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Sustaining the pre-colonial past: Saiva defiance against Christian rule in the 19th century in Jaffna

Introduction

The present formation in Jaffna (Tam. yāḻppāṇam, īlam[1]), of the caste system, the religious ritual performance among Saivas (Tam. caivar, Skt. śaiva) and Christians, and the educational system are, in part, results of the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial administrations (1504–1948). In this article, with special regard to Saivism (Tam. caivam), I shall focus on the 19th century, which falls within the period of the British colonial administration (1815–1948). The major figures of Saivism in Jaffna from the 19th century will be presented. They were guided by Arumuga Navalar (Tam. āṟumuka nāvalar, 1822–1897). Based on his works, I shall show how the followers of Saiva Siddhanta (Tam. caiva cittāntam, Skt. śaiva siddhānta) among the Vellalars (Tam. veḷḷāḷar), led by Arumuga, tried to defend and sustain a continuous tradition of Saivism based on the Agamas (Skt. āgama, Tam. ākamam) against the attacks of Christians and against the rise of alternative elites among Tamil speakers. One particular way of achieving this was by employing ritual formalism and traditionalism as indicators of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. I shall conclude by analysing Arumuga's network of thought, which connects concepts of Saiva Siddhanta with those of class, caste and ethnicity, though not with race. Arumuga, in contrast to the later Sinhala-Buddhist reformer in the South, Anagarika Dharmapala (Sinh. anagārika dharmapāla, 1864–1933), did not use racial and racialist categories.

Yāḻppāṇam is Tamil. In Singhalese, the city is today called Yapanaya and in English Jaffna. When speaking about Jaffna (yāḻppāṇam / yapanaya) today, we may refer either to a district, to a town in the wider non-technical sense, or to a Government Agent Sub-Division (SD) within Jaffna town. There is another neighbouring SD called Nallūr which shall also occupy us. It should always be made clear, when speaking of Jaffna, which area is intended.

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[1] *Īlam* is the Tamil toponym for the whole island along with *ilankai*; *īlam* should be distinguished from *tamiḻīlam*. For these terms and other toponyms for the island see Schalk 2004b.

The oldest references – in the form of a 1435 inscription from Tirumaṇikuli of the name of the town Jaffna, which is also mentioned in the literary work *Tiruppukaḻ* by Aruṇakirinātar from the 15th century – are South Indian. The town's name has been the subject of foundation myths based on speculative associative etymology. The age of the name is of course not the same as the age of the town, which is older. Up to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1621, Jaffna was an independent Kingdom[2] with a military presence in Vaṉṉi, fighting with the Kings of Nuvara (Kandy) for control of economic products, not least of elephants which were shipped from the Jaffna coast to South India and South East Asia. The Portuguese and Dutch included Jaffna in their administration, which comprised mainly of the coastal areas. The alleged range of political influence of the former Kingdom of Jaffna, together with the language geography of Tamil, is today the basis for the projection of the borders of the new state of 'Tamiḻīlam' by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In 1658, the Dutch took over the administration of the Portuguese, including Jaffna and the great fort built and finished by the Portuguese in 1636. The Dutch promoted the material interests of the Vellalar caste und used them in a divide-and-rule-policy. From the Dutch period stems the 19th century Vellalar opinion that the Jaffna district is the homeland of the Vellalars.

The British conquered the whole island in 1815 and in 1833 it was re-organised into an integrated system of administration areas. This was the precursor of the formation of the unitary state of the post-colonial government in the Constitution of 1972. The one-nation Sinhala-Buddhist state of Lanka (Sinh. laṃkā) is a post-colonial construction that has exercised a strong influence on succeeding governments.[3]

In 1827, 123 188 people were registered by the British in the Jaffna District, of which only 844 lived in Jaffna town. Statistics were not yet perfected at this period, but they do provide a rough guide to size. The largest caste in the district were the Vellalars, with 45 651 members, while the Brahmans (Tam. pirāmaṇar, Skt. brāhmaṇa) had 1 935. Of the total population, 15 359 were classified as "slaves" ("Covias", "Nalluas", "Pallas", slaves of the Burghers). Regarding religion: Protestants numbered 839, Roman Catholics 9 201, "Mahometans" 2 166, and "Heathen"

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[2] For the Kingdom of Jaffna see Pathmanathan 1978: Part 1 (circa A. D: 1250–1450); Pathmanathan 1974; Pathmanathan 1979; Gunasinghe 1978. For the controversy among historians about this Kingdom, see Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2007: 191–259.

[3] For the formation of Sri Lanka as a colonial nation state, see Fernando 2008.

[= Saivas] were 110 982.[4] This slave based society was part of the living conditions when Arumuga was born in 1822 into a Vellalar clan.

The castes of Jaffna

Still today, we can identify about 20 interacting castes in the Jaffna district, all with precursors in the colonial period. We have to focus on this caste reality in order to understand, for example, the past and present official statistics about land distribution and landownership. Also, aspects of religious organisation were and still are, in part, determined by caste organisations. True, there is a strong resistance against caste formation, not only from the government, but also from human rights activists, Saiva and Bauddha enthusiasts, the present Dalits, and not least the LTTE. It has organised a program against *cāti* 'caste' including *cītaṉam* 'dowry'.[5] In the beginning of the 19th century, however, the caste system, including slavery, was unquestioned and spilled over even into the Christian mission.

Given the intensive tradition of dedication to education, the Jaffna district has had high literacy. The Christian mission had a decisive influence on the expansion of educational institutions from the 19th century on, but it was only in 1974 that the University of Jaffna was founded. The delay was due to political controversies.

The 18th and 19th-century official lists of castes enumerated about 50 interacting castes.[6] The reduction today to about 20 can be explained by the formation of mega-castes, by different ways of counting castes, and by the effect of the appearance of anti-caste ideologies.[7] Today, the Vellalar caste should be viewed as a mega-caste, which has included people of other castes that have disappeared as autonomous institutions.

Castes presented themselves to the public in the 19th century by showing their caste marks.[8] The most important caste, because of its numerical dominance of almost 50 % of the population, formerly and now, is the caste of the Vellalars, 'cultivators', which constitute the landowners', not

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[4] *Return of the Population of the Island of Ceylon.* Compiled from the Separate Returns made by the Collectors of Districts to the Commissioner of Rebenue, in Pursuance of an Order of Government Bearing Date 27th January 1824 (Colombo: Government, 1824).

[5] For the social programme of the LTTE see Schalk 2007b: 31, 39, 46–48, 58, 102, 113.

[6] For a published list established by the Dutch in 1790 see Raghupaty 1987: 208–210. For the 19th Century see *Return of the Population:* 69–70. For the functioning and interaction of castes in the 20th century see Holmes 1980: 221–232, and David 1977: 203.

[7] For the formation of mega-castes see Holmes 1980: 236–237, and for the different ways of counting castes see Holmes 1980: 206.

[8] D'Alwis 1874. David 1977: 183–184.

the land labourers' caste. The term *veḷḷāṇmai* means 'cultivation'. The caste mark of the Vellalars is given as the standing brass lamp[9] or as the two-leaved lotus.[10] Jaffna was and still is an agricultural society, where control of land is the key to social control. Today, not all Vellalars are landowners. Some of them are proletarised and others have professions, which have nothing to do with landownership. In exile, the function of being a landowner has often become obsolete, but still, caste identity is kept alive, especially at times of marriage.

In 1824, the Jaffna district had the highest number of slaves in the island in proportion to its population, 12.46 % (Trincomalee 6.91 %, 0.28 %, Galle 0.18 %, Mannar 0.33 %, Cilau 0.15 %).[11] It is not clear whether these numbers refer to 'house people' or to 'slave people' or both (see below).

We have to consider that the South Indian castes are generally classified as *śūdra* in a pan-Indian perception, transmitted and upheld especially by sanskritised Brahmans in South India. This is a powerful and unshakable pan-Indian classification going back to the *Dharmaśāstras*. There is little possibility for the Dravidian 'Sudras' (Skt. śūdra, Tam. cūttirar) to eliminate this or to undermine it by social climbing. This acceptance of being a Sudra has been internalised.[12] This internalising may not indicate an ambition for social climbing to the observer, but it does. It is a clear demarcation against the untouchables. This internalisation points at what the Dravidians are not. The Vellalars try to delimit themselves against those belonging to the fifth caste, which is the outcastes, the modern Dalits. They are, for example, *vaṇṇār*, washermen, *ampaṭṭar*, barbers, *naḷavar*, toddy tappers, *paḷḷar*, low caste worker, and *paṟaiyar*, drummers. These and some other castes were in the *tēcavaḷamai*, the customary law, classified either as *kuṭimakkaḷ*, 'house people', servants to the Vellalars, or as *aṭimakkaḷ*, 'slave people' like the *kōviyar*, family slaves, *cantar*, slaves in public service, *nallavar*, toddy tappers, and *paḷḷar*, family labourers to the Vellalars.[13]

The 'house-people' sold their labour to chosen or inherited Vellalar families for money or kind, sometimes lifelong. We would call this system bonded labour. The 'house-slaves' were forced to sell their body and life to the landowner. They were part of his property. Today Īḷam is ruled by Roman-Dutch law and the *kuṭi-* and *aṭimakkal* rhetoric is obsolete, but there is still bonded labour in Jaffna in a legal grey zone. It

[9] Raghavan 1954: 139.
[10] David 1977: 183.
[11] See *Return of the Population*.
[12] See Pfaffenberger who correctly applies the *śūdra* label in the title of his book: Pfaffenberger 1982.
[13] On *kuṭimakkaḷ* see Raghavan 1954: 140–150.

should be mentioned that the social formation of Singhalese-Buddhist speakers is also related today to a caste system of their own. This plays a role in the formation of Buddhist monastic orders and in the identification of individuals in marriage pools, which includes the transfer of property by a system of dowry.

The Vellalar expansion in the religious sphere is limited by the Brahmans who of course are not classified as Sudras, but the Vellalars, with Arumuga in the forefront, who sustained the Agamas, have insisted upon a special consecration as Kurukkal (Tam. kurukkaḷ) that enables even Vellalars to serve in Agamic temples (Tam. kōyil). These Kurukkals compete with the Brahmans for positions in Agamic and non-Agamic Saiva temples (kōyils).[14]

A caste consisted and still consists of several *pakuti*s, 'sections', 'portions', 'allotments', 'divisions'. These are local organizations. Each consists of grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, and their children, as a minimum. We would call it an extended family based on kinship, contrasting to assembled extended families based on friendship or common interest. Tamil speakers use the term *kuṭumpam*, 'household'. Its unity is usually demonstrated at the occasion of a marriage, and in the homeland even at death. It functions as a marriage pool. It is the *kuṭumpam* that sanctions the choice of partner, which again is decisive for the future of the couple and for their relations to the other members in the same *kuṭumpam*.

An important observation made by Karthigesu Sivathamby (Tam. kārttikēcu civattampi) is that *kuṭumpam* and *pakuti* overlap.[15] As castes are endogamous, the *kuṭumpam* is a guarantee for partners to be part of the same *pakuti*. As can be expected, arranged cross-cousin marriages are idealised. Dysfunctional love marriages are discouraged. This household system is not abolished in exile. It lingers on in a different way. Geographical distances are overcome by letters, faxes and emails that connect uprooted and dispersed 'households' all over the globe and even reach Jaffna in 'the motherland'. The *kuṭumpam* also lingers on as attractive fiction in romantic and nostalgic films and narrations.

One metaphorical Tamil word for 'wife' is *kuṭumpam*. The wife not only symbolizes the *kuṭumpam*, she is it. *Kuṭumpam* used for 'wife' is employed in spoken language and is even preferred to the pedantic *maṇaivi*, 'wife'. The use reflects the strength of endogamy and the aversion against exogamic relations. It is interesting to see that, where a *kuṭumpam* based on kinship is missing, another secondary *kuṭumpam*

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[14] For Tiruñāṉacampantar see Schalk 2004a: 126–127, 177–178.
[15] Pfaffenberger speaks in this connection of micro-castes each of which jockeys for higher rank. See Pfaffenberger 1990: 186.

based on a common interest is formed. Temple communities today in exile sometimes form themselves in such a way.[16] The fact that a fictional *kuṭumpam* is invented if there is none shows the strength of this social formation that was and is the basis of caste in Jaffna. The strength of the *kuṭumpam* is also visible at funerals. It is the *kuṭumpam* that mourns. The LTTE has coined the expression *māvīrar kuṭumpam* for the clan of the killed fighter when mourning and grieving its 'Great Heroes' who died in battle for the establishment of 'Tamilīḻam'. The fading away of the *kuṭumpam*, due to social reform based on an individualised economy, will be the final blow to the caste system based on clans with a common economic interest.

In Jaffna, some of the temples were and still are run by a *pakuti* and on this social basis an annual religious *tiruviḻā*, 'holy festival', is organized in the villages lasting 1–15 days. Big festivals were and are organized by several *pakutis* of the same caste group. In a Vellalar village, for example, subordinated minority castes like *kōviyar*, the servants of the Vellalars, or the *karaiyār*, the fishermen, hold their own *viḻā*. If there are several *pakutis*, they elect a coordinator or elderman, who, as a symbol of his position, performs the ritual *tarppaipōṭutal*, 'wearing of the [sacrificial] grass'. It is formed to a ring that he wears on his right ring finger. This grass is usually used in purification rituals; in Sanskrit it is known as *dharbā*. The leader of the *pakuti* practising *tarppaipōṭutal* may demonstrate the purity of the *pakuti*. The same ritual was and is practised in another context in the temple. The annual *viḻā* is a social event, where a *pakuti*'s status is demonstrated. Village problems are discussed, or the possibilities of marriage are examined.

In Jaffna the annual *viḻā* was and is still based on caste distinctions, but to avoid caste conflicts, different castes have their own *viḻā*. There was a movement in the 1960s and 1970s called "the temple entry movement" that was mobilised by untouchables in Jaffna;[17] its aim was to allow all lower castes to enter higher castes' temples. The Māviṭṭapuram temple was the symbolic bastion of attack. The movement was allegedly unsuccessful,[18] though I would argue that it was partially successful. The organising of the movement was a way of solving internal problems of a social split within the community of Tamil speakers, with the unexpected and undesired help of the external enemy, the Government of Sri Lanka. It had interfered already in 1957, under the banner of human and civil rights, with the *Prevention of Social Disabilities' Act* to prevent caste dehumanisation, and rejected in 1968, on this basis and with reference to

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[16] See Schalk 2007a.
[17] Paffenberger 1970.
[18] This is the evaluation in Sivathamby 1990.

the problem in Jaffna organised by the temple entry movement, the application of the Federal Party for autonomy. Bryan Pfaffenberger's comment on this is relevant: still in the 1960s, at least part of the Vellalar community regarded the peninsula to be in essence a Vellalar preserve and relished partition as a means to stop the Colombo Government's intervention in pursuit of 'social reform' in Jaffna. This is true also in 2008, but we have to consider this part of the Vellalar community as a marginalised elite.

I referred above to the *tēcavaḻamai* as meaning 'custom of the country'. It contains customary law for the Jaffna district.[19] The Dutch administrators interviewed local chiefs and slaves and put in writing this law in Dutch in 1707, but it was retranslated into Tamil by twelve leading *mutaliyār*, 'headmen'. The Dutch introduced changes and so did the British later, who also made a new translation into English from the Dutch code. Section 4 in the formulation from 1707 says that all questions that relate to those privileges that subsist in the said province between the higher castes, particularly among the "Vellales" on the one hand, and the lower castes, particularly the "Covias", "Nalluas" and "Palluas", on the other, shall be decided to the said customs and the ancient uses of the province. During the time of Arumuga the *tēcavaḻamai* was still in use, with the exception in the part on the above section concerning slavery which was abolished by the British in 1844.[20] This was a turning point for the Vellalars, where they lost control over parts of the caste-system and were unable to prevent social climbing and stop the formation of the Vellalars as a mega-caste.

The Dutch had exploited caste divisions, from which the Vellalars had profited, in the agricultural sector, especially in the cultivation of tobacco for export. During the British administration, international competition meant less profits on the tobacco market. Many Vellalars adapted to these circumstances and combined agriculture with new sources of income: English education that generated mathematicians, engineers, medical officers, lawyers, civil servants and politicians. The 'Colombo Tamil' was created, who had his residence in Colombo but still had a side income from his properties in Jaffna. It is this Tamil living in Colombo, recruited from the English educated elite in Jaffna, that has formed the image of the Tamil speaker who in disappointment of losing his privileges takes up arms against the Government of Sri Lanka. Even critical scholars took over this stereotyped and generalised image about Tamil speakers, suppressing thereby the fact that most of them belonged to a landless proletariat, suppressed by the Vellalars, by the British colonials

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[19] For the history of this customary law see Tambiah 1958.
[20] Jayapalan n. d.

and by the Government Agents of the Governments of Sri Lanka who in Jaffna applied the laws of the central government. 1844 was a moment of choice among Tamil speakers to be for or against colonial culture in the cultural sector, including also the influence of Christianity in the educational field.

The Vellalars tried to indicate that they are *sat-*, 'true', which implies that the other castes belonging to the Sudra group are not *sat-*.

They are *a-sat*. This distinction was used by Arumuga, who, following an older tradition, did not relate it to specified castes, but to moral behaviour. Yet, as behaviour was related to caste, his classification was indirectly caste related. Sudras drinking liquor and eating meat were *a-sat*. The distinction was then applied to non-Vellalars, especially to proletarians who were connected with hard labour like the *nalavar* and *paḷḷar* and those engaged in killing. Such a caste is for example the *karaiyār*, fishermen, with a strong position in and around Valveṭṭitturai. In spite of reforms still, in 1967, only 17 % of all temples in Jaffna were open to all castes.[21]

In the 20th century, low-castes were still not allowed to live near a temple, to draw water from the wells of high-caste families, to enter public places like a barber shop, laundries, cafés or use a taxi, to keep women in seclusion and protect them by enacting domestic rituals, to wear shoes, to sit on bus seats, to register their names properly so that social benefits would be obtained, to attend school, to cover the upper part of the body, to wear gold earrings, if male, to cut their hair, to use umbrellas, to own bicycles or cars, to cremate the dead, and to convert to Christianity or Buddhism.[22] Other references to harassments against low castes by the Vellalars have been collected by Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam.[23]

Saiva Vellalar xenophobia

In turning to the 19th century we are faced with a complete dominance of Christian educational institutions; we have to search for Saiva and secular educational institutions. In 1816, American Missionaries were welcomed by the British Governor and only ten years later they had established a considerable mission in Jaffna consisting of hospitals and schools. This included the famous Batticotta (Tam. vaṭṭukōṭṭai) Seminary for collegiate education, with a dominance of students from the Vellalar caste, and an

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[21] Pfaffenberger 1994: 143.
[22] For caste discrimination see Holmes 1980: 232–234.
[23] Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1993: 253.

emphasis on female education in the Girls School in Utuvil.[24] Arumuga, whose life work was influenced by Vellalar caste interests, reacted by establishing Saiva schools with a dominance of Vellalar students and his younger follower, Ponnambalam Ramanathan (Tam. poṉṉampaḷam rāmanātaṉ, 185–1930), started in the spirit of Arumuga the Ramanathan College which was the first school for Saiva girls situated not far from Utuvil, where the competing Christian school was situated. The Catholics, who had arrived already in 1621 in Jaffna, had 23 Catholic schools with 424 students in 1828.[25] Well-known schools are St. Patrick's College, established in 1850, and Holy Family Convent, a girl's school founded in 1862.[26] Dennis Hudson has pointed out that Arumuga wanted to prevent a development in Jaffna that had occurred in Tirunelveli, South India, where the Protestant mission had succeeded in converting a group of Vellalars and had formed a Christian caste of its own.[27] This intention is however not made explicit by Arumuga himself, though it can be reasonably ascribed to his way of thinking. Indeed, the Vellalar religious unity based on Saivism split already during the life time of Arumuga into a Christian and a Saiva section. The real threat emanated from those Christians who, after conversion, rejected or neglected the caste system.

In the second half of the 19th century a protest movement arose in Jaffna among a Saiva elite against the dominance of especially Christian education and Christian polemic against Saivism. The protest was not prospective, millennaristic or revolutionary; it was retrospective by turning towards sustaining an idealised pre-colonial past, and by erecting this past as a wall of defence and protection against the alleged threatening and foreign elements of spiritual culture that were presented by the Christian part of the colonial administration. An already existing Vellalar xenophobia was intensified.

The knowledge about this ideal past was not based on historical-critical studies of pre-colonial society, but on a Puranic tradition of narration, especially from the Tamil *periyapurāṇam* and the *kantapurāṇam* that identified as ideal rulers saints or at least saintly kings. Sainthood was the ultimate ideal. This past was part of aesthetics and religion; it was virtual, not differentiated and therefore not real, but exactly this constituted its seductive strength among some intellectuals in the 19th century in Jaffna. I would not call them nostalgics; they did not believe in a *paradise lost*.

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[24] Sivathamby 1992; Pathmanathan 1986; Pathmanthan 1995.
[25] Sivathamby 1979.
[26] For the development of Catholicism in Yalppanam see Jayaceelan 1995; Sabaratnam 1995.
[27] Hudson1995b: 108–109.

They believed in a *paradise sustainable*. They saw themselves as actors, not as victims, but they had to pay a price for their defiant retrospection.

This reacting protest was proportional to the way dominance had been established by the colonial administration, not by violent extinction of Saivism as did the Portuguese, or by systematic suppression and segregation of Saivas in the colonial administration as did the Dutch who however exempted the Saiva Vellalar elite from this discrimination. The British established an inclusive domination of Western Christian culture over the local Saiva culture by making competent elites, among them Saiva elites and other competing possible elites, participate in, make use of and benefit from the material exploitation of the colonial administrative system. The defiant protest by de-monopolised Saiva Vellalars took therefore no violent anti-British forms, but had a clear and determined two pronged strategy in verbal communication: first to demonstrate the old age and highest value of Saivism to both Christians and apostates from Saivism to Christianity by presenting and cultivating Saivism in a specific sectarian interpretation of Saiva Siddhanta from the pre-colonial period, and second, to try to prevent the rise of new elites by sustaining the present elite's caste hierarchy, not least by a self-representation through ritual formalism and traditionalism. The top of this hierarchy were the Tamil educated pandits of the Vellalar caste, whose marker and self-image was Saiva Siddhanta as doctrine-and-ritual. They tried to prevent the undermining of Saiva Siddhanta (= of Vellalar ideology) in Jaffna by emerging competing castes, by the split of the Vellalars, and by the formation of the Vellalars as a mega-caste (but their efforts ended in their marginalisation in present Jaffna society of the 20th and 21st centuries). Arumuga gave this movement a special twist to which I now turn.

Most Tamil speakers in the whole of Īḷam belong nominally to his school of Saivism known as 'Caivacittāntam' in Tamil, 'Śaiva Siddhānta' in Sanskrit.[28] The present Western observer may evaluate it as both esoteric and eccentric, but it was not harmless seen from a social and political point of view. The tension between Agamic / non-Agamic was 'connected' with the pairings of both high caste / low caste and Tamil / non-Tamil in a series of persuasive identities (example: "a genuine Tamil is a Vellalar and his religion is Agamic Saivism"), or in persuasive homologies (example: the status relation of a genuine Tamil is that of a Vellalar to a low caste and of an Agamic to a non-Agamic form of Saivism, Vaishnavism [Tam. vaiṇavam, Skt. vaiṣṇava], or Christianity). The protesting movement was a "historic bloc" in the Gramscian sense (see below) that tried to cement the hegemony of Saiva orthodoxy in combi-

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[28] Jaffna University has produced its own scholars in Saiva Siddhanta. See, for example, Nāṉakumaraṉ 1995.

nation with caste and ethnic consciousness both in a doctrinal and ritual discourse.

In Arumuga's work is a promotion of the interests of the Vellalars. This is not explicit in his texts, but explicit is his promotion of classical *varṇāśramadharma* in, for example, his work *civālaya-taricaṇa-viti* (see below), where *dharma* is understood as Saiva *dharma*. In his prescription, each caste has its proper way of worshipping, which implies caste segregation in the temple and among temples.

Arumuga Pillai

Arumuga Pillai (Tam. ārumuka-p-piḷḷai) is known also as *nāvalar*, 'the orator', with the extended connotation of 'the learned', or simply as Arumuga Navalar Avargal (Tam. ārumuka nāvalar avarkaḷ).[29] A common honorary high-sounding title in Tamilised Sanskrit is *śrīlaśrī ārumuka nāvalar*. There is, of course, a Navalar road in present Jaffna and a special sanctuary for him close to the Nallūr temple to venerate his memory.[30] An annual Navalar 'solemnity' (Tam. nāvalar viḻā) is organized among his supporters even in exile. In 1971 the Government of Ceylon issued a stamp to commemorate him, and in 2003, in a period of cease fire, his 181st birthday was celebrated in Jaffna by his followers. When public commemorative monuments are erected over a person it is usually to save him from oblivion among the masses.

There are several images of Arumuga. The first image of him is as a saint following in the footsteps of the Nayanmars (Tam. nāyaṉmār*)*. Some of his dedicated admirers depict him verbally and visually as one of the followers of the Nayanmars, the Saiva leaders of *patti* (*bhakti*) whose biographies are summarized in the *periyapurāṇam*, one of Arumuga's favorite texts. He is depicted as a Saiva saint with *kṣavaram* 'tonsure', *tiripuṇṭaram* 'three marks' and *rudrākṣa* 'Rudra's eyes', which refers to a chain of beads. In a side sanctuary of the Nallur temple in Jaffna town he is depicted in a statue as if he was one of the Nayanmars among Nayanmars. On stamps and pictures distributed today he is almost one of the Nayanmars which is not completely absurd: his connecting of Tamil with Saivism goes back to Campantar.[31] Arumuga tried to associate himself

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[29] His life and work has been described many times. Ambalavanar 2006: 6–14; Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2007: 141–167; Hudson 1995b; Hudson 1992b: 51; Hudson 1992a; Hudson 1995; Kailasapathi 1979; Pathmanathan 1986; Pathmanathan 2003; Perinpanayagam 1988; Sivathamby 1995; Sivathamby 1979.

[30] A picture of this sanctuary with the statue of the Nāvalar is in Schalk 2004a: 243, picture 41.

[31] See Schalk and Vēluppiḷḷai 2002: 430–445.

closely with the pre-colonial period in South India in the manner of a pious theologian; he seems to have 'gone native' by identifying himself with an idealized past, but traditionalism does not in all its forms exclude transformation of its content or of its form. There is no such thing as a *frozen* tradition, except for in ideological historiography with vested interests. Devadarshan Ambalavanar has rightly pointed out that in this image is included a consciousness of change: the historical Nayanmars hold palm leave books in their hands, but Arumuga is depicted with an open printed book. According to Devadarshan Ambalavanar there was an element of colonial modernity combined in his traditionalism to go public, in his case to go public with Saivism as as counter measure to the dominance of Christianity.[32] The image of him as a Nayanmar is and should be modified, but not disowned. It was part not only of Arumuga's self-understanding, but can also be used as an interpretative model by the historian for understanding him. I have come to the conclusion that Arumuga was not only traditionalistic, having a dedicated commitment and attraction to the past, but that he also was traditional, being a representative of a continuous past going back in certain aspects to the Nayanmars.

A second image presents him as being heavily influenced by colonial modernity. It ascribes to him the consciousness of a Vellalar climbing the social ladder within the colonial system, dependent on keeping an open mind for education, especially in English. Along with opening schools in Tamil medium, it is pointed out that he personally engaged in the formation of a school in Jaffna using English medium (but they do not say that his attempt was a failure). Arumuga realized, reportably, that for the Vellalars to survive, they had to adapt themselves to a certain degree to new circumstances introduced by the British. He taught himself and his followers to distinguish between the beneficial colonial administration and the destructive Christian mission. The element of co-operation with the central and centralizing worldly authorities consisting of Singhalese-Buddhist speakers is allegedly characteristic of him and his followers, especially with his promotion of the politician Ponnambalam Rama-nathan. Ponnambalam Ramanathan's strategy was to highlight the bless-ings of British Rule,[33] but at the same time to pinpoint the intolerance of the Christian mission.[34] This was allegedly also Arumuga's main strategy. What Ramanathan stood for is ascribed to Arumuga.

The historian Sivasubramaniam Pathmanathan (Tam. civacuppira-maṇiyam patmanātaṉ) has pointed out that Arumuga did not exhibit anti-

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[32] Ambalavanar 2006: 24, 152, 221, 405, 411.
[33] Ramanathan 1929: 30, 41, 76.
[34] Ramanathan 1929: 85–88.

British sentiments. Arumuga even believed the British Government had a capacity to govern the colonial subjects in accordance with the principles of natural justice.[35] Moreover, to substantiate this image of a modernising reformer, Arumuga is depicted as the creator of modern Tamil prose, the user of the printing press, the taking over of preaching, the promoter of girls' education, and of singing hymns like Christians, and the creator of a 'catechism'.[36] All this does not fit into the image of him being a follower of the Nayanmars.

This image is evidently not painted by historians with knowledge about pre-colonial Tamil culture, which could provide a differentiated background to these examples of Arumuga's dependence of colonial culture.[37] When discussing whether Arumuga was a reformer or sustainer, it is necessary to approach the subject as a historian with a solid knowledge of the pre-colonial period. There are some critical scholars, including myself, who interpret these elements as the result of a sustained pre-colonial past.[38]

The real problem is what 'inspired by Christianity' means. If it means learning from Christianity something new for Saivism, I must reject this statement, but if it means to be inspired to look for similar elements in the Saiva past, I agree. Arumuga looked for arms that could beat the enemy, the enemy's own arms. Christianity was an awakener that made Arumuga search for similar elements in the Saiva past pertaining to doctrine-with-ritual and to methods of propaganda. I say similar, not identical, because it is evident as shown by Bernard Bate that, for example, the pre-colonial *piracaṅkam* 'preaching' and Arumuga's colonial *piracaṅkam* were at variance.[39] It can be shown that his 'monotheism' is a sustainment of an Agamic modalistic image of a god from the pre-colonial period that is similar but not identical with a strict monotheism.[40] To sum up, in the past, Arumuga found elements *similar* to monotheism – the singing of hymns and preaching, etc. – but he paralleled them, he did not adopt them, to Christian forms knowing that they were effective in his campaigns. Parallels never meet. His pragmatism did not change his traditionalism.

Another image of Arumuga was painted to counteract the criticism of him for being a representative of a hegemonic caste and that his hidden

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[35] Pathmanathan 2003.

[36] See, for example, Bate 2005.

[37] See, for example, the many works by Ālvapiḷḷai Vēluppiḷḷai on *caivam*, *cainam* and *pauttam*. Example: Vēluppiḷḷai 1990.

[38] Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2007: 147–162. See also the main thesis in Ambalavanar 2006.

[39] Bate 2005. For the *piracaṅkam* see also Young and Jebanesan 1995: 177–180.

[40] See Schalk 2004a: 90.

agenda was to promote this caste within the colonial administration. Instead, he is depicted without a hidden agenda as a purely *religious* reformer of Saivism which also includes elements of charity. This image was introduced by Ponnambalam Ramanathan in 1884 when he remembered Arumuga shortly after his demise in 1879 as "the champion reformer of Hindus in the Northern Province".[41] This characterization was again taken up as a title in V. Muttukumaraswamy's biography in 1965, *Sri La Sri Arumuga Navalar. The Champion Reformer of the Hindus.* The same author summarized this biography in a booklet in 1971 which has been distributed in both Tamil and English, thereby cementing the image of Arumuga as an idealistic 20th-century religious reformer fighting immorality.[42] The profile of this image is not only that Arumuga was open to British colonial modernity, but also that his intention was *religious* only, not socio-economic. His caste basis and caste interest are played down or hidden away. When he is said to fight social vices it is exemplified by meat eating and drinking alcohol, not about the economic exploitation of man by man in a system of bonded and slave labour.

In this image the element of fenced Saiva sectarianism is also not mentioned. Saivism has traditionally 16 sects and only one is promoted by Arumuga. Jaffna has a strong group of Virasaivas (Tam. vīracaiva, Skt. vīraśaiva) who have been marginalized.[43] Vaishnavas were despised by Arumuga. Jainas (Tam. caiṉa, Skt. jaina) were subject to disgust. Folk religion was condemned.[44] Therefore, not even his religious program is given in its totality.

His sectarian views on Saivism have been idealized by a group of pandits even today who involve the public in seemingly endless discussions about what is Agamic and non-Agamic. These discussions are coded forms for manifesting social stratification. The model case is the discussion of the Nallūr temple started by Arumuga's criticism of it for being non-Agamic.[45] Devadarshan Ambalavnar has made a meticulous examination of Arumuga's argumentation and has come to the conclusion that Arumuga's argumentation preserves – or as I say sustains – a pre-colonial tradition and that the temple committee that believes itself to be Agamic is dependent on non-Agamic reforms introduced in the colonial period.[46]

The activity of these *paṇḍitar* provokes the rise of critical voices against Arumuga and his legacy, above all from the Tamil left. They

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[41] Ramanathan 1929: 86.
[42] Muttukumaraswamy 1971.
[43] See Schalk 2004a: 83–88.
[44] For folk religion, see Shanmugaratnam 1990; Susindirajah 1999.
[45] For a presentation of this case, see Pathmanathan 2006: 336–374.
[46] Ambalavanar 2006: 384.

criticise Arumuga's dedication to the upper caste [= upper class]. Other critical voices are the Virasaivas, and also some few Christians who fight still active intolerant sectarianism and casteism – with and without ultimate hidden religious and political motives.[47]

This image of Arūmuga as a purely religious reformer is unhistorical. Caste was part of Arumuga's concept of religion when he accepted the concept of *varṇāśramadharma*. His Vellalar based negative evaluation of other castes is also evident. His caste agenda was not always hidden. To this we can add his covering metonymic language that makes his soteriology imply caste. He used the coded, specialized, seemingly apolitical, metonymic language of a Saiva theologian who speaks about social experiences of conflict in the hierarchical caste system in metaphors of a graded and hierarchical soteriology. The experience of social stratification is reproduced in terms of a graded and stratified soteriology. Soteriological terms are used to generate a semantic change from the social / political to the spiritual, thereby eliminating contingency about the former. One can refer to fire by speaking about smoke. This kind of metonymic language is typical for a traditional Gramscian intellectual who avoids confrontation and looks for consensus.

I suggest that we see Arumuga as a typical Gramscian traditional intellectual. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) examined especially the role of education in the formation of hegemonic groups and focussed upon the role of intellectuals. Some function as traditional and others as organic intellectuals. The traditional intellectual is allied with the dominant ideology and the ruling class. In Arumuga's case this is his Vellalar base in co-operation with the colonial administration, as illustrated by his promoting of Ponnambalam Ramanathan. In contrast, the organic intellectual belongs to an ascending class where he is formed and therefore is 'organic', genuine or authentic. Characteristic for a traditional intellectual is also his avoidance to identify himself with a specific group being allegedly above and beyond specific class interests. His language is coded. I have not yet found a passage where Arumuga identifies himself as *veḷḷāḷaṉ* (Vellalar). Arumuga, as a traditional intellectual who goes for consensus, saw himself as Saiva and the people as Saivas which seems to be specific, but which is not. There are 16 Saiva sects and Saivism was the ocean of Tamilness for him. Tamil Saivism ("Caivam") is a label not only for a religion, but also for a historic bloc (see below). In contrast, an organic intellectual honors his own caste-class identity.

The traditional intellectual attempts to establish and to maintain a distinction, difference and segregation between their *alta cultura* and 'the people's' *cultura populare,* which he does not acknowledge in its own

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[47] See Hoole n. d.

right, but as serving the elites. The distinction is, in our case, expressed in the caste system and in a parallelized graded soteriology. An organic intellectual strives to overcome these differences by generalizing popular culture, when necessary, by a revolution. By introducing the concept of a Gramscian traditional intellectual it becomes clear that the attempt to depict him as a religious reformer only is an act of traditional intellectualism.

A fourth image has tried to affiliate him to specific political interests and make him an organic intellectual who, on the side of the people, initiated the present freedom struggle of the Tamil speakers. Attempts have been made to make him a Tamil patriot and connect him with the present Tamil Resistance Movement as precursor. In 1986, when the 107th Arumuga 'solemnity' (Tam. nāvalar viḻā) was observed, even in exile among Tamil speakers, the well-known lawyer Krishna Vaikunthavasan (Tam. kiruṣṇa vaikuṇṭavācaṉ) from London presented Arumuga as a patriot and freedom fighter to whom tribute should be paid by full support of the militant movement.[48] It should be noted that Vaikuntavācaṉ was not part of the Central Committee of the LTTE, or had any official function within the LTTE, but was a supporter who like many dedicated supporters allegedly can read the mind of Velupillai Prabhakaran (Tam. vēluppiḷḷai pirapākaraṉ, 1954–2009). The LTTE leadership is, however, alienated to Arumuga's program. Vaikunthavasan's exploitation of Arumuga's name for specific political ends is based on a misunderstanding of both the nature of thought of Arumuga and of the Tamil Resistance Movement. Arumuga's alleged seminal thoughts for the LTTE's cause can be easily declared void. His caste interest is counteracted today by the Tamil Resistance Movement. Also, his loyalty towards a central Government with a centralised political administration is contradicted. His was no political programme. He had no ethnic understanding in political terms or in territorial terms of a Tamil motherland / homeland, a federal or independent state. His adept follower, Ponnambalam Ramanathan, tried later in the 1920s to knead a homeland concept, but this step was never taken by Arumuga. The use of violent revolutionary means was alien to him. His contribution to an awakening of Tamil consciousness was seen from the ebony tower of Vellalar consciousness. His defiance was an expression of a class / caste specific Saiva Vellalar self-assertion. Evidently, he and his followers thought it possible to maintain some of the privileges from the Dutch period. This self-assertion again was not directed against Singhalese speakers or against the colonial system, but above all against Christians, Christian Vellalars and non-Vellalars, within his own society

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[48] Vaikunthavasan 1986. There are more instances like this documented in Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2007: 142–143.

of Tamil speakers. Tamil speaking Christians were not only different believers, but also possible competitors within the caste system. Both were threatening the privileged position of the Vellalars from the period of the Dutch administration on. To sum up, I share the evaluation of Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam that there is no straight line from Arumuga to recent aspirations for Sri Lankan Tamil independence,[49] if 'straight line' means a teleological development predetermined already in his alleged seminal thinking. What happened in the 20th century in the Tamil Resistance Movement was and is mainly determined by the British political administration of selected preferences of ethnicities according to their usefulness and by successive Sri Lankan Governments' insisting on a formation of a unitary state.

Formalism and traditionalism in Arumuga's works

Arumuga's mission to sustain, from the Dutch period on, the social-economic privileges of the Vellalars and their Saiva ideology of dominance was supported not least by his religious program in sustaining an Agamic past. I focus here especially on Arumuga's norms for Agamic ritual performance in Arumuga's texts. One is from 1873 and called *Caiva Question-Answer* (Tam. caiva-viṇā-viṭai*). It is a small but 'loaded' book in two parts that is constructed in the form of questions and answers, like the Protestant catechism of Martin Luther. Therefore, a popular but also misleading 'translation' of *caivaviṇāviṭai* is 'Saiva Catechism', which is given even in the *Tamil Lexicon*. To give an example from the book: the first section is called *kaṭavul iyal*, ["the nature of the god"], and the first question and answer in this section is *ulakattukkuk karuttā yāvar?*["Who is the maker (creator) of the world?"] *civaperumāṉ* ["Siva, the Great"].[50]

Another important source for us is Arumuga's *civālaya-taricana-viti* ["The (Proper) Way to Worship at Siva's Abode (= temple)"].[51] Both books are excellent sources for a general study in ritual formalism and traditionalism, which hand in hand were means to achieve his aim. The formalisation of ritual counteracts attempts to change and to bind the involved to an acceptance of a social hierarchy. Traditionalism of ritual is

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[49] Hellmann-Rajanyagam 1989: 235.
[50] Navalar 1993. For predecessors and successors of this book see Young and Jebanesan 1995: 180–181.
[51] The "Catechism" is not yet translated, but *The (Proper) Way to Worship at Civaṉ's Abode (= temple)* is translated by Dennis Hudson in Hudson 1995a.

here part of a process to legitimate the positioning of the Saiva Vellalars on top of the caste hierarchy.

The framing as rituals by Arumuga of certain acts which seem secular to us, like urinating, reveals an interesting aspect of his thought. Arumuga believed in the power of rituals, in their ability to empower the ritual performer, provided the rituals are correctly executed. The reward is *puṇṇiyam* 'merit' which is a help in soteriological climbing. Arumuga saw it as his responsibility to inform the public about these rituals as assistants to salvation within a complex system of Saiva Siddhanta. He collected, from the tradition, prescriptions and proscriptions and published them in schoolbooks. These belong to a space other than the temple. They belong to a public space. It is the great merit of Devadarshan Ambalavanar to have demonstrated convincingly this specific adoption by Arumuga of colonial modernity, the shift from private to public space.[52] This adoption is not comparable to the saying *new wine, old bottles*, but is an example of the saying *old wine, new bottles*. True, the space is shifting and we can discuss further whether the content is affected from this shift, but Arumuga's stand is clear. He thought that the shift would not change tradition, but would lead to its spread. His acceptance of the printing press is therefore not a sign of becoming modern, but is an intensification of the spread of tradition, more specifically of a "historic bloc" in the Gramscian sense. In Gramsci's view, any class that wishes to dominate in modern conditions has to move beyond its own narrow 'economic-corporate' interests, to exert intellectual and moral leadership, and to make alliances and compromises with a variety of forces. Gramsci calls this union of social forces a "historic bloc". This bloc forms the basis of consent to a certain social order, which produces and re-produces the hegemony of the dominant class through a nexus of institutions, social relations and ideas. The historic bloc in the case of Arumuga was religion, Saivism, which he hoped to develop under the protection of the colonial administration and its modern school system on the basis of a system of social relations that we know as the caste system dominated by the Vellalars.

The two books prescribe in detail ritual behaviour in what is believed to be the tradition of the Agamas from the 12–14th centuries. In the given context of confrontation with Christianity we face a set of rituals expressive of retrospective defiant resistance against the efforts by the Christian mission and its supporters among Tamil speakers who allegedly were undermining 'pure' Saivism as the dominant ideology of the Vellalars. The two books were still used in schools up to the 1960s when the Government of Ceylon nationalised schools and introduced

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[52] Ambalavanar 2006: 24, 221, 152, 405, 411.

schoolbooks controlled by a centralised administration in Colombo. Still today individuals of the generation that went to school up to the 1960s know by heart sections of these books. The rise of the Tamil resistance movement in the 1970s made these books an anachronism.

I shall now give some examples from the books, with reference to their formalism that reflects their particular style and genre. It should be noted that all the contained prescriptions are given without explanation. The first example refers to the right way of using *vipūti,* which is holy ash to be used as prescribed in the *caiva-viṉā-viṭai* first part, chapter 3. We do not learn any paradigmatic or aetiological myth that 'explains' religiously the use of *vipūti.* Arumuga does not appeal to a pious or rational under-standing, but to the obeying of the authority of tradition. He gives orders. What follows is my summary of a part of this section.

Vipūti should be kept in a *campuṭam,* [a little silk bag or brass cuplike vessel] for smearing. One should smear it, facing the North or the East, taking care not to drop it on the ground. One should face upwards and uttering "Siva Siva", take the *vipūti* in the three central fingers of one's right hand, and smear it on one's forehead. One should smear it before going to sleep, after getting up from sleep, after washing one's teeth, while the sun rises or sets, after bathing, before and after meals. If one receives an *ācāriyār* 'teacher' or a *civaṉaṭiyar* 'devotee of Siva' one should worship them thrice or five times, bowing down and prostrating in front of them, and get up and receive the gift of *vipūti* with both hands. Then one should worship the masters as before. One should smear *vipūti* not facing them, but facing opposite to them. One should smear head, forehead, chest, navel, two knees, two shoulders, two elbows, two wrists, the left and right sides of the back between the shoulder blades, lower vertebral column, neck – 16 parts in all. Some leave out the back between the shoulder blades and mention the two ears. Some leave out elbows and wrists and have 12 places. The length of the *tiripuṇṭaram* on the forehead is from one extreme end of an eyebrow to the other. It is wrong to have longer or shorter marks. On the chest and the shoulders it should be six inches. There should be one inch space between each line. One line should not touch the other, etc. ...

It is understandable that Arumuga dedicates three pages to the art of applying *vipūti* and that he dedicates several pages to the art of carrying a *liṅkam.* It is however puzzling why he prescribes in detail the way how a male orthodox follower of Saiva Siddhanta should go to the toilet. A Saiva should rise two hours before the sun, and ease and purify himself at once. The place should be a hundred bows distance from a temple. The act must be done in silence, with the cord place on the right ear and the body covered from head to waist. If it be day-time, the person must face

north, if night, the south. He must ask the gods of the place to retire by clapping his hands thrice. He must not look at the sun, moon, fire, cow, Brahmans, those waring the Saiva insignia, or women. He must keep his eyes fixed on the tip of his nose. He must not yawn, sneeze, or spit. The gods curse an uncovered head that will be split into a hundred fragments.[53]

The point here is that even in an extremely private situation there should be a consciousness of being a follower of Saiva Siddhanta. There is no private or reserved sphere that suspends the dedication to Siva. The other point is that these actions are framed as rituals which qualifies them – correctly performed – as instruments for gaining merit.

We can interpret the formalism and traditionalism of Arumuga as ways of defending orthodoxy, which refers here to the doctrinal teaching about the image of Siva and soteriology of Saiva Siddhanta in accordance with the Agamas. Orthopraxis refers to the correct ritual performance within Saiva Siddhanta in accordance with Agamas. Saiva Siddhanta has strong roots in this special collection of 28 texts from the pre-colonial period known as Agamas. They come under the category of Tantric texts. They prescribe what to believe according to Saiva Siddhanta, how to live and how to perform the rituals correctly. What is 'Agamic' is regarded as orthodox. Most of these texts in their Tamil version appeared in the 12th to 14th century AD in South India, and influenced the development of Saivism in Īlam, too, not least through the work of Arumuga. Elsewhere, in 2004, I described Arumuga's work in relation to the South Indian tradition[54] and came to the conclusion that Arumuga, in contrast to Dharmapala, is traditional. Devadarshan Ambalavanar has also convincingly delivered an arsenal of arguments for that stand in 2006.[55] I see Arumuga as a Gramscian traditional intellectual whose tradition is not religion alone but a "bloc" of religion and specific caste interests.

Conclusion

The complexity of the hybrid Jaffna caste system demands an analysis. A caste in Jaffna is similar, not identical, to a class. A Tamil caste's dominance is founded not mainly on religious status like the varna (Skt. varṇa), but on economy, more specifically on landownership, and also on size. It deviates from class in its insistence on endogamy and in its fatalism that lets the status of birth determine an individual's destiny. The

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[53] For a complete translation see Young and Jebanesan 1995: 181.
[54] Schalk 2004a: 88–95.
[55] Ambalavanar 2006: especially chapter VI.

economic foundation of landowning makes the Vellalars the dominant upper-class and the *aṭimakkaḷ* and the *kuṭimakkaḷ* suppressed landless classes. In order to uphold this class system on the moral and emotional level and to legitimate it, notions from the varna system have been introduced, like the concepts of purity and pollution as separators of social strata. This includes also notions in popular and official religion in the form of a ritual system of sacrifices that establishes the greatness of the Vellalar patron and the humble status of his servants and retainers.[56] Furthermore, there is the strong connection of caste to the extended family system under the name of *kuṭumpam,* whose solidarity is symbolised in religion in the form of a clan temple. Finally, there is the Vellalar specific doctrine that cast stratification, resulting in Vellalar hegemony in Jaffna, is an authentic expression of Tamilness including Saivism. The stratification of caste becomes a mirror of soteriological climbing. It also introduces a connection between social stratification and ethnic consciousness. The Jaffna caste system in the form of a purified Vellalar tradition, in the footsteps of Arumuga, is an attempt to unite religion, language, class, caste and ethnicity on to a caste hierarchy as a model for the lower castes. After Arumuga some leaders added the concept of race. Today this hybrid system is still upheld by a small group of Saivas who, however, in the context of the development initiated especially by the LTTE, appear as sectarian and atavistic.

In the case of the Buddhist Dharmapala we can safely say that he was not traditional, but that he was traditionalistic. He retrieved from the past of the Vamsic tradition elements which he connected with the modern development to facilitate its acceptance among Singhalese-Buddhist speakers, but he was not traditional in the sense that he was an exponent and representative of an unbroken Vamsic tradition. The Vamsic tradition had been reinvented by colonial historians first in the middle of the 19th century. In the 18th century the *mahāsaṃgha* had to travel to Siam to renew its lineage of the initiation of monks. Dharmapala was fundamentally a modernist, holding industrialising Japan as a model for the development of the island. He 'pasted' Vamsic references and allusions onto his program for modernity to legitimise its introduction in a conservative Buddhist society.

In contrast, Arumuga was not only traditionalistic, he was traditional also. He did not retrieve and paste, together with a group of Tamil intellectuals he sustained from the pre-colonial past a transmitted and still existing world view from the Puranic and Agamic tradition, which had been made available orally and in manuscripts for centuries, and in publi-

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[56] For more on this, see Pfaffenberger 1982 and an abridged version in Pfaffenberger 1984: 17–18.

cations in print in the 19th century. In his case, modernity in the form of English colonial culture was forced upon him as a necessity for the survival of Vellalar hegemony in a colonial setting, but he used it selectively for his own purposes. He placed traditional Saiva education into the colonial school system. He remained like one of the Nayanmars living in the 19th century. He was not modern like "Colombotamils" settling in Colombo as Ponnambalam Ramanathan did, enjoying the benefits of colonial material culture, or like Dharmapala who had ideas about development through industrialisation, or like Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883) who searched and found modern telecommunications and gravitational attraction mentioned in the Vedas. Arumuga realised that modern techniques like the printing press and a new public space like the school – even if they were not mentioned in the Tamil Vedas – could help him to sustain the past as a model for the present, not for the past's own sake, but because it contained what he as a traditional intellectual believed to be an empowering soteriology. He poured old wine into new bottles. This is how a tradition can be sustained when encountering changes. Some may call this a modernisation of tradition; I call it the sustenance of tradition.

Arumuga never went outside the Tamil language area. His knowledge about Europe was based on his studies of classical antiquity and of the early Christian tradition. He developed a pre-colonial native mentality. Coming too early for modernism actually saved him from becoming an anti-Sanskrit Tamil language purist and biological racist like some later Tamil leaders of the South Indian Dravidian movement and like the movement of the Singhalese-Buddhist Dharmapala. Language purism and racism became part of colonial modernity towards the end of the 19th century. Arumuga, however, has paid a price for his sustaining of tradition: his ideas today are a sectarian and exotic atavism in Jaffna marginalised by the LTTE, the Tamil left, the Dalit movement and democratic forces.

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