*Foreword*

# SPEAKING OF BARNEY BATE

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Barney, as all his friends will emphatically agree, was an animated conversationalist. But our first meeting was rather quiet. We met at a cinema hall in Madurai, toward the end of 1992, to watch Kamal Haasan's *Thevar Magan* (dir. Bharathan). Barney had apparently been told that I did not like to be distracted when watching a movie, and I had in turn taken him for a serious Chicago academic who did not entertain idle talk. When we soon became thick friends spending long hours chatting—in his adopted hometown of Madurai, in Tirunelveli, in Chicago, and at Yale University—we laughed heartily at this misunderstanding. These memories well up in me as I struggle to write this foreword, made poignant by the knowledge that, of all his friends and interlocutors—and Barney had many—he chose to dedicate this book to me.

Barney's reputation preceded him—as a white man who spoke Tamil like a native and as a scholar fascinated with platform speaking. He was one of the earliest anthropologists whom I knew and from whom learned much about how anthropologists work in the field. His home—on Munichalai Road, a lower-class neighborhood that he chose over posher localities such as Visalakshipuram or Tapal Tanthi Nagar—easily conformed to an anthropologist's home in the field.

I was a fundamentalist Rankean historian then, besotted with sources. Barney was theoretically oriented and prone to discursive analysis. We were, one could say, following Bernard Cohn, inhabiting Historyland and Anthropologyland. Our conversations continued over the years—a committed correspondent, he would pen long letters and, after the advent of email, his

FIGURE 2. Barney Bate and his gurunatar, Professor Tho. Paramasivan. This photograph was posted by Barney on his Facebook page on 27 June 2009 with the caption "Me writing down things that Tho.Pa. says."

responses were unfailingly swift—and gained a new edge when I spent the fall term of 1999 at the University of Chicago. Shortly before he turned in his PhD dissertation, I read its final draft and learned an enormous lot from it. In my comments and conversations, I pushed him into thinking historically. (Another deep influence on Barney's thinking about Tamil culture historically from the ground up was the late, great Tamil scholar Tho. Paramasivan whom he referred to respectfully as *gurunatar*, meaning "mentor" or "preceptor.") I plied him with historical material—excerpts from documents, collections of speeches, Tamil writings on oratory and orators—but Barney was diffident about taking the historical turn.

In March 2003, Barney, along with Rama Sundari Mantena and Lisa Mitchell, put together a panel on "Language, Genre, and Identity in Colonial South India" at the Association of Asian Studies Conference, New York, and the conversations continued next year at Yale as an international roundtable, "Language, Genre, and the Historical Imagination in South India," resulting

in a special issue, of the same name, of the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. It was here that Barney first rehearsed and published his work on Arumuga Navalar.[1] In the first half of 2005 he spent some months in the missionary archives in Jaffna working on Navalar; he was, however, reticent about his time there, and I can only speculate why.

By this time, Barney was deeply taken in by the Swadeshi movement and, on discovering Sumit Sarkar's classic monograph on the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, could never stop speaking about it. However, his archival diffidence continued even when he arrived in Chennai to spend the academic year of 2008–9 to work at the Tamil Nadu Archives, but he soon took to the archives like fish to water. The editors of this book state that he clocked about seven hundred hours there. Like a born-again historian, he spent long days at the archives, often working over weekends. Enjoying the minutiae of archival research, his detailed notes, written in black ink, filled many moleskin notebooks. As historians are wont to do, he even wrote a vignette on a Vellala woman's Swadeshi lecture in Madurai—a piece that *Economic and Political Weekly* unfortunately turned down (but was eventually published, in Tamil).[2] I write this to show how quickly he grasped and mastered the historian's craft.

Like many of us, Barney suffered from writer's block. It was during his work on his second book, I believe, that he fully overcame it, the publication of his first monograph, *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India*, providing the spur.[3] For many years from the middle of the first decade of this century Barney experienced professional anxieties, material worries, and personal travails. But he breathed Swadeshi during these days, and it probably helped him overcome much of them. In the years before his shockingly untimely death he was writing at a furious pace and presenting various versions at seminars and conferences. Barney obsessed over details and could never stop refining his text; he would toss endlessly in bed the night before a presentation. For whatever reason, he conceived this book to a manageable size, stopping at the time of the Non-cooperation movement rather than logically extend it to the rise of Dravidian oratory in the 1940s. But even in its present form *Protestant Textuality and the Tamil Modern: Political Oratory and the Social Imaginary in South Asia* is a patently pathbreaking work. I am not aware of another monograph that treats oratory in any of the South

Asian languages. The editors of this book, apart from paying their tribute to a dear friend, have put the scholarly world in debt by patiently and diligently piecing together this text.

The purpose of this foreword is to fill in some of the gaps and complement this splendid monograph, based on the material I remember sharing with Barney and other sources. Hopefully, younger scholars will pick up the threads and extend the history.

**Dissolving in the Wind**

Sundara Ramaswamy's evocative obituary of the Communist leader P. Jeevanandam—which not incidentally focuses on his legendary oratorical skills—is titled *Kattril Kalantha Perosai* (The thundering voice that dissolved in the wind).[4] It could not be more apt. Speech vanishes into thin air. Unlike printed material to which historians take first recourse, speech poses an extraordinary challenge to access and reconstruct its history.

For the colonial period, historians need to rely on police reports, contemporary newspaper reports, the speaker's personal files, and testimonies of contemporaries—rare indeed is an autobiography of those times that does not speak of attending public meetings and auditing the speeches. Apart from the fact that much of the intelligence archive remains closed and personal papers of the actors sparse, each source comes with its own problems. As Barney shows in this book, until shorthand for vernacular was invented, there could be no reliable transcripts.[5] What we do have in the colonial archive are English translations and redactions of Tamil speeches. Rarely do we find—at least until much after the time of the Civil Disobedience movement—the original Tamil versions. These translations are surprisingly rather faithful (but awkward), though the original vernacular transcripts, presented in the courts of law, remain to be unearthed by historians.[6] When some of them came up for discussion in the government for prosecution, we get more analysis. When speeches actually went to court, they were discussed threadbare. In the decade after independence, elaborate transcripts of Tamil speeches came to be bound together in government files. Colonial Police Abstracts of Intelligence provide detailed translations purporting to be verbatim.

Early Tamil newspapers—which, until the beginning of the First World

War, virtually meant only *Swadesamitran*—offer some recourse to Tamil originals. But newspaper reports are even more unreliable. Vernacular newspapers did not have trained reporters but only *nirubar*s (literally, correspondents)—who were amateurs if not actually the speakers or organizers of the meeting themselves—to send a report to the newspaper. In this situation, the quality of the reported speech can well be imagined. Here is Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram Mudaliar (Thiru. Vi. Ka.) writing in 1928 (my translation):

> Correspondents of the Tamil press do not take the trouble to learn shorthand. Shorthand is now largely the preserve of the police. I do know of one or two non-policemen who have acquired shorthand skills. As they do not have adequate knowledge of the Tamil language, I see them struggle. If there are indeed persons who both know shorthand and possess Tamil language skills, I am not aware of them. . . .
>
> Tamil speeches are never reproduced faithfully in newspapers. There is no limit to the violence they commit on the speeches. One can only throw up one's hands, exclaiming, "Alas, alas."

Thiru. Vi. Ka. continues his observations under the rubric "The Mischief of Newspapers":

> The correspondent renders the speech in his own words. The views of the speaker thus lose their [original] garb. Sometimes meanings get distorted. Occasionally distortion is deliberate. If I elaborate on the mischief of party newspapers, it will run into pages. In short, one may say that it is rare indeed for talks delivered in the vernacular to be reproduced faithfully in newspapers.
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> . . . Today I would say something on the platform. In tomorrow's newspapers it would appear in an entirely different version.[7]

Thiru. Vi. Ka. would know. For he was not only Tamil's pioneering orator but also a distinguished political journalist, the hero of Barney's last chapter of this book.

Periyar E. V. Ramasamy provides an excellent example of one such mischief. Referring to a report in *Swadesamitran*, on a meeting regarding birth control, he pointed out that the Tamil newspaper had reported the English speeches

in full while adding a plain statement that P. Varadarajulu Naidu had spoken in Tamil. Pointing to such prejudicial reporting, Periyar wondered if this occurred because Tamil was a lowly language or because Varadarajulu Naidu was a non-Brahmin.[8]

However, by and large, Barney did not use newspaper sources. But the future historian, who will need to stand on Barney's shoulders, will need to exploit this source.

In some cases, speakers had a written text. By the 1920s it was common for presidential addresses of major conferences at least to be written up and printed copies distributed at the time of their delivery. For instance, Thiru. Vi. Ka. collected these written texts and published them in book form, and he was by no means exceptional.[9]

When, in 1945, two years after the death of S. Satyamurthy, Chinna Annamalai, the Congress activist and publisher, decided to publish his speeches, Chinna Annamalai sought the help of Satyamurthy's family. On visiting Satyamurthy's home along with his friend S. A. Rahim, Chinna Annamalai was pleasantly surprised when Satyamurthy's widow, Balasundarammal, handed over to him "a cartload of files" containing transcripts of his speeches.[10] Evidently, even a speaker celebrated for his spontaneity prepared notes and texts, if not transcripts, after the speech.

Though the platform was the preeminent forum for public talks, it was by no means the only one. By the mid-1930s All India Radio had come into existence and was a regular forum for talks; some of these have now been retrieved from its archives and are being broadcast occasionally. During the Quit India movement there were clandestine broadcasts, and the Indian National Army aired Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's inspiring talks. Gramophone records of speeches were not uncommon, but such speeches could only be brief. Radio broadcasts and gramophone records are a different cup of tea altogether and will require separate treatment.

Textual versions of speeches—whether recorded by the police or reported by journalists or written out by the speakers themselves—are but words. But as Barney shows, "vernacular oratory became *the* central communicative frame within which mass politics cohered as a genre of action within . . . democratic politics." Words mobilized people and impelled them to act, and therefore, even

if the words themselves dissolved in the wind, the listeners, many of whom went on to become political and cultural actors, recalled and recorded their memories. Barney, for instance, appropriately cites Thiru. Vi. Ka.'s evocative recall of Bipin Chandra Pal's speeches and the British journalist Henry Nevinson's report of a Swadeshi meeting, both delivered in 1907 on Madras Beach.

This draws us to another aspect of what these sources tell us: the context, the numbers, and the effect speeches had on the audience.

Police reports invariably provide specific figures, for the colonial masters were understandably keen to know how many turned up for political speeches. The numbers are likely to have been underestimates—though it is curious, as Barney notes, how tens of hundreds, even as per police underestimates, could hear anything on the beach, even accounting for the lack of noise pollution. The police also applied crude sociological categories identifying the crowd as students, merchants, petty shopkeepers, et cetera, and often on caste lines as well. Crowds were often characterized as mobs, who tended to get irrationally excited. Terms such as "riffraff," "rowdy," and the Anglo-Indianism of *badmash* (scoundrel) were frequently employed. This language has all the elements of "the prose of counter insurgency."[11] The effects on the crowd were also recorded. In contrast to police reports, newspapers tended to be less precise, using terms such as "hundreds" and "thousands" to refer to the crowds, and are better taken as orders of magnitude rather than literally. In the last part of A. Madhaviah's well-known novel *Padmavathi Charithiram*, the protagonist observes: "Newspapers often write outrageous lies. . . . Even in this city of Chennai, after attending a meeting, if we read a report of its proceedings in the papers one begins to wonder if it is a report of the same meeting or it's a dream. Even if only thirty turn up the newspaper exaggerates the numbers as three hundred and three thousand."[12] By the 1930s, we have some photographs, and the occasional, if jumpy, newsreel clips that give us a sense of the crowd.

The public-address system had made its tentative entry by the time of the Civil Disobedience movement. For all its novelty and assumed revolutionary significance, references to its use are limited, and one has to tease them out from the sources. For instance, Kalki states, in 1931, that one Coimbatore Mahalingaiyer, nicknamed *Kodai-idi* (Summer thunderclap), "would not require 'a loud speaker' even when addressing a crowd of a lakh people."[13] Interestingly,

Kalki uses the term "loud speaker" in English and parenthetically describes it in Tamil as *oli perukkum karuvi* (literally, a sound-amplifying device), an indication both of its newness and imminent entrenchment.

Contrary to what technological determinists may believe, the entrenchment of the public-address system was by no means swift or immediate. While the microphone entered the world of South Indian classical music in the 1930s, it was not until the 1940s that it was used for Tamil public speaking.[14] Costs were high and accessibility limited such that it was not uncommon to advertise its use, indicating that it was evidently a novelty that attracted a bigger audience. It also required police permission for use outside a meeting hall, and there were frequent complaints about political partisanship in granting permission. However, it was far from universally welcomed. It was believed that the microphone absorbed—if not the speaker's vital energies, at least—the moisture from his mouth, rendering it dry and hoarse. Speakers, therefore, took recourse to gulping soda water during the speech and after. Soda water bottles—with the pressure-locking colorful glass marbles—were de rigueur in public meetings well into the 1990s.[15]

Even T. M. Deivasigamani Achari, the author of a treatise on public speaking, writing as late as 1949, devoted a chapter to the use of loudspeakers, referring to the speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal in 1907. He remarked that those gifted with a resounding voice had no need for it but grudgingly conceded that "it was helpful to old and infirm [speakers]."[16] (That he devoted a chapter to the need for developing physical vigor and energy on the part of speakers may be read in conjunction with this.) Thiru. Vi. Ka. would have disagreed, for he squarely blamed his ill health on shouting at the top of his voice in the times before sound amplification.

The microphone, for all its revolutionary potential, had one major shortcoming: it tied down the speaker. If the microphone was to pick up the voice, the orator needed to speak into its diaphragm. Earlier, the speaker would pace up and down as he spoke to the audience. (We have the excellent caricatures published in *Janasakthi* where Jeevanandam can be seen in different poses as he thundered to the audience without a microphone to hinder him.) Deivasigamani Achari was particularly uncharitable when he said that the microphone obstructed vision, and the speaker sometimes appeared as a decapitated head

to the audience. Deivasigamani Achari's primary criticism was that rather than the speaker training his natural voice and throwing it effectively, he tended to adapt his voice to the needs of the amplifying technology. (Similar complaints were made about vocalists, as the modern Carnatic concert was beginning to be established at the same time.) This precisely was the point. Rather than shout at the top of the voice throughout one's speech, the speaker had ample scope for modulation and pauses through the new technology. C. N. Annadurai's popularity in the 1940s was predicated on this. Anna (Older Brother), as Annadurai was also called, used the new technology to telling effect, conserving energy for long orations, modulating his voice, and punctuating it with pregnant pauses.[17]

Another intriguing device was the megaphone, of which little is known. There is oral evidence to indicate that the megaphone was in use even in the 1940s and the cash-strapped Communists often used it. Megaphones were crude, and it is not entirely clear how it was amenable to voice modulation and the like. P. Jeevanandam was known to have used it, and it is said that he damaged his eardrum by shouting into a megaphone at the top of his voice for long hours.

**Orators as Personalities**

Barney's promise to "trace the genealogy of twentieth-century vernacular politics and the vernacular politician in South India" would be incomplete if we do not address the period between the 1930s and the 1950s. Though Barney demonstrates in this book "the emergence of vernacular political modernity in the Tamil-speaking lands" by the great satyagraha meeting of April 1919, it was not until the 1940s that the style of public speaking that he so brilliantly ethnographically studied in his first book achieved full form.

Before I attempt to fill this gap, a few words on the transmission of what Barney calls "the communicative infrastructure" that fused Protestant sermonic genres and deeper cultural forms and aesthetics of language that made possible the creation of the vernacular Tamil politician. Arumuga Navalar's ideas and methods found purchase in Tamil Nadu from the late 1860s largely through the polemics between him and his followers, on the one hand, and Ramalinga Swamigal and his disciples, on the other.[18] In the wake of this churning in

the Saiva world, from the 1880s a flurry of Saiva *sabha*s (associations) were established, carrying on what has been called the "Protestantization" of the Saiva religion. V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, the key political agent in Chapter 3, states expressly in his verse autobiography (not incidentally while serving a prison sentence for making and abetting seditious speeches) that "I joined the Saiva Siddhanta Sabha [of Tuticorin] and mastered the art of expression." The *sabha* he referred to was one of the earliest modern Saiva organizations (founded in 1883) in the Tamil country and followed by similar *sabha*s in cities far apart as Trichy (1885), Trivandrum (1885), and Palayamkottai (1886). These *sabha*s were coordinated and brought under an apex body called the Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam (in 1905), which, apart from performing other functions, provided authorized lists of speakers.[19] Maraimalai Adigal was a key figure in this formation and was regularly invited for public lectures. Many Dravidian orators had close affinities with this Saivite formation.[20]

The transformation of Tamil oratory is illustrated by the emergence of star orators in the two decades or so following the Non-cooperation movement and is best exemplified in the history of Tamil public speaking constructed by two narratives: one by the renowned Tamil writer Kalki R. Krishnamurthy (in 1931) and the other by the Dravidian movement writer Ma. Su. Sambandan (in 1947).[21]

Writing in 1931, at the peak of the Civil Disobedience movement, if Kalki constructed the pantheon of Indian nationalist speakers, Sambandan provides a lineup of Dravidian and Tamil nationalist speakers. Kalki's preamble makes it clear that the political speech had come to stay in the Tamil world. By the time of his writing, humongous political meetings with interminable talks extending from eleven in the morning to nine at night had become the norm. Tongue in cheek, Kalki proposed that the government outlaw all speeches that extended to more than forty-five minutes. Kalki recalled attending political meetings and hearing political speeches from 1918, when he was not yet twenty. His initiation into the national movement, even dropping out of college, he attributed to a talk by the Congress leader T. S. S. Rajan. So, inevitably, the first place in his list went to Rajan. This is followed by his description and detailed analysis of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, C. Rajagopalachari, Thiru. Vi. Ka., S. Satyamurthy, and Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu as speakers. (In a coda, he names a few

other speakers as well.) Written in his trademark witty style (with occasional contrived humor), Kalki's sketches are sharp and astute, weighing the speakers' strengths and weaknesses. Kalki's narrative leaves us in no doubt that by the time of the Civil Disobedience movement, public speaking was the primary form of political communication.

By 1947, when Ma. Su. Sambandan (under the pseudonym "Thodarban") penned his *Sirantha Pechalargal*, public speaking was an even more powerful modality of communicative action, but the persona and the field had changed dramatically. Of the ten speakers discussed in Sambandan's book, only two had figured in Kalki's list: Periyar and Thiru. Vi. Ka. The others were new: S. Somasundara Bharati, R. P. Sethu Pillai, Avvai S. Duraiswamy Pillai, K. A. P. Viswanatham, C. N. Annadurai, U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, P. Jeevanandam, and M. P. Sivagnanam—a mix of Dravidian ideologues and Tamil scholars, with the inclusion of a Communist and a communalist demagogue.

The Tamil political sphere had indeed changed in the intervening decade and a half. The Dravidian movement was in full flow, and a major popular struggle, the anti-Hindi agitation (1937–39), had transformed the stage. The technology of the public-address system had also amplified the power of the new speakers.

Though vernacular oratory had come of age during the Non-cooperation movement, English was not entirely displaced by Tamil in the 1930s. Tamil oratory was a phenomenon more of the 1930s and after, with English oratory strictly restricted to an elite class converging in hall meetings. As late as the time of the Non-cooperation movement it had been considered fashionable to say one did not know how to speak in Tamil. Kalki mentions that when Rajaji once began his speech in Tamil, some voices called for him to speak in English. The shift to Tamil in public speech is indexed by the rise of Anna. If Anna's debut in 1935 on the public stage had begun as a translator of A. Ramaswami Mudaliar (who along with "Silver Tongue" V. S. Srinivasa Sastri was a legendary public speaker in English of the times), he had, in a matter of years, emerged as the most popular public speaker, overshadowing all others.

Not only had Tamil displaced English as the primary political language, but the Tamil language itself had changed. Gone was the highly Sanskritized language used by speakers. With the influence of the Pure Tamil movement,

pure Tamil words replaced Sanskrit words and the awkward translation/transliteration of English words. If Kalki credited Thiru. Vi. Ka. for inaugurating this process, by the time of Sambandan it had become the norm. Rhetorical devices too had changed; alliteration predominated and drew from what Barney calls in this book "culturally and historically deeper forms and aesthetics of language."[22] The anti-Hindi agitation had brought vernacular politicians and Tamil/Saiva lecturers together in mass meetings that profoundly altered the nature of public speaking. By the 1950s, public speaking was the road to political power.[23]

**Codifying Oratory**

The entrenchment of Tamil oratory as a dominant communicative practice is indexed by the significant number of narratives produced in the 1940s on the nature and practice of oratory. A key text is Deivasikamani Achari's *Medai Tamil* (Stage Tamil), a pregnant coinage that invokes the many prefixes added to Tamil to describe the language's many facets and attributes.[24] Written in early 1944 (though published only in 1949 with the addition of part 2), this elaborate treatise, running into over four hundred pages (with appendixes, index, glossary, and plates), codifies public speaking with many examples. The book leaves no aspect of public speaking undiscussed: stage fright, preparation, posture, opening gambit, finishing flourish, acknowledgment, memory, physical endurance, rhetorical devices, mellifluousness, and the use of the public-address system. More strikingly, Deivasigamani Achari draws specific examples from contemporary speakers without ignoring any major speaker or prominent style.

As we noted, Sambandan had published his little book two years earlier in which Anna figures prominently. Speakers in the Dravidian tradition were now taking center stage, and a number of other books began to focus on them. By the mid-1940s, Anna's rise was meteoric, especially after his famed public debate with R. P. Sethu Pillai and S. Somasundara Bharati on burning the *Ramayana* and *Periya Puranam*.[25] Youths flocked to his talks—some of them ticketed events—and Tamil associations in various colleges invited him to speak. The political meetings that he addressed were legion. Many of these talks were transcribed by enthusiastic admirers and published as booklets,

gaining further circulation. One such transcriber was Anbu Pazhamnee,[26] who went on to coauthor (with K. V. Veeraraghavan, a friend of Anna himself) a booklet on the secret of Anna's success as an orator.[27] These two authors followed this a year later with a book on the art of speaking, *Pecchu Kalai*.[28] The art of speaking was very much the flavor of the times. As could be expected of a primer, this book provided tips and techniques on public speaking. That the book included forewords by, among others, Ilavalagan, a Saivite propagandist, and V. R. Nedunchezhiyan, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader, is indicative of the streams that went into the making of modern Tamil oratory.

Another primer, A. K. Parandamanar's *Pechalaraka*, though published in book form only in 1955, belongs to the same moment. Serialized earlier in Karumuthu Thyagaraja Chettiar's daily, *Tamil Nadu*, it covers the same ground but in a more scholarly manner.[29] A particularly important section is the first chapter, which outlines the history of oratory. While Parandamanar draws from ancient Tamil literature on elocution, verbal skills, and appropriate speech, he was categorical in stating that public speaking was a modern discursive practice. Arguing that earlier practices fell within the domain of courtly speech, religious debate, and textual discourse, he asserted that "only in democratic societies can oratory naturally and truly exist. Public speaking did not and could not have existed in monarchical Tamil Nadu."[30] Tracing its origins to the beginnings of the Indian nationalist movement in the early part of the twentieth century, Parandamanar called Thiru. Vi. Ka. not only the father but also the fostering mother of Tamil public speaking. As an erudite Tamil scholar in the Saiva tradition, Parandamanar could be expected to be familiar with Arumuga Navalar, though he makes no mention of him. And he went on to add that it was the Dravidian movement—the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) and the DMK—that developed it into a distinct communicative art form.[31]

It is this distinct communicative modality that Barney Bate chose to study and that brought him to Tamil Nadu, the land and the people he loved so much. His two pioneering monographs, richly documented, astutely analyzed, and written with great love and passion will remain standard works for years to come.

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# PROTESTANT TEXTUALITY AND THE TAMIL MODERN

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