to the same third material principle or substance that exists besides God (Skt. Śiva / pati) and the soul (Skt. paśu). This third principle is called Mala or Pāśa in Sanskrit, and consists of three different “impurities” (Āṇava Mala, Maya[-mala]m, and Karma[-mala] – the latter was not discussed by Nallasvami), which all impede the soul from getting right knowledge. However, Nallasvami’s concern was to work out that Āṇava Mala, and not Maya, is the crucial and main impurity (Tam. mūla-malam) that encases the soul during its periodical existence in the world of Maya (Skt. sakala-avasthā), as well as during world-sleep (Skt. kevala-avasthā), until its final liberation. Āṇava Mala is “night and darkness”; it is the “cloud or cataract in one’s eye”.<sup>83</sup>

Āṇava Mala would vanish only when the “Light of Truth, ... entering body and soul, has melted all faults and driven away the false darkness”, and when “the soul is fully enveloped in that Supreme Splendour”.<sup>84</sup> This is “the soul’s Śuddha or Nirvāṇa condition”.<sup>85</sup> In this state, the soul is united with God, and Nallasvami quoted from the Tiruvācakam, a famous classical collection of Tamil Bhakti-songs, to illustrate the intense and emotional unity between the soul and Siva in the state of liberation.<sup>86</sup> However, even in this unity, the soul always remains categorically different from God:

The soul is not a reflection nor a particle nor a spark of the Partless and Changeless Brahman, nor one with Him. God is other than the soul.<sup>87</sup>

Nallasvami made a very strong point against Advaita Vedanta when he further explained that “all religion and morality are sure to die, when we regard the soul the same as God”<sup>88</sup>. On this matter, he lined up with the Western Christian critique of Indian “Pantheism”, when he approvingly quoted a long passage from a book of the well-known English Unitarian minister, Richard Acland Armstrong (1843–1906). This quote, for instance, contained the following statement of Armstrong: “Pantheism ... becomes deadly to vigorous religion and morality when it makes the

<sup>83</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 305.

<sup>84</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 305.

<sup>85</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 305.

<sup>86</sup> Nallasvami quoted the 7th hymn of the “kōyiriruppatikam” in an English translation from *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 51, by an anonymous contributor (“P. A.”), who is probably a Tamil (see also Nallasvami Pillai 1911g: 107; Nallasvami Pillai 1911l:251–252). Nallasvami did not use the translation of Pope, though he was familiar with it and quoted from it on other occasions (see Pope 1900: 222–223).

<sup>87</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 306.

<sup>88</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 306.

man's soul, the man's self, a portion of God"<sup>89</sup>. Nallasvami concluded that, in the end, it is Saiva Siddhanta with its "three planes of existence, or three centres, the plane of matter, the plane of souls and the plane of God"<sup>90</sup> which best takes up these conceptual challenges.

Nallasvami backed up his argument again with Vedanta Sutras, which also postulate "the difference between the Human Soul and the Supreme Soul"<sup>91</sup>, and he discussed their treatment of the so called Mahavakya (Skt. mahāvākya) verses from the Upanishads (like, for instance, "tat tvam asi" / "thou art that"), the crucial scriptural foundation for Advaita Vedanta's teaching that brahman and atman (Skt. ātman) are identical. He argued that the Mahavakyas were not discussed in the first chapter of the Vedanta Sutras with regard to the theoretical foundation of categories, but in the third chapter in relation to the means of salvation. This is why they did not relate to a natural identity, but dealt with a union of God and soul based on the "consciousness of duality"<sup>92</sup> between the two. This argument culminated in the statement that the union of God / Siva and the soul is also called "advaita" in Saiva Siddhanta, and that the proper name for Saiva Siddhanta would be Saiva Advaita Siddhanta. Saiva Advaita Siddhanta was, of course, phrased in opposition to Advaita Vedanta, and "Saiva Advaita" is probably inspired by "Sivadvaita" (Skt. śiva-advaita), the designation for Srikantha's system.<sup>93</sup>

To explain this specific notion of advaita, Nallasvami referred to the peculiar concept of the soul in Saiva Siddhanta, which stands between matter (Skt. asat / non-being) and God (Skt. sat / absolute being) and belongs to neither of the two. However, the soul can be called "sat-asat", as both matter and God strive to conform the soul to their own image, and because it is a characteristic of the soul that it is unable to live for itself but must always attach itself to something or other. Only in the state of liberation does the soul become "sat" in union with God<sup>94</sup>:

This nature of the soul consists in its becoming one with whatever it is united to, losing its own individuality, and its not being able to exist independently, except in union with one or the other. ... The soul identifies itself absolutely with the body or God ...<sup>95</sup>

Again, Nallasvami sought to reconcile this specific Saiva Siddhanta idea of the soul with Christian teachings. He cited Henry Drummond (1851–

<sup>89</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 306 note. The quote is from Armstrong 1896: 60.

<sup>90</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 307.

<sup>91</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 306.

<sup>92</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 307.

<sup>93</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 305–306.

<sup>94</sup> See also Nallasvami Pillai 1911e: 67, and Schomerus 1912: 198–208.

<sup>95</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 308.

1897), the Scottish evangelical scientist and theologian, who tried to settle the growing science-religion divide in the 19th century.<sup>96</sup> In a famous address on Christian sanctification, Drummond interpreted a Pauline verse from the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:18) in the general sense that the person is a mirror of the divine who, when reflecting the character of Christ, will become like Christ.<sup>97</sup> In this idea of the person as a mirror, Nallasvami saw a congenial expression of the Saiva Siddhanta notion of the soul. Nallasvami referred to this parallel in Drummond's writings also on other occasions,<sup>98</sup> calling it a "formula of sanctification" that he also identified in mirror metaphors in the Svetasvatara Upanishad and in Saiva Siddhanta writings.<sup>99</sup>

This peculiar notion of the soul is the key to the understanding of advaita in Saiva Siddhanta, which Nallasvami wanted to see as clearly distinct from Advaita Vedanta. He also made it clear that Saiva Siddhanta had nothing to do with the Visishtadvaita (Skt. *viśiṣṭādvaita*) Vedanta of Ramanuja (11-12th century), which was considered by contemporary Western Orientalists as the main theistic critique of Advaita Vedanta in the Indian tradition. Visishtadvaita Vedanta was and still is a living tradition in the Tamil context, where it is called Srivaishnava (Skt. *śrīvaiṣṇava*), and Nallasvami had apparently close contacts to some of its followers.<sup>100</sup> He also did not want Saiva Siddhanta to be explained in the categories of Madhva's Dvaita Vedanta (12-13th century).<sup>101</sup> However, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita Vedanta are clearly seen to have much more in common with Saiva Siddhanta than Advaita Vedanta. At one instance, Nallasvami explicitly emphasized that "there is much greater doctrinal harmony between Śaivism and Vaishṇavism of Śrī Rāmānuja's school than between these and Vēdāntism of Śaṅkara's School".<sup>102</sup> He also

<sup>96</sup> See Bergunder 2005.

<sup>97</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 308, see Drummond 1891: 17–29.

<sup>98</sup> See, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911h: 143–144; Nallasvami Pillai 1911j: 215–216; Nallasvami Pillai 1911l: 257–258.

<sup>99</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 309. He quoted Svetasvatara Upanishad II.14–15 and I.10 in Max Müller's translation (see Müller 1884: 242–243, 236), which is nevertheless altered in a way that shows some familiarity with the original Sanskrit text (for instance, instead of "all natures" he wrote "all tattvas") and also interpreted in Saiva Siddhanta terminology (for instance, instead of "freed from all fetters" he wrote "freed from all *pāśa*"). For Saiva Siddhanta, he cited Sivagnana Botham VIII, 3 in his own translation (Nallasvami Pillai 1984: 84).

<sup>100</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 359.

<sup>101</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 358–359.

<sup>102</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 358.



acknowledged the apparent similarities between Dvaita and Saiva Siddhanta when he reported his discussion with a Madhva follower.<sup>103</sup>

However, for Nallasvami, Saiva Siddhanta represented a fundamentally different way of thinking than the great Vedanta traditions, be it Advaita, Visishtadvaita, or Dvaita.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, he expressly called himself an “Advaiti” as “all Śaiva Siddhāntis call themselves strict Advaitis”.<sup>105</sup> This was, of course, directed against the claim of Neo-Hindus and Western Orientalists that Advaita Vedanta and its concept of advaita comprise the central philosophy of Hinduism. Nallasvami’s Saiva Siddhanta was a direct counterclaim against Neo-Hinduism.

Nallasvami argued, with reference to the second Sutra of Sivagnana Botham, that the true meaning of advaita is “anyō nāsti” or “ananya”, i. e. “inseparable” but not unity or monism.<sup>106</sup> Advaita marks a “relation” which could be defined best by the phrase “neither one nor two”<sup>107</sup>:

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<sup>103</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 358–359. He referred to his exchange with P. Srinivasa Rao, Judge at the Civil Court in Madras.

<sup>104</sup> See also Nallasvami Pillai 1984: 15–33; Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 244–272.

<sup>105</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 244.

<sup>106</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310. The Tamil transliteration for Sanskrit ‘anyō nāsti’ is ‘anniyānti’. As far as I can see, the Sanskrit word ‘ananya’ (usually ‘ananniyam’ in Tamil transliteration) is not used in Sivagnana Botham, but could, for instance, be found prominently in Sivagnana Siddhiyar XL.11 (see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 5:110; Schomerus 1981: 373–374).

<sup>107</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310. The first time Nallasvami quoted this phrase was in his comments on Sivagnana Botham II: “In Sivagnana Siddhi, Adwaitham is defined as *onṛākāmal, iraṇṭākāmal, onṛumiraṇṭumiraṇṭākāmal* (neither one, nor two, nor neither).” (Nallasvami Pillai 1984: 18). Strangely, Nallasvami referred to the wrong source, as these lines are not from Sivagnana Siddhiyar. As Nallasvami gave also the original Tamil text, I could trace the quote to another Tamil work of Arunanti (Tam. *aruṇanti*), the author of Sivagnana Siddhiyar, called *Irupa Irupatu* (Tam. *irupā irupatu*) in chapter 20. Moreover, in his other writings, up until 1911, he never gave the correct source when quoting these lines (see, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 62; Nallasvami Pillai 1911h: 128), which hints that he learned this phrase through one of his Tamil pundits, without obtaining a clear reference. Whereas Nallasvami showed intimate knowledge of Sivagnana Siddhiyar, I could not trace any other quote from *Irupa Irupatu* in his writings up to 1911 (see also Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 294, where *Arunanti* is only given credit for Sivagnana Siddhiyar, though in his short introduction to Sivagnana Siddhiyar from 1897 he acknowledged *Arunanti* as author of *Irupa Irupatu*, see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 1:2). This reinforces the impression that Nallasvami’s exposition of Saiva Siddhanta in our text is mainly dependent on Sivagnana Botham and, especially, on Sivagnana Siddhiyar. However, the picture is complicated. In 1912/1913, Nallasvami published an English translation of *Irupa Irupatu* where he also gave due credit to the “famous Phrase” (Nallasvami Pillai 1912/1913: 450), but it seems that this intensive study of *Irupa Irupatu* was a latecomer. For *Irupa Irupatu*, see also Schomerus 1916.

Advaita, literally meaning not two, simply denies the separability or duality of God and soul and matter, but does not postulate Oneness ...<sup>108</sup>

Nallasvami backed this view on advaita with different authorities. To show its correspondence with the teachings of the Vedanta Sutras, he referred again to Srikantha's commentary,<sup>109</sup> and to Manilal Dvivedi (1858–1898) who had also stated that, in the Vedanta Sutras, advaita does not mean “one” (Skt. eka, abhinna) but “inseparable” (Skt. ananya).<sup>110</sup> Dvivedi was one of the leading contemporary proponents of Advaita Vedanta which he tried to reconcile with western materialism and Theosophical ideas to propose it as a scientific religion.<sup>111</sup> The reference to Dvivedi shows, once again, how Nallasvami tried to make his point through engaging the Neo-Hindu side.

Nallasvami then took on contemporary Western philosophy, quoting Alexander Bain (1818–1903), a Scottish Utilitarian and leading proponent of a scientific approach to psychology.<sup>112</sup> He alluded to Bain's discussion on the difficulties of thinking about the paradoxical and contradictory relationship between mind and body, resulting in Bain's statement “that there is not even an analogy to illustrate this unique union of mind and body”<sup>113</sup>. Nallasvami combined this argument of Bain with a look at the

<sup>108</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310.

<sup>109</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310 note. Nallasvami referred without further explanation to Srikantha's commentary of the Vedanta Sutras II.i.22 (Sastry 1897–1906: 2:217–218), where Srikantha tries to go beyond conventional expressions of duality / non-duality. However, it should be noted that, in the passage which immediately follows (II.i.23), Srikantha explains, among other things, how the soul and the universe are emanations from Brahman; this marks one of the main differences between Srikantha's Sivadvaita and Saiva Siddhanta.

<sup>110</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310 note. Obviously, Nallasvami referred to passages like Dvivedi 1889: 35, 40–41; literally, it is indeed a convincing reference. It also shows that, in the circles around Neo-Vedanta and Theosophy, complex conceptions of advaita were discussed, a fact which is often overlooked when one takes Vivekananda's rather simple exposition of advaita as representative (for Vivekananda's conception of advaita, see, for example, Hatcher 1999: 47–70). However, in the end, Dvivedi's conception of advaita was shaped by the fundamental principles of Advaita Vedanta, which was irreconcilable to Nallasvami's Saiva Siddhanta views on God, soul and matter. This could best be seen in Dvivedi's refutation of Visishtadvaita and Dvaita Vedanta (see Dvivedi 1889: 68, 102–104).

<sup>111</sup> See also Thaker 1983.

<sup>112</sup> See Young 1990: 101–133.

<sup>113</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310 note. In other articles, Nallasvami had discussed Bain's idea in more detail, which shows that his reception of Bain is more than mere namedropping. See, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 53–59, 61–62; Nallasvami Pillai 1911e: 64–65, where Nallasvami also gave the quotation in full: “There is an alliance with matter, with the object or extended world; but the thing allied, the mind proper, has itself no extension and cannot be joined in local union. Now, we have a difficulty in providing any form of language, any familiar analogy, suited to this unique conjunction; in

Sanskrit tradition, where the close linkage between mind and body had occasionally been used to illustrate the relationship between God, soul, and matter. He quoted from the Brhadaranyaka (Skt. *bṛhadāraṇyaka*) Upanishad, where God is called the “soul” (Skt. *ātman*) that dwells in a “body” (Skt. *śarīra*), i. e. the “Universe of nature and man”.<sup>114</sup> This led to another quote from the Aitareya Upanishad, which he understood in the sense that, within the Sanskrit tradition, the metaphor of body and soul could be further translated into the metaphor of consonants and vowels: “Its consonants form its body; its vowel, the soul.”<sup>115</sup> However, Nallasvami argued that it was only in the Tamil tradition that the great conceptual potential of these metaphors were realised and deeper reflected upon. The Tamil grammar uses for vowels the word for soul (*uyir*), and for consonants the word for body (*uṭal*, *mey*). According to Nallasvami, this peculiarity was taken up by the Tamil proponents of Saiva Siddhanta and it helped them to develop a clear and comprehensive idea of advaita:

The consonants cannot be brought into being unless the vowel supports it; and in union, the two are inseparable; and One is the word used in the oldest Tamil Grammar to denote the union of the two ... the vowel is not the consonant nor the consonant the vowel. God is one with the soul and the Universe, and yet without God, where is the Universe?<sup>116</sup>

It is at this point that Nallasvami explicitly brought in his Tamil context and the Tamil language as the basis of a superior philosophy. This is a key argument for him, which also figured centrally in some of his other

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comparison with all other unions, it is a *paradox*, or *contradiction*.” (Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 53, directly quoted with slight alterations, especially regarding punctuation and use of italics, from Bain 1879: 136).

<sup>114</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 310–311. He quoted Brhadaranyaka Upanishad III.7.3 and 22 in the translation of Max Müller (see Müller 1884: 133, 136), again with alterations that show familiarity with the Sanskrit original. It is noteworthy that Nallasvami, who frequently quoted these verses, on one occasion, explicitly discussed his differences from the translation of Max Müller (see Nallasvami Pillai 1911f: 95).

<sup>115</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 311 (Aitareya Upanishad II.2.4.1, using Max Müller’s translation, see Müller 1879: 22. However, one should note that the context does not seem to support Nallasvami’s interpretation.).

<sup>116</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 311. It is not entirely clear to me what Nallasvami means with the “oldest Tamil grammar”. This should be *Tolkāppiyam*, but I could not trace an apt verse there, though the commentaries of *Tolkāppiyam* interpret the designation of vowel and consonant as soul and body often philosophically (see Kiruttinamurti 1990: 75–77). The only Tamil grammarian that Nallasvami explicitly referred to seems to be Nannul, (Tam. *naṇṇūl*) with verse 204 (“*uṭalmēl uyirvantoruṇvatiyalpu*.” ‘It is a natural union when the vowel unites with the consonant as one.’” Nallasvami Pillai 1911n: 327, see also Nallasvami Pillai 1911l: 249 with a slightly different Tamil Sandhi and English translation). As Nallasvami’s English translation has a clear reference to the word “one”, probably this verse is meant by Nallasvami. For the meaning of Nannul 204 see Ilavarasu 1997: 117.

writings, where he included in detail various reflections on the letter ‘A’ in Tamil literature and especially in Saiva Siddhanta writings.<sup>117</sup> He made his point there in direct contrast to the Sanskrit tradition. The Bhagavadgita, for instance, he argued, might also have a verse such as: “Of letters, the letter A, I am”<sup>118</sup>, but “we look in vain even in Śankara’s commentary for the meaning we have tried to give it [in the framework of Tamil Saiva Siddhanta]”<sup>119</sup>. Based on these arguments elaborated elsewhere, he quoted again the second Sutra of Sivagnana Botham in our text in order to make his case in this direction: “You can indeed say God is One, without a Second, as when you say without the vowel ‘A’ no other letters exist.”<sup>120</sup> This, taken together, led him to the strong conclusion that the specific Tamil aspect of Saiva Siddhanta should be of universal importance in answering the pressing religious questions of the time:

This is a view of Advaitam or Monism, which is not ordinarily met with, which must appeal to the hearts and intelligence of the people of every nation and every religion and which I commend to your earnest consideration.<sup>121</sup>

With this principal appeal, Nallasvami ended his outline of the core teachings of Saiva Siddhanta, and added a very short excursus on the role of “practical religion” in Saiva Siddhanta. He introduced Saiva Siddhanta’s four stages (Skt. *mārga*) on the way to liberation, but interpreted them inclusively as well as progressively. In its inclusive aspect they became different paths to suit the different spiritual needs of different people:

When you want to approach God, you can approach Him as your Lord and Master [Skt. *dāsa-mārga* / servant’s way], you can approach Him as your Father [Skt. *putra-mārga* / child’s way], or as your Friend [Skt. *saha-mārga* / friend’s way] or as your Beloved [Skt. *san-mārga* / true way]. The last is no *mārga* at all but where the One-ness is reached fully and finally. There is return to birth, while one is in the first three paths. And these paths are so adjusted in an ascending

<sup>117</sup> Besides Sivagnana Botham II, he also explicitly mentioned the first verse of the Tirukkural (see Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 59), and first verse of Tiruvarutpayan (Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 62).

<sup>118</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 53. It refers to Bhagavadgita X,33; the peculiar wording and a comparison with the other contemporary translations makes it clear that he used the English translation by Annie Besant (see Besant 1984: 187). For the role of the Bhagavadgita in 19th-century India, see Bergunder 2006.

<sup>119</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911d: 59.

<sup>120</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 312. He did not render his own published translation (cf. Nallasvami Pillai 1984: 12), but gave more of a paraphrase, which interpreted the verse in a way that neatly fits into the required meaning. It seems that these verses were very important for Nallasvami, as he gave further different interpretative translations in other articles (see, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911k: 226; Nallasvami Pillai 1911l: 249).

<sup>121</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 312.

scale to suit the intellectual, moral and spiritual development of the aspirant. The lowest and the highest have equally a place in this scheme and are given room for their development and progress. No one path is put in opposition to the other.<sup>122</sup>

He proposed this fourfold classification of Saiva Siddhanta against the common Vedantic understanding of four paths, which was, also with an inclusive interpretation, forcefully propagated by contemporary Neo-Hindu circles, i. e. Karmamarga, Bhaktimarga, Yogamarga and Jnanamarga.<sup>123</sup> However, according to Nallasvami, these latter four paths, which marginalized Tamil Saivism as Bhaktimarga, had “no logical scheme at all but involve cross division”<sup>124</sup>. The aspects expressed (Karma, Bhakti and Jnana) “are altogether essential” and together part of every stage in the Saiva Siddhanta classification. Once again, Saiva Siddhanta is established as superior to Vedanta. It has a better classification of religious practice and can easily include the concerns of the four paths of Vedanta.

After his detailed discussions, Nallasvami closed his argument with the statement that Saivism, through its interpretation in Saiva Siddhanta, could truly claim to be a “universal religion” in its own right, but with a strong foundation in the Sanskrit tradition that fundamentally challenges the inclusive and representative claim of Advaita Vedanta on Hinduism:

Saiva Siddhanta, as representing the old Hinduism and with its chief scripture, the Śvetāśvatara Upanishat and the Gīta, claims to be an eclectic philosophy and an universal Religion; and the various points I have brought out above will show how it brings itself into agreement with every shade of opinion, Religion, and Philosophy.<sup>125</sup>

To further prove the case, he cited “a few opinions of European Students”<sup>126</sup> about Saiva Siddhanta, and documents their praise for it in longer quotations. It is noteworthy that all the three authors he explicitly refers to are Christian missionaries with a scholarly interest in Saiva Siddhanta, namely G. U. Pope, F. Goodwill and W. F. Goudie.

Curiously, he did not end here but added a small passage on the “ethical basis” of Saiva Siddhanta, but admitted this topic “is not usually discussed in text-books on Religion [in Saiva Siddhanta]”.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, he claimed that Saivism is “based on the Highest morality”<sup>128</sup>, and

<sup>122</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 312.

<sup>123</sup> For the notion of these four paths in Neo-Vedanta see, for instance, Vivekananda 1959: 1:108, 5:414, and, in slightly different terminology, Aiyar 1946: 105–106.

<sup>124</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 312.

<sup>125</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 313.

<sup>126</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 313.

<sup>127</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 314.

<sup>128</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 314.

its most important ethical foundation is the *Tirukkural*, though he also mentioned the “ahimsa doctrine” as the “chief pillar” on Saiva Siddhanta without explaining this further.<sup>129</sup>

*Nallasvami and the discourse on universal religion in colonial India*

This investigation into Nallasvami’s thought shows that it is hardly adequate to call him and his ideas “indecisive” or “moderate”. He claimed that Saiva Siddhanta was the true heir of the Sanskrit tradition and a universal religion of its own, like Christianity and Islam. Making “universal religion” the core concept, Nallasvami related to one of the major themes of the colonial discourse in India. This must be seen in the context of the cultural debates and transformation processes in 19th-century Europe and North America, which led to, as it is sometimes called, the “invention of World Religions”.<sup>130</sup> However, it seems more appropriate to understand this “invention of World Religions” as a global discourse, because “creating, redefining, and standardizing religion has long been a political strategy linked to the making of national identities and the exercise of colonial power”<sup>131</sup>. As religion was part of the colonial discourse, the colonized had no choice but to relate to it. At the same time, the appropriation and application of the concept, in colonial non-Western contexts, was in itself also a transformation process that affected the discourse on religion as a whole, i. e. also in Europe and North America. In this way, the colonized were also part of the “invention” process, and religion should not simply be seen as a Western construction as is often done in scholarly discussion.<sup>132</sup>

In this line of argument, one can locate Nallasvami’s application of the concept of “universal religion” to Saiva Siddhanta. Right from its beginning, *Siddhanta Deepika* gave ample space to the discussion on “religion” from a general theoretical perspective and, in numerous articles and editorial comments, the journal reflected contemporary scholarly debates. Two examples from the first volume (1897–1898) might illustrate this. The first volume saw the start of a longer series of articles by the Italian Jesuit Giorgio Bartoli, on “Evidences of Natural Religion”, which gave a broad overview of contemporary theories on the history of religion, though with

<sup>129</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 315.

<sup>130</sup> See Masuzawa 2005.

<sup>131</sup> Peterson and Walhof 2002: 1.

<sup>132</sup> See, for instance, McCutcheon 1997; Dubuisson 2003.

a Christian theological interpretation.<sup>133</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* also reprinted the summary of a lecture by Robert Needham Cust (1821–1909), a former high ranking colonial official and then private Orientalist scholar with a passion for Christian mission, on “modern religious conceptions”.<sup>134</sup> This painted the picture of a plurality of religions (Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrism, Buddhism, Confucianism) and discussed their recent transformation processes, and the rise of numerous reform movements, as a reaction to the challenge by Christianity and Christian mission. In general, one can say that the articles in *Siddhanta Deepika* are well informed, not only about the scholarly debates on religion, but also about the ways in which Christianity, Theosophy, and Neo-Hinduism were conceptualizing themselves as universal religions.

Nallasvami used the concept of “universal religion” against the background of his intimate knowledge of the contemporary Western debates on religion, and in awareness of its crucial role in the colonial discourse. He carefully discussed the different aspects of universal religion to find a proper space for the universal claim of Saiva Siddhanta within this discourse. Liberal Christian theologians and historians of religion in the West often focused on the divide between universal and missionary religions, on the one hand, and local or ethnic religions on the other hand. Universal religions, in this sense, were Christianity, Islam and Buddhism; however, in a second evaluation, Christianity was often considered to be the only religion that was truly universal in all aspects.<sup>135</sup> This position was explicitly refuted by Nallasvami in a longer statement in *Siddhanta Deepika* against the Haskell Lectures from 1898–1899 given by the well-known liberal Scottish theologian Andrew Martin Fairbairn (1838–1919), who was an advocate of this position.<sup>136</sup> Nallasvami insisted on another definition of universal religion:

We demur to the definition of Universal Religion given by the Haskell Lecturer [Fairbairn]; and here is what we conceive to be the Universal religion: ... “That religion is the true which does not conflict with this religion and that, and yet reconciles all and stands supreme in the conscience of man.” Whose supreme Ideal is such that, once seen, every Religionist can exclaim, “what is there here of

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<sup>133</sup> See Bartoli 1897–1899. Bartoli was, at the time, a Jesuit missionary teaching at a college in Mangalore. Later, in 1909, after repeated accusations of being a modernist, he became a Protestant Waldensian minister.

<sup>134</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 144. The text reprinted a summary of a congress paper from the Calcutta Review, but the content seems to be identical with a book published by Cust years earlier (see Cust 1891).

<sup>135</sup> See Masuzawa 2005.

<sup>136</sup> See, for instance, Fairbairn 1902: 230–236.

sect and creed, All is His Supreme Glory and Bliss”, and perceiving which, even the hardest heart can melt in love and joy eternal.<sup>137</sup>

Nallasvami saw the core of universal religion not in its transnational reach and missionary activity, but in its inclusive potential to contain all the others, which he underlined with a well-known quotation from a Saiva Siddhanta classic. In that modern context, it meant for Nallasvami that other religions found their teachings included in Saiva Siddhanta. The inclusive interpretation of the four paths, mentioned earlier, served as a hermeneutical tool for claiming this universality of Saiva Siddhanta. Islam and Judaism could be understood as the servant’s way (dāsa-mārga), Christianity as the child’s way (putra-mārga) etc.<sup>138</sup> In this context also belongs the reprint of an article from the Rajput Herald in *Siddhanta Deepika*, which observes how religious and cultural life in England resembles, in many ways, that of a Saivite country.<sup>139</sup> This idea of Saivism as the inclusive fulfilment of all other religions emphasises another aspect of universal religion that was also present in the colonial discourse on religion. It was not so much highlighted by Christian theology or Western scholars of religion but became strong within currents that were rather critical of established Church Christianity or of Christianity in general. Forceful proponents of this aspect of universal religion were, for instance, American Transcendentalism and Theosophy and, on the Indian side, the Brahma Samaj and, as we will see, Neo-Hinduism.<sup>140</sup>

However, the different features of universal religion were not understood as mutually exclusive within the global discourse of religion, but mark only a different emphasis. Accordingly, the aspects of having a universal reach and missionary engagement were also taken up by Saiva Siddhanta. Nallasvami’s Saiva Siddhanta oriented its activities in several ways on the work of the Christian missions in India, especially the Bible societies.<sup>141</sup> Curiously, occasionally, it even claimed having a universal reach, as in an editorial of *Siddhanta Deepika* from 1911: “Now the Śaiva Religion is found in almost all parts of the world and the extent is very

<sup>137</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899c: 214. Nallasvami gives no hint as to where both quotations are taken from, but for the first quotation the Tamil text is also given, so that it can be identified as part of Sivagnana Siddhiyar 8,13. In his full translation of Sivagnana Siddhiyar, the passage is rendered differently (see Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 4:240). The quotation is also repeated in Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 313. For an interpretation of the passage, see also Schomerus 1981: 309. The second quotation is not from the same passage, but I could not work out where it might be taken from.

<sup>138</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911j: 220–221.

<sup>139</sup> Seesodia 1911/1912. See also Glasenapp 1922: 437. For Seesodia see also *Siddhanta Deepika* 13 (1912/1913) 50.

<sup>140</sup> See, for example, Jackson 1981; Figl 1993; Campbell 1980; Hatcher 1999.

<sup>141</sup> See Nehring 2003: 336–337.



wide as many other religion. We have adherents to this Faith everywhere.”<sup>142</sup>

Related to the discourse on universal or world religions was also the question of what would be the religion of the future, and many made the claim that it would be their own. Occasionally, we find this claim even in Saiva Siddhanta, though it does not appear explicitly in a text written by Nallasvami himself. In the already mentioned editorial of *Siddhanta Deepika* from 1911, we also read: “We hope that in the near future our sacred Śaivism will become the universal religion ...”<sup>143</sup> This position of Saiva Siddhanta, as the religion of the future, was also voiced by Ponnambalam Ramanathan (Tam. poṇṇampaḷam rāmanāṭaṅ, 1851–1930), who acted two times as president for the central annual Saiva Siddhanta conference.<sup>144</sup>

After the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893, the global religious discourse received an institutional expression in the form of interreligious conferences, which were irregularly held in many places in the aftermath of Chicago.<sup>145</sup> In 1909, a ‘Convention of Religions in India’ was accordingly organized in Calcutta through the initiative of the Vivekananda Society.<sup>146</sup> The invitation was reprinted in *Siddhanta Deepika*, and Nallasvami attended the convention as a representative of Saivism.<sup>147</sup> The article ‘The Saiva Religion and Saiva Advaita Siddhanta Philosophy’, which we discussed in the first part, was actually presented there by Nallasvami, and it was also reprinted in the congress volume, though in a slightly abridged version.<sup>148</sup> This context backs our interpretation that the claim of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion is the central theme of the text. It also shows, on the one hand, how this is embedded in the global discourse on religion and, on the other hand, that this claim has to be understood as a struggle for representation among different religious currents within the Indian context.

The programme of the convention, and its documentation in the conference volume, show the strong claim of Vivekananda followers to be the true representatives of Hinduism. The invitation was extended to five

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<sup>142</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 11 (1910/1911) 523. The author is probably V. V. Ramana Sastrin.

<sup>143</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 11 (1910/1911) 523.

<sup>144</sup> See Ramanathan 1906: 124–126, see also Glasenapp 1922: 422. For biographical information on Ramanathan, see *Siddhanta Deepika* 13 (1912/1913) 286–290.

<sup>145</sup> See Klaes 2000.

<sup>146</sup> See Sen 1910. To my knowledge, there has been no scholarly research on this conference.

<sup>147</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 9 (1908/1909) 135–136.

<sup>148</sup> See Sen 1910: II.110–136.

religions, which were identified as “I. Hinduism ... II. Christianity. III. Islamism. IV. Zorastrianism. V. Judaism.”<sup>149</sup> Hinduism was specified as having nine subdivisions: “(a) Buddhism (b)Jainism (c) Shaktatism (d) Vaishnavism (e) Saivaism (f) Sikhism (g) Brahmoism (h) Arya Samaj (i) Theosophy”<sup>150</sup>. The papers presented on Hinduism were expected to pick out these or other subdivisions as their themes. Only one paper in the conference volume dealt with “Hinduism” in general and this is from Swami Saradananda of Bellur Math, which had been founded by Vivekananda.<sup>151</sup> This was flanked by an “Introduction” of the Vivekananda Society, which was to give “A Short Account of the Evolution of Religious Ideas Beyond India”.<sup>152</sup> Both texts made it very clear that the Advaita Vedanta, in the Neo-Hindu interpretation of Vivekananda, is the core of Hinduism as an inclusive universal religion. The introduction argued that the main feature of the “Aryan idea” is to assume the “Oneness” of all reality, as against the “ne-Aryan [non-Aryan] idea” which assumes “duality”.<sup>153</sup> The Aryans were presented as the civilising factor of India, who acculturated also the other peoples of the subcontinent like, for instance, the “Dravidian tribes” of South India.<sup>154</sup> This Aryan idea “that there is but One”<sup>155</sup> found its contemporary expression in Vivekananda’s teachings. The introduction concluded:

In this Oneness is included all faiths, all dogmas. Each of them has its own place in the world. We must recognize this. Through this Oneness is the ideal of a Universal Religion realized. ... Let us hope for the day when this idea of Universal religion will shine upon mankind.<sup>156</sup>

Accordingly, Saradananda stated in his paper on Hinduism, man “begins his religious life with Dvaita” and “when he is comparatively advanced he experiences the Visishtadvaita ... and finally ends with the Advaita”.<sup>157</sup>

In this framework, there was only derivative space for the articulation of a theistic, a Saiva Siddhanta, or a South Indian (“Dravidian”) perspective. Hence, it is clear that Nallasvami’s argument is directly made against this hegemonic representative claim of Neo-Hinduism. He accepted that advaita (“Oneness”) is the supreme idea but twists the point,

<sup>149</sup> Sen 1910: I.5; see also *Siddhanta Deepika* 9 (1908/1909) 135.

<sup>150</sup> Sen 1910: I.5 (italics deleted); see also *Siddhanta Deepika* 9 (1908/1909) 135.

<sup>151</sup> See Saradananda 1910. In the conference proceedings, this paper was announced under the title “Sanatan Dharm” (see Sen 1910: I.10, 40).

<sup>152</sup> Vivekananda Society 1910.

<sup>153</sup> Vivekananda Society 1910: iii.

<sup>154</sup> See Vivekananda Society 1910: xxi.

<sup>155</sup> Vivekananda Society 1910: li.

<sup>156</sup> Vivekananda Society 1910: lix.

<sup>157</sup> Saradananda 1910: 207.

claiming that only Saiva Siddhanta has fully grasped its meaning and can truly incorporate all the other traditions and religions.

It is important to note that Nallasvami was very much aware of the Neo-Hindu representative claim on Hinduism, long before he went to Calcutta. When Vivekananda made his triumphant return from the West, he stopped for nine days in Madras in February 1897 and gave some speeches. Apparently, Nallasvami sent a delegation from Tiruppatur, where he was District Munsiff at the time, to meet Vivekananda in order to engage him into a critical philosophical conversation. However, the delegation was brushed off by Vivekananda after it dared to ask, as their first question, how the unmanifested can become the manifested.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Nallasvami regularly read the journals of Vivekananda followers, especially the Madras-based English journals, *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*.<sup>159</sup> There were even polemic exchanges between *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Siddhanta Deepika*. *Prabuddha Bharata* was edited (and mostly written) by B. R. Rajam Aiyar (1872–1898), the famous Tamil novelist, Vedantist, and Vivekananda supporter.<sup>160</sup> Rajam Aiyar had taken appreciative notice of *Siddhanta Deepika* in the October issue of 1897. But he also declared that the assumption of three principles in Saiva Siddhanta instead of one, as in Advaita Vedanta, would be useless “metaphysical wrangling”, which evoked a strong reaction in *Siddhanta Deepika*.<sup>161</sup> In the February issue of 1898, Rajam Aiyar advertised several Tamil pamphlets as useful for “refuting the dualistic Saiva Siddhanta”, which again brought a strong editorial reply in *Siddhanta Deepika* rejecting the notion that Saiva Siddhanta is “dualistic”.<sup>162</sup> This shows that, in Madras, the Saiva Siddhanta revival had clashed with Vivekananda’s renaissance of Advaita Vedanta almost from the beginning. The polemical engagement between the Tamil followers of Saiva Siddhanta and Neo-Hinduism, in the late 19th and early 20th century is

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<sup>158</sup> Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda by K. S. Sundarama Iyer, see appendix II: 369–374. The followers of Nallasvami have a strong oral tradition that a personal meeting between Nallasvami and Vivekananda took place (see Balasubramaniam 1965: ix, 122–125). To clarify that matter the two respective historical sources are given in the appendix of this book, see pp. 371–373.

<sup>159</sup> See, for instance, for references to *Brahmavadin* Nallasvami Pillai 1911b: 21–22, 27–28; Nallasvami Pillai 1911c: 42–43, 45, 48; Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 173–174, 177, 179, and for *Prabuddha Bharata* Nallasvami Pillai 1911c: 43. As many journals exchanged copies, the Saiva Siddhanta office received regularly a variety of journals on religion and culture as complimentary copies, among them were most of the English speaking journals from sympathizers of Vivekananda, see, for instance, *Siddhanta Deepika* 6 (1902–1903) 24.

<sup>160</sup> For Rajam Aiyar see Aiyar 1946: 14–20; Blackburn 1998: 157–175.

<sup>161</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 119–120.

<sup>162</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 240.

unfortunately not yet well researched.<sup>163</sup> It is important to note that this early exchange was mainly about the issue of who would represent Hinduism; only later, in the mid-1910s, did the Dravidian issue become the major dividing theme in the religious confrontation of the two sides. Nallasvami himself also occasionally quoted Vivekananda in his writings, but he apparently avoided combining his harsh criticism of Advaita Vedanta with a specific dismissal of Vivekananda's positions.<sup>164</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* even printed a short solemn obituary on the occasion of Vivekananda's death.<sup>165</sup> Seeing these strong interactions between the two sides, it seems quite certain that Nallasvami was at least familiar with some of the speeches that Vivekananda gave on his tour back to India in 1897. They had been published in *Brahmavadin* and *Prabuddha Bharata*,<sup>166</sup> but were also separately printed in pamphlet editions in Madras, and even a Tamil translation was available and duly announced in *Siddhanta Deepika*.<sup>167</sup> In the speeches of January and February 1897, Vivekananda repeatedly made bold claims regarding a universal religion:

You have also heard, quite within recent times, claims put forward in favour of Christianity by a great friend of mine, Dr. Barrows, that Christianity is the only universal religion. Let me consider this question awhile and lay down before you my reasons why I think that it is the Vedanta, and the Vedanta alone that can become the universal religion of man, and that none else is fitted for that role.<sup>168</sup> ... Ours, as I have said, is the universal religion. It is inclusive enough, it is broad enough to include all ideals.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika*, for instance, reported significant polemical confrontations at two annual Vedanta conferences at Madras in 1913 and 1914, which even led to the situation where, in one instance, the followers of Advaita Vedanta "pelt stones at the Siddhantis from a distance" (see *Siddhanta Deepika* 13 [1912/1913] 481–483; 14 [1913/1914] 235–237).

<sup>164</sup> See, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911b: 28; Nallasvami Pillai 1911c: 42; Nallasvami Pillai 1911h: 124, 128; Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 268; Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 294.

<sup>165</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 6 (1902/1903) 30, and *Siddhanta Deepika* 13 (1912/1913) 285–287, where a tribute to Vivekananda's 50th birthday is reprinted.

<sup>166</sup> See Basu and Ghosh 1969: 505 (*Brahmavadin*/27.2.1897: 'Kumbakonam Address'), 603 (*Prabuddha Bharata*/March 1897: 'The Vedanta and its Application to Indian life' – Madras; 'The Sages of India' – Madras).

<sup>167</sup> See Muller 1897; Muller 1904; *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 288.

<sup>168</sup> Muller 1897: 96 (italics deleted); Muller 1904: 90. This is the Kumbakonam Address that is reprinted in the Complete Works, though with some alterations in the English style (Vivekananda 1959: III.182). John Henry Barrows was one of the organisers of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893 (see Ziolkowski 1993).

<sup>169</sup> Muller 1897: 168; Muller 1904: 160–161. This is the third Madras lecture with the title "The Sages of India", reprinted in the Complete Works (Vivekananda 1959: III.251–252. There is at least one more explicit statement on universal religion in the Madras lectures, see Vivekananda 1959: III. 279.

These quotations show clearly the use of the same strategy to conceptualize Advaita Vedanta as a universal religion that we found with Nallasvami for Saiva Siddhanta. Whereas the conceptual framework of a universal religion is very similar between Nallasvami's Saiva Siddhanta and Vivekananda's Advaita Vedanta, there are some interesting differences which should be noted. Vivekananda stated that "modern materialistic science can be acceptable, harmoniously with their religion, only to the Vedantins" and this was combined with "the wonderful rationalism of the Vedanta".<sup>170</sup> The scientific claim is made against orthodox Christianity as a seemingly unscientific, non-empirical, revelatory religion.<sup>171</sup> In connection with this, Vivekananda also elevated experience (Skt. *anubhava*) to a status of authority higher than scripture. This related to the concept of an inward experiential religion not dependent on scriptural revelation and outward practices.<sup>172</sup> Following this line of argument, Vivekananda was also critical of traditional rituals. He considered religious rituals the "kindergarten of religion", which are only secondary expressions and, as "concretized philosophy", limited in their importance to a pedagogical function.<sup>173</sup>

Nallasvami could not agree with this line of argument fully. He also referred to the contemporary knowledge of Western science, and he claimed for Saiva Siddhanta that "the latest discoveries in science could not shake its foundation"<sup>174</sup>. However, he never spoke of Saiva Siddhanta being itself scientific. The background for this might have something to do with the specific discursive constellation. Within the discourse of religion, identity or reconciliation between science and religion was usually claimed by non-theistic movements, like Spiritualism, Theosophy, Neo-Hinduism, or Neo-Theravada-Buddhism, which understood their own teachings as pantheistic, monistic, or non-dualistic.<sup>175</sup> They backed up their arguments with a Western critique of religion, especially of Christianity, from evolutionary materialism (Herbert Spencer, Ernst Haeckel etc.). They understood themselves as a religious version of contemporary philosophical monism, though without the materialistic implications of its counterpart in popular Western philosophy.<sup>176</sup>

Since Nallasvami defended a theistic tradition, he could not go along with this. Moreover, as he did not start his activities for Saiva Siddhanta

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<sup>170</sup> Vivekananda 1959: III. 184–185.

<sup>171</sup> For the discursive context of the science and religion debate, and the critique of Christianity, see Bergunder 2005.

<sup>172</sup> See Proudfoot 1985; Rambachan 1994; Nehring 2005.

<sup>173</sup> See Vivekananda 1959: I.72, V.216, VIII.365.

<sup>174</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911k: 242.

<sup>175</sup> See Bergunder 2005.

<sup>176</sup> See, for instance, Dvivedi 1889. See also Prakash 1999: 75–82.

before the late 1890s, it seems he was already aware of the new situation in the West, where the science and religion antithesis was widely overcome by Neo-Kantianism. Nallasvami did not view science as materialistic and anti-religious; when he mentions scientific positions, he calls them “agnostic” or refers simply to Neo-Kantian philosophy.<sup>177</sup> As we have seen, he used the Western Christian critique of pantheism to criticize Neo-Hinduism. This made it nearly impossible to relate Saiva Siddhanta, at the same time, to the idea of a scientific monistic religion. Moreover, because the Neo-Hindu understanding of Advaita Vedanta as the central philosophy of Hinduism was firmly embedded in the Orientalist understanding of the Sanskrit tradition, Nallasvami had to argue with scriptural evidence to show the opposite; this made it also very difficult for him to take an empiricist position like Vivekananda. He did not even relate Saiva Siddhanta to any kind of religious experientialism, and he rarely addressed the emotional side of Tamil Saiva Bhakti.

Another difference to Vivekananda relates to the position towards rituals. Saiva Siddhanta is well known for its complex ritualism, but, as already pointed out, Nallasvami largely left out this dimension. However, in contrast to Vivekananda, he could not outrightly devalue rituals. He seemed to be aware, though, that in constructing Saivism as a universal religion, he needed to have some critical position on rituals too:

We cannot know God really by all our religious rites and performances, repetition of prayers and formulas by saguna or nirguna worship, with or without idols, and even by the highest yoga, except when His grace and Love fills us all and we lose ourselves in this Love. ... All our religious practices, ceremonies, forms and Shibboleths fall off from us, as the basket from the sleeper's hand, and they are of no consequence when we reach His seat.<sup>178</sup>

Whereas Vivekananda could easily relate to the long tradition of advaitic vedantic ritual criticism, the more ritualistic Saiva Siddhanta had many more problems coping with the criticism of ritual inherent in the contemporary global religious discourse. The different concepts of ritual criticism, in Neo-Hinduism and Saiva Siddhanta revival, are also an indication of the constraints on the power of the colonial discourse when it met strong conflicting traditions.

Though Nallasvami and his followers argued their case in an elegant, sophisticated and comprehensive manner, the universalist claim of Saiva Siddhanta to be the true heir of Hinduism was not accepted outside their ranks and did not gain permanent ground in the following decades. At least two setbacks are obvious. The colonial discourse on religion in India

<sup>177</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911b: 25; Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 308.

<sup>178</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911j: 216; Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 358. See also Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899a: 157.

was deeply shaped by the framework of Western Orientalism. This marks the first handicap for Saiva Siddhanta. Several studies have shown how Neo-Hinduism was able to achieve its strong plausibility by playing along the lines of Orientalist thinking, though often inverting its judgements.<sup>179</sup> Nallasvami was well aware of the current state of Western indological research. In the second volume of *Siddhanta Deepika*, we find a concise overview about the history of European Sanskrit scholarship,<sup>180</sup> and many new books by famous indologists like Max Müller or Paul Deussen were often immediately reviewed.<sup>181</sup> Nallasvami saw clearly how Neo-Hinduism profited from this relation to Orientalist thinking, and that Saiva Siddhanta simply did not fit into the picture of the ‘mystic East’. It is interesting to read how sharply Nallasvami complained about it:

The European who has learnt to read the books of one [Indian] school of philosophy only (all the books translated till now in English are books and commentaries of the Vedānta School), knows nothing of any other school of philosophy existing in India and what authorities they had, and has gradually come to deny the existence of even such; and young Indians educated in English deriving all their pabulum from such source have also been ignorant of any other phases of Indian Philosophy.<sup>182</sup>

The exclusionist effects of the Orientalist discourse are not an invention of postcolonial scholars; they were already realized by many marginalized and colonized people, a point which deserves more attention in future research.<sup>183</sup> In this situation, Nallasvami and his followers closely watched for any possible changes in the discursive constellation. As we have seen, Nallasvami’s argument depended, among others, on a theistic interpretation of the Vedānta Sūtras as against the Advaita Vedānta and, as already briefly mentioned, he especially emphasised Max Müller’s late change of mind with regard to this. Only a few months after the publication of Max Müller’s book on Ramakrishna, Nallasvami wrote an editorial under the title *Prof. Max Muller’s conversion*. In his book on Ramakrishna, Müller had written that he was now “bound to acknowledge after

<sup>179</sup> See, for instance, King 1999; Dirks 2001; Bergunder 2004.

<sup>180</sup> See Ramanan 1898/1899.

<sup>181</sup> See, for instance, *Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (1898/1899) 238 (M. Müller, *Ramakrishna*, 1898); *Siddhanta Deepika* 13 (1912/1913) 142–146 (P. Deussen, *The System of Vedānta* [Engl. transl.], 1912).

<sup>182</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911i: 172–173, see also Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899a: 157. Cf. also Vaitheespara 1999: 168–169, where another quotation is given which makes it clear that Vedānta, in that context, meant Advaita Vedānta.

<sup>183</sup> For another sharp critique of the exclusionist nature of the Orientalist discourse in India, see some remarks of C. Iyothē Thassar (Tam. k. ayōttitācar, 1845–1914) in the Tamil journal, *Tamiḷan* (see Aloysius 1999: I.153, II.86). For an English translation of the respective passages, see Bergunder 2004: 72 fn. 21. See also Aloysius 1998; Geetha and Rajadurai 1998: 98–99.

Professor Thibaut's luminous exposition that Viśiṣṭādvaita interpretation is more in keeping with the Sutras of Badarayana."<sup>184</sup> Nallasvami considered himself vindicated, but also spoke of his impotence in changing the hegemonic discourse in India:

And it took him [Max Müller] nine years [since the publication of the first volume of Thibaut's commentary] to come round to face the real truth and acknowledge it. ... we have been claiming attention for Dr. Thibaut's view since 1895, and not even a single Indian writer condescended to notice it. Such is the firm-hold bigotry of this so-called liberal age.<sup>185</sup>

In another instance, *Siddhanta Deepika* drew attention to an anonymous review of Paul Deussen's *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie*, in one of the leading English review journals. The German indologist, Paul Deussen, was known to Saiva Siddhanta revivalists as "the keenest expounder of Sankara in the West"<sup>186</sup>. The review criticized his opinion that Sankara "returned to the pure doctrine of the Upanishads", and his estimation of Advaita Vedanta as "still the creed of the majority of those Hindus who feel the need for a philosophical basis of their conception of the world". The reviewer complained:

The Professor speaks here more as a partisan than as a critic, ignoring the justifiable claims of some millions of e. g. Saivas and Ramanujiyas. We regret too that he has not studied at first hand the very interesting and valuable system of the Saiva Siddhantam which is the dominant creed of Southern India.<sup>187</sup>

However, this review probably did not come from an established European indologist, but from H. W. Schomerus, who belonged to the small group of Christian missionaries that had a scholarly interest in classical Tamil literature and Saiva Siddhanta.<sup>188</sup> These missionary scholars, especially G. U. Pope and Schomerus, tried to confront Western indology with the Tamil and Saiva classics, as can be seen in this review. Nallasvami and his followers sought them as allies. As already seen, Nallasvami presented their research and their positive judgement of Saiva Siddhanta

<sup>184</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (1898/1899) 238. The quotation is from Müller 1899b: 71. The reference about George Thibaut is with regard to his translation of the Sankara commentary of the Vedanta Sutras in the *Sacred Books of the East* (see Thibaut 1890/1896, especially page c of the introduction in the first volume).

<sup>185</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (1898/1899) 238.

<sup>186</sup> Ramanan 1909/1910: 48.

<sup>187</sup> Ramanan 1909/1910: 49 (italics deleted). The quotation is a reprint from the book review in *Luzac's Oriental List and Book Review* (London) 20 (January to December 1909) 1910: 2–3. Though the review is anonymous, the whole ductus of the arguments makes it is highly likely that it was written by H. W. Schomerus, cf. similar statements in Schomerus 1912: 5, 19–20, 176–177.

<sup>188</sup> For Schomerus in general, see Nehring 2003. Schomerus' German book on Saiva Siddhanta (Schomerus 1912) was reviewed in *Siddhanta Deepika* 14 (1913/1914) 92–93.



to confront mainstream Orientalist notions with conflicting and alternative Western scholarship. He invited Schomerus as a special guest to the fourth Saiva Siddhanta conference in 1909, and Schomerus' conference report was reprinted in *Siddhanta Deepika*.<sup>189</sup> Nallasvami even bought 100 copies of Pope's translation of the Tamil Saiva Bhakti classic, *Tiruvacakam* (Tam. tiruvācakam), to distribute it to interested people free of cost.<sup>190</sup>

However, Western indology at the time was well entrenched in Sanskrit studies, and the research on South India was simply ignored by prominent contemporary indologists. The few Tamil scholars were not able to make a difference, which Nallasvami was very much aware of when he wrote in an editorial:

A European missionary gentleman wrote to us from England to say that he repeatedly pressed on Professor Max Müller and Monier Williams and others the claims of Tamil literature and Philosophy but that they had turned a deaf ear to his prayers.<sup>191</sup>

In the same way, the leading English speaking Indian elite, dominated by Brahmins, oriented themselves towards Sanskrit traditions and advaitic Neo-Hinduism, and largely ignored other currents. In 1911, a second 'Convention of Religions' was organized by the followers of Vivekananda in Allahabad. Nallasvami again participated and presented an impressive paper, which interpreted Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion in relation to other religions.<sup>192</sup> However, no trace of any impact on the wider Indian context could be found. The failure to make a lasting effect is also illustrated by the fact that at the 'International Parliament of Religions', organized by the Ramakrishna Mission at Calcutta in 1937, no representative of Saiva Siddhanta presented a paper.<sup>193</sup>

The other great obstacle to the universalist claims of Saiva Siddhanta was its strong Vellalar base. All the important activists of the Saiva Siddhanta revival were from a Vellalar or related background. Though Nallasvami had close Tamil Brahmin co-workers, like V. V. Ramana Sastrin, and also a wide range of Brahmin sympathizers, it was to

<sup>189</sup> See Nehring 2003: 335–341.

<sup>190</sup> See Balasubramaniam 1965: 88.

<sup>191</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 7 (1906/1907) 27.

<sup>192</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911o: 347. *Siddhanta Deepika* did not provide further information of the Allahabad convention. It seems also that no conference volume was published.

<sup>193</sup> See Ramakrishna Mission 1938. However, T. H. M. Sadasivayya spoke on "Vīraśaivism" and had a brief look at Saiva Siddhanta teachings, when tracing its historical roots. He referred to its special notion of advaita and made the argument in an identical way to that of Nallasvami. He probably, therefore, knew Nallasvami's writings (see Sadasivayya 1938: 434).

Theosophy and Neo-Hinduism that most English educated Brahmans were allied in the South Indian Tamil context. It does not appear as if many Brahmans joined the Saiva Siddhanta revival.

We also have hardly any evidence that the idea of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion was combined with an active policy of opening up its base to people from groups considered by Vellalars to be of lower societal status. The only incident that informs of a specific practical crossing of caste barriers is the positive report about a ‘Pañchama Religious Association’, with the name ‘Śivanēsa Tirukūṭṭattār’, which Nallasvami encountered during a 1911 lecture visit in Bangalore. Young men from that organisation sang hymns of the Tamil Saiva classic Tevaram (Tam. *tēvāram*) to the audience, and Nallasvami made it a point to visit their place.<sup>194</sup> However, it is not reported that this organisation became in any way part of the network of Tamil Saiva Siddhanta organisations coordinated by Nallasvami. On the other hand, caste discrimination and its impact on social inequality were openly discussed in the Saiva Siddhanta organizations, especially at the fourth central conference in Trichy 1909.<sup>195</sup> However, the main attitude was that of gradual and top down social reform as, for instance, suggested by Nallasvami in relation to the Nadar (Tam. *nāṭār*) discrimination: “If we are wise in our generation, we should give small concessions to these people gradually such as their entry into some of the inner enclosure and so on till all the restrictions are done away with.”<sup>196</sup> Into this picture fits the plan by the central Saiva Siddhanta association to open a ‘Nandanar school for the education of the Pañchama’<sup>197</sup> in 1910.

*Dravidian historiography, Tamil identity,  
and the legacy of Nallasvami*

It is somewhat illustrative that *Siddhanta Deepika* was discontinued in 1914, whereas the Justice Party and perhaps the Pure Tamil movement started in 1916. At this point, it is not possible to analyse the complex historical genesis of this development. Here, we will solely focus on the conceptual break from Nallasvami’s idea of an inclusive, universalist Saiva Siddhanta to Maraimalai’s decisively Dravidian understanding of Tamil Saivism and its history. However, this break was not a complete one, as the question of Tamil identity and Dravidian historiography were

<sup>194</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 11 (1910/1911) 513–514.

<sup>195</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 10 (1909/1910) 258–259.

<sup>196</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 3 (1899/1900) 47.

<sup>197</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 11 (1910/1911) 431.

already discussed by Nallasvami himself and in his journal *Siddhanta Deepika*. It should be noted that Nallasvami defended, by all means, Tamil as a modern language, and forcefully fought for its place at the university.<sup>198</sup> Moreover, he displayed a very critical position against the Brahmanical caste system with its discriminatory effects, and adopted an explicit Dravidian understanding in his criticism of it:

Brahmins tried hard to impose their fourfold distinction [in South India]; and portions of the South Indian community who display greater punctiliousness in the matter of caste are all people who have become more and more under the sway of Brahminism; and even now if there are instances of Pariahs entering temples and non-Brahmins officiating as priests ... they are vestiges of the older influences of non-Brahmins before they were subverted by the dominance of Brahmins ...<sup>199</sup>

In a remarkable editorial, he referred to the situation of the Nadars, which he personally knew from his own travel experience.<sup>200</sup> He wrote that “the restrictions imposed on the Shanars [i. e. Nadars] were not religious” but “political”, and he called it “shameful” that this treatment should happen “in the name of our Religion and our God”.<sup>201</sup> He saw the Nadars as a people that in the past had experienced not a religious subjection but a political one, which later was wrongly interpreted as religious. It is in this sense that he was also critical of the Nadars’ claim to be Kshatriyas (Skt. *kṣatriya*), because it reinforced the Brahmanical varna (Skt. *varṇa*) framework, which he wanted to be discarded. He objected to the Kshatriya claim as “nobody would seriously talk of their being Kshattrias when they were pure Dravidians”<sup>202</sup>. One might speculate that this is also one reason why he nowhere discusses the caste status of the Vellalars, or comments on the then contemporary claim of Indian Vellalars to be Vaisyas (Skt. *vaiśya*).<sup>203</sup> Regarding caste, it seems clear that Nallasvami argued in line with the dichotomy of Dravidian / Tamil versus Aryan / Brahman. Here is also a basic difference to Vivekananda’s position, who was undecided on the issue of caste but, in the end, tended to defend the Brahmanical varna system, while rejecting its discriminatory aspects.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>198</sup> See Balasubramaniam 1965: 67–78.

<sup>199</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899b: 188.

<sup>200</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 2 (1898/1899) 119–120.

<sup>201</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 3 (1899/1900) 47.

<sup>202</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 3 (1899/1900) 48.

<sup>203</sup> For the Vaishya-claim of Vellalar, see Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1989: 241; Vaitheespara 1999: 325–326, 481. However, in one of his articles, he provided a longer quote from P. Sundaram Pillai where the Vellalars are called “the flower of the Dravidian Race” (Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899c: 112).

<sup>204</sup> See, for instance, Bayly 1998: 101–104; Bayly 1999: 163–166. However, though Bayly admits that Vivekananda’s writings also contain anti-caste statements (Bayly 1999:

This rejection of the Brahmanical varna system principally demanded the postulation of a specific Dravidian and pre-Aryan past without a varna system.<sup>205</sup> Nallasvami indeed proposed, explicitly, a Tamil race that migrated to India by sea “from Assyria and Asiatic Minor, the oldest seat of ancient civilization”; and he even claimed that he was “the first to broach the notion that the Tamilians had no sort of connection with the north or northern settlers and they never derived their letters or arts or civilization from the Aryans”.<sup>206</sup> However, he himself did not elaborate on this matter further, though he consciously gave room to its discussion in *Siddhanta Deepika*.<sup>207</sup> Without explicitly distancing himself from it, he reproduced, in one of his own articles, quotations from P. Sundaram Pillai (1855–1897), who was perhaps the first of the English educated Tamil scholars from a Vellalar background who radically proposed a Dravidian Saiva non-Aryan past of the Tamils.<sup>208</sup> Sundaram was of the conviction that “most of what is ignorantly called Aryan Philosophy, Aryan civilization is literally Dravidian or Tamilian at bottom”<sup>209</sup>. Similar views were also unambiguously propagated by Ponnambalam Pillai. In the presidential address of the 7th central conference at Kanchipuram in 1912, he stated that the Dravidians already had a “high state of civilization all peculiarly our own – when the Āryans entered India”,<sup>210</sup> and this Dravidian civilization did not know any caste discrimination.<sup>211</sup> Saiva Siddhanta was called by him the “Dravidian religion” that “had been perfected so as to become a cosmopolitan religion as it is now, so that it may embrace within its fold all the other religions in the world, by the time the Āryans entered India with the earlier and unsystematic portions of the Vedas”<sup>212</sup>.

However, it is hard to reconcile this aspect of Dravidian historiography with Nallasvami’s derivation of Saiva Siddhanta from the Sanskrit tradition and his broad outreach to the English educated elite of South Indian

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166 note 47), she emphasizes, perhaps too much, the apologetic side. Vivekananda’s critique of caste can already be found in some passages of his Indian addresses in Ceylon and South India in January/February 1897 (see Vivekananda 1959: III.132–133, 198–199, 267, 291–298).

<sup>205</sup> For the general question of Aryan and Dravidian historiography within the colonial discourse in India see Ramaswamy 2001; Bergunder 2004.

<sup>206</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899c: 110.

<sup>207</sup> These voices received special attention in the fifth volume of *Siddhanta Deepika* from 1901/1902. See, especially, Savariroyan 1901/1902. There was, for instance, also a longer extract from Sundaram Pillai’s *History of the Religious Sects in Southern India* in *Siddhanta Deepika* 5 (1901/1902) 73–74. See also *Siddhanta Deepika* 5 (1901/1902) 157–161, 168–173.

<sup>208</sup> For P. Sundaram Pillai see Vaitheespara 1999: 139–158.

<sup>209</sup> Quote in Nallasvami Pillai 1898/1899c: 112.

<sup>210</sup> Ponnambalam Pillai 1912/1913: 346 (italics deleted).

<sup>211</sup> See Ponnambalam Pillai 1912/1913: 352.

<sup>212</sup> Ponnambalam Pillai 1912/1913: 349–350.

Brahmans. Nallasvami seemed to be very aware of this problem and wrote in a 1906 editorial:

Following up our first article on the ancient Tamilian civilization, Pandit D. Savariroyan and his friends have opened up a dark page of South India's past and great credit is due to them for carrying on their work, undeterred by the unreasoning opposition and prejudices of a large number. And we have heard it – that we have lost the sympathy of a few of our well-wishers and friends by permitting the publication of such articles. But we will appeal to their sense of justice and fairness for once.<sup>213</sup>

The idea of a distinct Tamil history was apparently so important to Nallasvami that he even risked the established friendship of his Brahman supporters. However, in his philosophical expositions of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion, the idea of a Dravidian pre-Aryan past was nowhere explicitly reflected on. It is hard to believe that a systematic thinker like Nallasvami had no idea of how to relate the idea of a special and separate Tamil past to the history of Saiva Siddhanta. Only in one article, on the Svetasvatara Upanishat, did he write about the time between Buddha and Badarayana, the author of the Vedanta Sutras:

It was during this time ... that the blending of the Aryan and Tamilian in art and civilization and Philosophy took place (and we could not here consider how much was common to both and how much each gained from the other).<sup>214</sup>

From this quotation, one might guess that he considered the Vedanta Sutras the product of the contact between Aryan and Tamil philosophy, but he did not elaborate on it further. The following text of the paragraph suggests, in a certain way, that Samkhya (Skt. *sāṃkhya*) and Yoga might be of Tamil origin, or at least had a strong Tamil counterpart. However, as we have already seen, Nallasvami made it clear that Saiva Siddhanta is neither Samkhya nor Yoga, but a “third school” different from them both.<sup>215</sup>

It is precisely here that Maraimalai went one step further. Basing his argument very much on the Samkhya tradition, he explicitly related Saiva Siddhanta to a specific Dravidian past. The difference of this approach to Nallasvami is well illustrated when looking at a paper which Maraimalai presented before the Theosophical Society in Calcutta in 1913.<sup>216</sup> The

<sup>213</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 7 (1906/1907) 29–30. The 7th volume was published after a three-year delay. Considering the unusual, explicit language about lost well-wishers, one might speculate that the journal got into financial trouble after extensively publishing the Dravidian perspectives in the 5th volume, because Brahman friends might have stopped giving support or paying their subscription.

<sup>214</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1911h: 121.

<sup>215</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911b: 32–33.

<sup>216</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 443–446.

context is similar to the paper of Nallasvami that we analysed in the first part, because Maraimalai is also speaking about Saiva Siddhanta to a North-Indian audience that views Advaita Vedanta as the central philosophy of Hinduism. Unlike Nallasvami, Maraimalai centred his whole argumentation around Samkhya as being the historical root of Saiva Siddhanta. For him, Samkhya is “the earliest and deepest fountain of philosophy”<sup>217</sup> and it had a deep impact on Buddhism and Yoga, but also on the Sanskrit tradition, like the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and the Vedanta Sutras. However, it is Saiva Siddhanta that truly preserved the Samkhya tradition:

Now as regards the relation of Sāṅkhya to Saiva Siddhānta I venture to say that in all and every important respect they are identical ... As you also see from this identity of these two systems, that the doctrine of Saiva Siddhānta entitle it to a claim of as great of antiquity as the system of Sāṅkhya has.<sup>218</sup>

One should not overlook that this line of argument is in many ways similar to Nallasvami’s approach. Central parts of the Sanskrit tradition, such as the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and the Vedanta Sutras, are claimed for Saiva Siddhanta by Maraimalai, though, in his case, it is because of their Samkhya imprint only. As in Nallasvami’s case, this meant for Maraimalai that the Advaita Vedanta could no longer claim that its interpretation of these foundational classical texts was authentic or appropriate. Similarities can also be found in several specific philosophical positions on Saiva Siddhanta. Maraimalai explicated the specific understanding of advaita in Saiva Siddhanta in the same way as Nallasvami would have done it.<sup>219</sup> This is not self-evident, as Sundaram had characterized Saiva Siddhanta as “dualist”, in his effort to separate a Dravidian or Tamil tradition of Saiva Siddhanta from an Aryan tradition of Advaita Vedanta.<sup>220</sup> Maraimalai clearly followed Nallasvami’s more complicated argument.

However, highlighting Samkhya created a special problem, as Maraimalai himself acknowledged. Samkhya is an “agnostic” philosophy with no knowledge of a “Supreme Being”.<sup>221</sup> One might speculate that this aspect deterred Nallasvami from searching in more detail for a Dravidian Samkhya tradition, as he was always making theism the most crucial and central aspect of Saiva Siddhanta and its historical predecessors. Marai-

<sup>217</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 174.

<sup>218</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 213–214.

<sup>219</sup> See Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 185–188. A comparison between Nallasvami and Maraimalai, regarding their views on the philosophical tenets of Saiva Siddhanta, is an academic void.

<sup>220</sup> See *Siddhanta Deepika* 5 (1901/1902) 74, and Balasubramaniam 1965: 55–60.

<sup>221</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 212, 214.

malai downplayed this aspect and explained that “Saiva Siddhānta, like the so called theistic Sāṅkhya or yoga of Patañjali, goes a step upward and maintains the existence of an all intelligent power from certain actual experiences of our inward life”<sup>222</sup>. This line of argument transformed God into a power that can be observed empirically and, hence, could be included into the system. The emphasis here is more on the rational justification of God, which goes along with Maraimalai’s strong emphasis on the rational foundation of Samkhya. He accused the Sanskrit tradition of having diluted Samkhya rationalism by mixing it with a scriptural foundation, because “in the Vedānta Sūtras the doctrines of Sāṅkhya [were] assimilated and expounded, not based upon reason alone [as in the original Samkhya] ... but based upon the various passages of the upaniṣads”<sup>223</sup>. According to Maraimalai, Saiva Siddhanta had kept the rationalism of Samkhya, which led him to claim that Saiva Siddhanta and science were principally identical:

To all those who seek after an exact knowledge of these six eternal verities [of Saiva Siddhanta], it must be very gratifying to note that the recent developments of western philosophy and physical science go every inch to prove the truth and value of all the fundamental doctrines that are peculiar only to Saiva Siddhanta but not to any other religion or philosophy, ancient or modern.<sup>224</sup>

This is a claim that Nallasvami avoided. It brings to mind the understanding of Advaita Vedānta as science in the writings of Vivekananda, which Maraimalai had intensively studied and compared with Saiva Siddhanta.<sup>225</sup> However, the main, directly traceable influence of this scientific claim came from Maraimalai’s study of Western esotericism and especially Theosophy which, as already mentioned, also claimed an identification with science.<sup>226</sup> Against the background of this esoteric scientism, he understood Saiva Siddhanta as an occult science.<sup>227</sup>

In his later writings, Maraimalai’s ideas on the Dravidian past became more articulate and combined with strong anti-Brahman sentiments.<sup>228</sup> It is often pointed out how strongly this Dravidian position of Maraimalai’s Tamil Saivism became the ideological base for the early Justice Party and pre-Periyar Dravidian movement. However, a point often neglected is that this was also connected with a shift and transformation in the self-under-

<sup>222</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 214.

<sup>223</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1913–1914: 181.

<sup>224</sup> Maraimalai Adigal 1966: 14–15.

<sup>225</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 365.

<sup>226</sup> For Maraimalai’s study of Western Esotericism see, for instance, Vaitheespara 1999: 334, 364–365.

<sup>227</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 367.

<sup>228</sup> See, for instance, his comprehensive treatise of Saiva Siddhanta from 1940 (see Maraimalai Adigal 1966).

standing of the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta revival. At least a comparison between Nallasvami and Maraimalai suggests this. It is a well established fact that the elder and influential Nallasvami took over some of the important revival initiatives of the younger Maraimalai. Nallasvami monopolized control over the central Saiva Siddhanta umbrella organization and the annual conferences it organized, which had been initiated by Maraimalai.<sup>229</sup> There is also evidence that Maraimalai had a strong personal animosity towards Nallasvami, whom he even once called a “drunkard” in his diary.<sup>230</sup> However, this personal rivalry and power struggle must not overshadow the conceptual differences at play, which exemplarily mark the plurality and changes within the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta revival in the late 19th and early 20th century.

*Universalist interpretations of Saivism  
before Nallasvami in the late 19th century*

The conflation of Saiva Siddhanta with a Dravidian identity started in the late 19th and early 20th century, interpreting and appropriating the contemporary Orientalist dichotomy of Aryans and Dravidians. P. Sundaram Pillai is perhaps the earliest exponent of this perspective and Maraimalai the most established.<sup>231</sup> However, as our analysis has shown, Nallasvami’s understanding of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion was also dependent on Orientalist notions and the contemporary colonial discourse on religion in the second half of the 19th century. This raises the question whether Nallasvami’s interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion marked a new development or whether it was part of a foregoing discursive context. Nallasvami himself seems to suggest that he was inspired by his teacher, Somasundara Nayakar (1846–1901), when he wrote in the obituary: “He used to frequently point out the universal character of the Siddhanta, how this was the whole, of which all other schools were but parts ...”<sup>232</sup> Although the work of Somasundara is not yet well researched,<sup>233</sup> it is doubtful if he already had a clear concept of Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion. The same seems to be true for the 19th-

<sup>229</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 383–396.

<sup>230</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 395.

<sup>231</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 32–33. See also Dirks 2001; Nehring 2003; Bergunder 2004; Trautmann 2006.

<sup>232</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 4 (1900/1901) 205.

<sup>233</sup> There is no academic biography, but for a good summary of his life and teachings see Vaitheespara 1999: 118–139.



century Saiva Siddhanta revival in Jaffna (Tam. yālp̄pānam) around Arumuga Navalar (Tam. ārumuka nāvalar, 1822–1897).<sup>234</sup>

There is one case that deserves special attention. It is related to the interpretation of the message of Ramalinga Adigal (Tam. irāmaliṅka aṭikaḷ, 1823–1874) after his death. Ramalinga was a major Saiva saint in the 19th century, but his characterization differs widely.<sup>235</sup> When T. Velayuda Mudaliar (Tam. toḷuvūr vēḷāyuta mutaliyār), Ramalinga’s foremost and long-standing disciple, published the first edition of Ramalinga’s religious poetry in 1867, called the *Tiruvarutpa* (Tam. tiruvarutpā), he added a biographical poem in which he characterized Ramalinga as a Tamil Saiva Bhakti saint.<sup>236</sup> In the 1892 edition of the *Tiruvarutpa* Ramaswamy Mudaliar explained Ramalinga’s life as that of a traditional Tamil cittar (Skt. siddha).<sup>237</sup> Yet, the Tamil nationalist interpreters of Saiva Siddhanta claimed Ramalinga, as well as Arumuga, as the founder of the whole Saiva Siddhanta revival, and he was held in high esteem by Maraimalai.<sup>238</sup>

Velayuda pleaded, some years after Ramalinga’s death, in the 1880s, for a universalist understanding of Ramalinga’s message. In 1882, Velayuda presented his new interpretation; he published a longer statement in the official journal of the Theosophical Society to introduce Ramalinga’s universalist message:

Among many other things he [Ramalinga] preached ... that the distinction between races and castes would eventually cease, and the principle of Universal Brotherhood be eventually accepted, and a Universal Brotherhood be established. ... In the year 1867, he [Ramalinga] founded a Society, under the name ‘Samarasa Veda Sanmarga Sangham’, which means a society based on the principle of Universal Brotherhood, and for the propagation of the true Vedic doctrine. I need hardly remark that these principles are identically those of the Theosophical Society.<sup>239</sup>

This remarkable statement sees Ramalinga’s teachings in line with a universal religious outlook when it interprets its core as the “principle of

<sup>234</sup> See the article of Peter Schalk ‘Sustaining the Pre-Colonial Past’ in this volume: 106–130. See also Bate 2005, who looks into the concept of religion that Arumuga adopted.

<sup>235</sup> See Raman 2002.

<sup>236</sup> See Raman 2002: 193.

<sup>237</sup> Raman 2002: 193–194.

<sup>238</sup> For quotes in *Siddhanta Deepika* where Arumuga and Ramalinga are called the two founders of the Saiva Siddhanta revival see, for instance, 10 (1909/1910) 254, and 11 (1910/1911) 262. For Maraimalai’s appreciation of Ramalinga, see Vaitheespara 1999: 321–331, 416–418, 440–441.

<sup>239</sup> *The Theosophist* 3 (1881/1882) 243. The whole text is on pp. 243–244 under the heading “Coming Events Foretold”, and is reprinted in Adigal 1975: 611–616. It is also partially quoted in Raman 2002.

Universal brotherhood”, and when he identifies it with the teachings of Theosophy, which are exemplary for the concept of a universal religion.<sup>240</sup> When this statement was published, Velayuda, who was working as Tamil pandit at Presidency College, and thus had some social standing, had already officially joined the Theosophical Society. He was not the only follower of Ramalinga who reached out for contacts with the Theosophical Society. Henry Olcott (1832–1907), the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, met “certain disciples and near relations” of Ramalinga in Bangalore in 1886, who apparently all supported this universalist and Theosophical interpretation of his message.<sup>241</sup> We also know that Casava Pillai, Inspector of Police in Nellore and prominent member of the Theosophical Society in the early years, had been deeply influenced by Ramalinga and was a friend of Velayuda.<sup>242</sup> Unfortunately, we do not have more information about these Theosophical Ramalinga followers. There are some indications that, in the 1880s, the Theosophical Society had many leading Tamil members of Vellalar or Chettiyar (Tam. ceṭṭiyār) background. This changed later on<sup>243</sup> and, during the 1890s, the Brahman domination, for which the Theosophical Society is now famous in the Tamil context, became slowly established and many of the early Vellalar and Chettiyar members were forgotten.

The universalist claim of Velayuda caused a harsh and strict refutation from the Brahmanical side. It was written by N. Chidambaram Iyer, who was a sympathizer of the Theosophical Society, a regular contributor to *The Theosophist*, and who especially appreciated Theosophical help in reviving Hinduism.<sup>244</sup> One of Chidambaram’s major arguments was that the notion of a universal religion necessarily needs the idea of an impersonal God, which Ramalinga did not teach but which Velayuda wrongly

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<sup>240</sup> Up until today, there is no scholarly study on Ramalinga, but Srilata Raman has recently worked on him (see Raman 2002) and plans to publish a monograph. The following interpretation keeps to Velayuda’s interpretation and does not go back to Ramalinga’s message itself. However, for an interpretation of the ambiguous terms ‘samārasa’ (Tam. camaracam) and ‘san-mārga’ in Ramalinga’s works, see Dayanandan Francis 1990: 33–36. For the teachings of Theosophy on universal religion see, for instance, Campbell 1980; Figl 1993.

<sup>241</sup> See *The Theosophist* 7 (1885/1886) 747. See also Olcott 1895: 386–391 for a visit of Olcott to Bangalore, where he probably met the disciples and relatives of Ramalinga.

<sup>242</sup> See R. Casava Pillai: How a Hindu of Madras Interviewed a Mahatma at Sikkim. In: *The Indian Mirror* (Calcutta) Vol. 25 (1885) March 3, p. 2, and March 7, p. 2 (quoted from <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/pillai.htm>, 08/2008).

<sup>243</sup> Browsing through the journal *The Theosophist* shows that, in the 1880s, numerous ‘Pillais’ and ‘Mudaliars’ were mentioned, which abruptly stopped in the 1890s.

<sup>244</sup> As this source is still unknown but very important for the understanding of Ramalinga’s legacy, it will be reprinted in Appendix I: 359–368. Chidambaram Iyer became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1883 and died in 1892 (see *The Theosophist* 13 [1891/1892] xlviiii).

implied that he did. Velayuda had characterized Ramalinga's understanding of God as: "that what men call 'God' is, in fact, the principle of Universal Love – which produces and sustains perfect Harmony and Equilibrium throughout all nature"<sup>245</sup>. Chidambaram understood this as an impersonal concept of God and confronted it with a contrary statement from one Venkatesa Iyer, whom he called the "most important Chela of Ramalingam Pillai, in fact one of the very few that even now strictly adhere to the instruction of the Guru"<sup>246</sup>. Chidambaram thus contested the privileged disciple status of Velayuda with the supposedly higher authenticity of Venkatesa Iyer, who had written in a letter to Chidambaram:

He never said there was no personal God. He said there was but one God; that that God possessed all the attributes ever assigned to him by man in word or thought, and many other attributes; that the world was governed by persons chosen by Him for the purpose, and that he was one of the chosen few.<sup>247</sup>

Chidambaram used the testimony of Venkatesa to prove that Velayuda was wrong in implying an impersonal understanding of God in Ramalinga's message:

The reply [of Venkatesa], however, shows that Ramalingam was a firm believer in a personal God and that he wanted to assume the position of a Saviour of mankind. ... Far from the views of Ramalingam Pillai being 'identically those of the Theosophical Society', you will observe that there is not one important point about which both parties would mutually shake hands; or one common ground except perhaps as to the obnoxious distinctions of caste in which Ramalingam Pillai was naturally much interested for this plain reason, viz., that he occupied, though by accident of birth, the lowest round of the ladder, or, in other words, he was a Sudra.<sup>248</sup>

This strong statement by Chidambaram could be interpreted as claiming, in no uncertain terms, Brahman superiority over religious questions. Venkatesa, the Brahman disciple of Ramalinga, was much more trustworthy than the Vellalar Velayuda, the "Sudra" (Skt. śūdra, Tam. cūttirar) disciple. The claim for universality was reduced to a "Sudra" protest against caste discrimination. Ramalinga is painted as a popular Bhakti saint who believed simply in a personal God, but went a little bit over the top with the claim that he is the saviour of mankind. However, the idea of universal religion could not be derived from theistic Saivism and the latter was also incompatible with Theosophy. It is interesting to note that in an editorial comment, probably written by Henry Olcott or H. P.

<sup>245</sup> *The Theosophist* 3 (1881/1882) 243; Adigal 1975: 612.

<sup>246</sup> *The Theosophist* 4 (1882/1883) 62. See Appendix I: 365.

<sup>247</sup> *The Theosophist* 4 (1882/1883) 61. See Appendix I: 361.

<sup>248</sup> *The Theosophist* 4 (1882/1883) 63. See Appendix I: 365.

Blavatsky (1831–1891), the other co-founder of the Theosophical Society, Velayuda was defended by stating that Ramalinga's message was, in principle, in harmony with Advaita Vedanta:

Since the above article was put in type Mr. Chidambaram has kindly sent us for inspection an original copy of a Tamil handbill (Notice) issued by Ramalingam about 10 years ago, together with his (Mr. C's) English rendering of the same. We find upon a careful examination of the Tamil what seems unquestionable evidence that the famous Sadhu believed in the God of the Adwaites, i. e., a non-personal Universal Essence ...<sup>249</sup>

It is most remarkable that Velayuda, in his rejoinder, did not take sides between a personal or impersonal understanding, but tried to bring both together. The English summary of a Tamil letter written by him to the editors of *The Theosophist* contains the following passage:

It is nowhere pointed out in the Pandit's [i. e. Velayuda's] sketch that Ramalingam Pillai ever said that there is not a Personal God. Here may be [Velayuda] adduced in favour of the statement "That what men call 'God' is, in fact, the principle of Universal Love," a stanza from 'Thirumanthiram' ... "The ignorant say that Love and Brahmam are different. None know how love becomes Brahmam. After knowing that love is Brahmam one becomes absorbed in love and Brahmam." This is also shown in Ramalingam Pillai's works, viz., 'Arulperum-jothi Akaval' &c. Nothing more is said in the sketch [i. e., Velayuda's first statement in *The Theosophist*] about a personal God.<sup>250</sup>

This debate between Chidambaram and Velayuda already showed up the difficulties of how to articulate a universal claim and maintain a theistic concept of God. As has been seen, this was a major theme in Nallasvami's writings, who even quoted the same famous verse from Tirumantiram, when he tried to explain that God is both nirguna and saguna in Saiva Siddhanta.<sup>251</sup> In this manner, then, the circle around Velayuda prepared the way for Nallasvami's later discussion about Saiva Siddhanta as a universal religion. Whether Nallasvami was personally aware of Velayuda's activities is not known, but it is likely, not least because Nallasvami had some contacts to Theosophical circles, though Nallasvami does not refer to Velayuda and Ramalinga in his writings. In any case, Velayuda's example shows, at least to some extent, that the concept

<sup>249</sup> *The Theosophist* 4 (1882/1883) 61 note. See Appendix I: 361.

<sup>250</sup> *The Theosophist* 4 (1882/1883) 63. Appendix I: 366. The English text, as related in a footnote, is "freely translated [from Tamil] into English by G. Subbiah Chetty Garu, F. T. S. who speaks in the third person." Soobiah Chetty (1858–1946) was one of the early non-Brahman members of the Theosophical Society (see Sarada 1991). The quote is from Tirumantiram 270, and one should note that the original has Siva (Tam. civam) instead of "Brahmam".

<sup>251</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1911m: 300; Nallasvami Pillai 1911p: 354.

of Saivism as a universal religion had already been part of the religious discourse in South India before Nallasvami.

Chidambaram's "Sudra" reference also hints at the later divide between non-Brahman Tamil Saivism and Brahman Neo-Hinduism and Theosophy. Velayuda himself also anticipated this later development. Though he argued against all castes in confrontation with Chidambaram and proclaimed Ramalinga's message as a universal one, he was, at the same time, a leading figure in a petition by Madras Vellalars to the census commissioner, which demanded that the Vellalars be granted a Vaisya instead of Sudra status.<sup>252</sup>

### *Theoretical implications*

#### Orientalism and colonial discourse

Several groundbreaking studies have shown how the Western colonial representation reshaped Indian society in the 19th and first half of the 20th century.<sup>253</sup> The case of Nallasvami shows, in an exemplary fashion, how the Saiva Siddhanta revival was embedded in the colonial discourse. Western concepts of religion and the Orientalist representation of Hinduism and Indian traditions shaped the debates on Saiva Siddhanta, and any articulation that wanted to be heard had to relate to them. However, there is a danger in this approach, as it might too easily rely on a dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized as something that shapes the discourse; whereas this dichotomy, in a strict theoretical sense, can only be understood as nothing more than being itself a discursive effect that needs critical treatment. As Stoler and Cooper have pointed out:

Scholars need to attend more directly to the tendency of colonial regimes to draw a stark dichotomy of colonizer and colonized without themselves falling into such a Manichean conception. ... How to demarcate the boundaries of the 'colonizers' and analyse how those boundaries were produced is proving as elusive task as probing the multiple layers of oppositional discourse and politics. ... It does us no service to reify a colonial moment of binary oppositions ...<sup>254</sup>

It is in relation to this that Homi Bhabha has pointed to the hybridity of the colonial encounter.<sup>255</sup> With regard to South India, Eugene Irschick has even tried to go one step further by viewing the colonial discourse as a

<sup>252</sup> See Velayudam Mudaliar 1880.

<sup>253</sup> See, for instance, Inden 1990; King 1999; Dirks 2001.

<sup>254</sup> Stoler and Cooper 1997: 3, 8, 9.

<sup>255</sup> See Bhabha 1994.

multifaceted phenomenon to which all participants contribute.<sup>256</sup> Irschick was heavily criticized for calling this process “dialogue”,<sup>257</sup> and one could indeed get the impression that he downplays the basic insight that any identity or subject positioning is an effect of power. However, in the same way, the dichotomous identity of colonizer and colonized is a product of the relationship of power. The critique of Irschick’s dialogue concept, then, is itself in danger of constituting a step backward, towards reification of this dichotomy as constitutive of the colonial discourse and providing it with an external, extra-discursive framework, or, in other words, with what Derrida criticises as a “transcendental signifier”. As Laclau and Mouffe have shown, on the one hand, identity positionings lead to dichotomies, as they demand an empty signifier to close the endless play of signification and, in that process, a negative “other” necessarily emerges. However, on the other hand, they have also pointed out that these dichotomies are always fragile and open to the subversion of the signifying processes by its participants; and it is this latter aspect that requires major attention in order to trace the discursive dynamics of power struggles.<sup>258</sup>

The South Indian situation, especially, demands a careful and cautious investigation. Ravindiran Vaitheespara has argued that, here, the list of the colonized is broadened into Brahmans and non-Brahmans, and the Orientalists into Sanskrit Orientalists and Missionary Tamil Orientalists.<sup>259</sup> Since this does not fit into the common scholarly view, which relies only on a simple dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, be it conventional history or Postcolonial theory, the “Dravidian movement ... is still largely presented as an aberrant if not peculiar phenomenon”<sup>260</sup>. However, this broadening is also dependent on Western Orientalist representations and needs to be looked at critically. Perundevi Srinivasan has warned that scholars on Tamil Saivism in colonial South India often assume dichotomies, like Non-Brahman Tamil / Dravidian Saivism versus Brahman Aryan / pan-Indian Advaita Vedanta as essential, “with the assumption that the chasm lying between the constructed categories is natural and forever”<sup>261</sup>.

However, at the same time, it is important to acknowledge the “reality” of these constructed categories, as they have constituted the hegemonic discourse in the South Indian Tamil context since the 1920s. Nallasvami’s universal claim for Saiva Siddhanta did not win general recognition. It

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<sup>256</sup> See Irschick 1994. See also the article of Andreas Nehring ‘Performing the Revival’ in this volume: 12–29.

<sup>257</sup> Dirks 2001: 303–314.

<sup>258</sup> See Laclau and Mouffe 1991.

<sup>259</sup> See Vaitheespara 1999: 1–24; Vaitheespara 2006.

<sup>260</sup> Vaitheespara 1999: 3.

<sup>261</sup> Srinivasan 2006: 239.

was defeated by the rival claim of Neo-Hinduism to be the universal and representative religion of India. Neo-Hinduism fitted Western Orientalist representations and won a pan-Indian following among Indian English educated elites, who came from Brahmanical traditions or who looked at them as religious benchmarks. This also explains well why Nallasvami's concept of Saiva Siddhanta, as a universal religion and fulfilment of the Hindu tradition, did not attract much attention in the academic study of Hinduism – it simply did not fit into the established dichotomies, broadened or not. The result was a marginalization of Saiva Siddhanta. Mariasusai Dhavamony, in 1971, characterized this very well:

One reason for this neglect [of Saiva Siddhanta and other theistic traditions] is that in India with the rise and spread of Neo-Vedāntism, which champions the cause of the advaita in order to suit the purpose of being as a sort of universal religion syncretising in itself all other great religions, bhakti was accorded a lower status ... Till recently the opinion prevalent among Westerners about Hindu religion was ... that its central idea is non-dualism. Hence, the theistic current in Hindu sacred writings which supplied the intellectual framework for the bhakti cults was thought to be of little consequence in the history of Indian religions.<sup>262</sup>

On the other hand, the Vellalars and other non-Brahman Tamil elites chose to follow an anti-Brahman agenda, which favoured a Tamil nationalist instead of a universal reading of Saiva Siddhanta; hence, Nallasvami's universalist approach fell also into oblivion here. However, it is not the scholarly task to reproduce the history of the victors but to recover the complexity of identity positions of the past. Any discourse is an articulation by *all* its participants and, in order to recognize its complexity, we need to reconstruct as many voices in it as possible. Neglecting the universalist position of Nallasvami does not do justice to the complex power struggles in colonial South India, or to the different strategies of Vellalar elites to come to terms with increasing Brahmanical domination in colonial society. The Tamil nationalist interpretation of Saivism was not the only option. One should also be aware that any scholarly critique of Tamil Saiva nationalism automatically undermines historically legitimated Vellalar-representative claims, and might itself be nourished by opposing interest groups, be it Tamil Brahmins, Tamil Dalits or Western researchers. There is hardly any escape from power struggles when it comes to identity representations,<sup>263</sup> but what is needed is an explicit reflection on these dynamics.

<sup>262</sup> Dhavamony 1971: 3.

<sup>263</sup> As this matter is highly sensitive and emotionally loaded, I purposefully resist giving references. However, the whole issue of representation in current scholarship on the Tamil context would need more explicit attention.

## Invention of tradition?

The concept of universal religion is a product of the 19th century which took shape within Western debates on religion and became globalized in the wake of Western imperialism. This constellation is often understood as the imposition of something foreign onto an indigenous tradition, but behind this argument lies a notion of authenticity that cannot be upheld within an approach based on discourse theory. The colonial discourse is the constitutive framework for all participants and it is made up of their articulations; it is not a neutral meeting place for negotiation between previously separate and essentially different traditions. However, an important question remains: to what extent is Saiva Siddhanta's appropriation of the concept of universal religion shaped by its specific context? What Christopher Bayly has stated with regard to nationalism could also be applied to the concept of universal religion – as far as the 'theory' is concerned, continuity with concepts of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition would not be a necessary condition for the emergence of the nineteenth-century concept of universal religion in the Tamil Saiva context. It does not need to have been born out of some earlier and similar concepts of religious universalism. This does not mean that such traditions could not have existed, or that it is unimportant when they existed. Traditions have unintended, unexpected and sometimes profound consequences.<sup>264</sup> The important point here is that the role of tradition has to be specifically and strictly established historically. It is clear that Nallasvami, like Vivekananda, used traditional inclusive models to back up a universal claim. These inclusive models expressed the superiority of Saiva Siddhanta or Advaita Vedanta in relation to other Indian schools and they were then applied to the relationship to other religions. We have seen how Nallasvami took one of his definitions of true religion as that "which does not conflict with this religion and that, and yet reconciles all and stands supreme in the conscience of man" from a traditional Saiva Siddhanta source, but also how he transformed its meaning for a modern purpose.<sup>265</sup> In the same way, he took over the Saiva Siddhanta understanding of the four paths, but interpreted it in a new way. The question to what extent these traditions referred to have influenced Nallasvami's concepts, is a matter of assessment and not a matter of principal, as long as it is accepted that these traditional concepts have been reinterpreted by the Saiva Siddhanta revival. Nallasvami was also deeply influenced in his

<sup>264</sup> Bayly 2004: 219. The following paragraph contains mainly verbatim quotes from Christopher Bayly's discussion on nationalism applied to the concept of universal religion. For better readability the direct quotes are not highlighted.

<sup>265</sup> See on page 52.



interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta by the Saiva pandits of his generation. He had a certain preference for Sivagnana Siddhiyar as an authoritative source, and he wrote in the introduction to his translation of the text:

Our Pandits fall shy generally of Sivagnanabotham, but this work [Sivagnana Siddhiyar] is more popular with them; and its words and phrases thoroughly permeate their speeches and writings, and one feels so far quite at home in Siddhiar, when one takes it up, after an acquaintance with writings and speeches of our Pundits [sic].<sup>266</sup>

In order to assess Nallasvami's dependence on the pandits, one would have to analyse his references to Saiva Siddhanta texts for their possible relation to established pandit interpretations of the time. Before that can happen, more scholarly research is necessary regarding the Saiva Siddhanta pandit traditions in 19th-century South India. A good start would be, for instance, an analysis of the 19th-century commentary on Sivagnana Siddhiyar by Subrahmanya Desikar, from the Thiruvadathurai Mutt.<sup>267</sup>

However, one has also to keep in mind that a strict historical approach has to be open to surprises with regard to specific traditions. It is a salient feature of Nallasvami's argument that he distances himself from Advaita Vedanta and claims the right understanding of advaita for Saiva Siddhanta. This claim assumes a clear demarcation between Advaita Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta, but it is probably the Saiva Siddhanta revival itself which produced these clear cut boundaries, since there is plenty of evidence that the boundaries were somewhat blurred in the time previous. This phenomenon needs further investigation in future research. Karl Graul, director of the German Lutheran 'Leipzig Mission' and one of the early Western Tamil scholars, reported in 1855 about a Saiva Society that existed in Madras for some years and which held monthly meetings with lectures on Saiva classics. In relation to this "a Saiva Saint" (Germ. ein Saiva-Weiser) complained about the growing dominance of Smarta Brahmans who taught Advaita Vedanta among Tamil Saivites:

They [the Tamil Saivites] think, the Advaita teachings and Saivism belong together, and the Smarta-Brahmans are nothing else than Saiva-Brahmans. That is why the Vellalar and other castes put aside their Saiva-Visishtadvaita books and study the Advaita texts, under the delusion that the latter contain the truth. They [the Smarta Brahmans] get quite a few proselytes here in the South among the Saivas – they draw them slowly away from the mandatory customs of their Saiva

<sup>266</sup> Nallasvami Pillai 1897–1902: 3:5.

<sup>267</sup> See Devasenapatti 1960: 14–15.

books, get them used to their own customs, and deprive their previous gurus of their entire income.<sup>268</sup>

This conflation of Advaita Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta goes back at least to the 18th century, when the famous Tamil poet, Tayumanavar (Tam. tāyumāṇavar), whose poetry stands in between several different streams of Saiva and non-Saiva traditions, suggested a synthesis between Saiva Siddhanta and Advaita Vedanta, and coined the phrase “Vedanta-Siddhanta-Sama-Rasa” (Tam. vētānta cittānta camaracam/ harmony between Vedanta and Siddhanta).<sup>269</sup> Tayumanavar was arguably one of the most popular Tamil Saiva poets of the 19th and early 20th century.<sup>270</sup> Nallasvami quoted regularly from his poems and called him “our saint”<sup>271</sup>. However, the Vivekananda follower, Rajam Aiyar, also highly appreciated Tayumanavar and understood him from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta.<sup>272</sup> These different receptions of Tayumanavar at the beginning of the 20th century somewhat echoed the earlier conflation of both traditions. It was also echoed in Nallasvami’s incorporation of Srikantha’s Sivadvaita Vedanta into his interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta, which he learnt from Venkatagiri Sastrigal, a Brahman scholar from Trivandrum, whom he called both “a Siddhanthi” and “follower of Sri Kanta Charya”<sup>273</sup>. Moreover, the only known commentary of Srikantha’s system was written in Sanskrit by Appayya Dikshita (1552/53–1624), who apparently combined the basic convictions of Advaita Vedanta with the theistic concept of Saiva bhakti:

As an advaitin release meant for him realisation of identity with Brahman; but this is not to be, so long as there continues in the world even a single unredeemed soul. Till the final release of all, individual release is but the attainment of being of Īśvara.<sup>274</sup>

In the late 19th century, it appears that this kind of hybridity was felt as problematic. In 1901, *Siddhanta Deepika* reported that the “exposition by the same man [Appayya Dikshita] of two apparently opposed systems [Advaita Vedanta and Saivism] has given rise to a great amount of debate and it is one of the vexed questions ever cropping up in the vernacular

<sup>268</sup> Graul 1854–1856: IV.155. Perhaps the society is Saiva Siddhanta Sangam, with Ramasami Kavirayar as president, founded 1829 in Madras (Blackburn 2003: 109). See also Nehring 2003: 262.

<sup>269</sup> See Isaac Tambyah 1925: xxii–xxx; Purnalingam Pillai 1929: 306–307; Lehmann 1935: 7–12; Shulman 1991.

<sup>270</sup> See Lehmann 1935: 12–14.

<sup>271</sup> See, for instance, Nallasvami Pillai 1911a: 3; Nallasvami Pillai 1911b: 34.

<sup>272</sup> See Aiyar 1946: 14; Blackburn 1998: 160.

<sup>273</sup> See Nallasvami Pillai 1984: ix, see also Vaitheespara 1999: 163.

<sup>274</sup> Suryanarayana Sastri 1974: 4.

religious papers”<sup>275</sup>. This again shows how new boundaries became established that were, perhaps, formerly blurred. Even the reception of Vivekananda and his message among Tamil Saivites in Ceylon hints at this constellation. Vivekananda received a warm reception from Tamil Saivites at the Saiva Paripalana Sabai of Jaffna in 1897.<sup>276</sup> Tamil Vellalars had apparently also no difficulty in founding a ‘Vivekananda Society’ in Colombo in 1902, which laid much stress on Saiva traditions and Saiva Siddhanta. It is reported from the year 1907 that there were weekly classes on Sivagnana Botham under one R. C. Kailasa Pillai Mudaliar; and a member wrote to *Siddhanta Deepika* that he would be writing a paper on Tayumanavar, who “will be portrayed as the latest exponent of Siddhanta, preaching the quintessence of Vedanta”<sup>277</sup>. It seems this reconciliation with the Advaita Vedanta of Vivekananda’s Neo-Hinduism lasted for quite some time, at least in the Ceylonese context. However, when S. Sabaratna Mudaliyar presented a paper on “The Advaita Philosophy” before the Vivekananda Society in 1911, he claimed that “pure Vedānta is Siddhānta”<sup>278</sup> in the sense that only the Saiva Siddhanta and not the “Māyāvādins” have an acceptable idea of advaita, and that “Māyāvāda” is nothing short of “Pantheism”<sup>279</sup> and its “theory of illusion” is unacceptable. His argument followed that of Nallasvami in nearly all details, but he was explicitly polemical against Vivekananda, which Nallasvami always avoided:

No doubt, Svāmi Vivekananda was a great Sannyasin, and I may say, a great scholar too. So I may say of Sri Sankarāchārya also, whom I may even call a much greater man than Svāmi Vivekananda. But truth is truth and facts are stubborn, and I should not feel nervous to speak out what I think to be the truth.<sup>280</sup>

At least at this point, the chasm between Saiva Siddhanta and Neo-Hinduism was firmly established in the Ceylonese context too.

This should again make it clear that locating Nallasvami’s concept of universal religion within the colonial discourse must also take into account his rootedness in the Indian traditions and their possible influence. However, the relevance of these traditions has to be shown in a strictly historical way and must not be apriorily assumed. Hence, this exposition of Nallasvami’s thought has put great emphasis on the sources

<sup>275</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 4 (1900/1901) 196.

<sup>276</sup> See Sitrapalambam 1994: 16.

<sup>277</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 8 (1907/1908) 225.

<sup>278</sup> *Siddhanta Deepika* 12 (1911/1912) 308.

<sup>279</sup> See Sabaratna Mudaliyar 1911/1912: esp. 309. 389–395. See also Sabaratna Mudaliyar 1913: 26, 28, 58–59.

<sup>280</sup> Sabaratna Mudaliyar 1911/1912: 395.

used by Nallasvami – to show how a comprehensive historical approach can be translated into concrete research.

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