PROTESTANT TEXTUALITY AND THE TAMIL MODERN

> And he said unto them, "Go ye into all the world
> and preach the gospel to every creature."
>
> —Mark 16:15

> Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political
> by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being.
>
> —Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

On 6 April 1919, the first great satyagraha in the Madras Presidency was conducted in Madras City in protest of a new set of restrictions on political activity ushered in under the Rowlatt Act. These laws extended emergency measures instituted during World War I, and thus many viewed them as bitter reward for the loyalty, service, and sacrifice that Indians had demonstrated to King George V and the British Empire during the war. The satyagraha had been billed by Mohandas Gandhi as a "Day of Humiliation and Prayer," and the people were called out to partake in a demonstration against this erosion of their natural rights as citizens of the empire. In response a massive crowd, estimated by organizers and police to exceed one hundred thousand,[1] assembled on Marina Beach before five stages set up for simultaneous oratorical performances, mostly in Tamil and Telugu, some in Urdu. The speeches delivered in English were translated onstage into Tamil.[2]

The stages were aligned one after another, and separate stages were set on either end for members of the newly established Madras Labour Union and Tramway Workers Union. Devotional singing (*bhajan*) groups that had formed in different parts of the city earlier in the day processed via various routes to the Marina, singing and dancing all the way. A police sub-inspector who provided

an account of this event derisively noted that the crowds continued to break out into *bhajan*s while the orators were speaking. But he also conceded that "the crowd surrounding the speakers was enormous and kept moving from place to place in their vain attempt to hear them."[3] By his own admission, the sub-inspector's report suggests that a large portion of the immense crowd had come to Marina Beach to listen attentively to speeches by the local and national leaders of the day.

By all accounts, the crowd was the largest anyone had ever seen in Madras for a political event, and it shattered the expectations of the organizers. It was probably some four or five times larger than any political meeting in Madras theretofore. The *Madras Times*, an Anglo-Indian paper hostile to the nationalists, wrote on 8 April 1919, "Whatever may be said about the causes which induced the people of Madras to carry out the dictates of the Satyagraha, 'satyagraha Day' (6th April) will be remembered in the annals of the city as [a] unique occasion." Numerous meetings had been held during the month prior to the satyagraha to educate the public and ensure a large turnout. Despite their extensive preparations, the organizers themselves were stunned by the turnout. One of them, a journalist, Tamil scholar, pioneer in public oratory, labor organizer, and politician of profound impact, Thiru. Vi. Kalyanasundaram (Thiru. Vi. Ka.), described the crowd as a "great army, like a surging ocean" moving toward the beach ([1944] 2003, 237).

Even more germane for our purposes, the crowd was quite mixed and not limited to the upper-caste Hindu and Christian boys and men, the students and educated classes that had been the usual participants up to the most recent times. Our sub-inspector wrote, "Muhammadans, though not in proportion to the Hindus, were in much greater numbers than ever at such meetings" and that while "the bulk of those present were middle class persons of the trading, official and student community . . . the poorer classes were also numerous."[4] The *Madras Times* reported on 8 April 1919 that the crowd was composed "mostly of the labouring and trading classes." And the sub-inspector also observed that they were not only men: "There were about 200 women present and they were provided with an enclosure in the 5th platform [one of the labor platforms], but they were all mostly illiterate people of the working classes who had come there merely to see what took

place."[5] They had come, rich and poor, Hindu and Muslim, man and woman, to partake of politics.

The birth of modern mass politics in the Madras Presidency has long been dated to this era, and few would question that this period of post–World War I politics represented a phase shift in political action and organization. Many have noted that by 1918–19 virtually all the elements of twentieth-century Tamil politics had converged. The crowd that gathered on the beach that April was a manifestation of a new efflorescence of political action, a new politics that set the stage for the kinds of mass actions that would take place throughout the twentieth century, including the Dravidianism that became the hallmark of politics in later Tamil Nadu (Bate 2009b).

But what had changed from the nineteenth into the twentieth century such that people previously excluded from, or indifferent to, formal political action suddenly appeared in great numbers in the political realm? And how did political oratory, did speech itself, become central to this form of politics?[6]

Protestant Textuality and the Tamil Modern offers a genealogy of this political transformation, of Tamil political oratory, and of the emergence of vernacular political modernity in the Tamil-speaking lands of India and Sri Lanka. It documents how sermonic and homiletic genres introduced by Protestant missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fused with culturally and historically deeper forms and aesthetics of language, providing the communicative infrastructure that eventually enabled a new kind of agent, the vernacular politician, to address and mobilize a modern Tamil people within a distinctive social imaginary. In short, I trace the genealogy of twentieth-century vernacular politics and the vernacular politician in South India, the topic of my first book, *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic* (Bate 2009b). Doing so, in my view, is to trace the genealogy of the Tamil Political itself.

The Press and the Platform

Scholars have long linked print capitalism—the production, sale, and circulation of vernacular texts (e.g., novels, newspapers) throughout a limited geography—to the constitution of large-scale modern social imaginaries such as the public sphere, the people, or the modern nation-state (Habermas [1962] 1991; Anderson [1983] 2006; M. S. S. Pandian 1996; Geetha and Rajadu-

rai [1998] 2008; Warner 2002; Blackburn 2003; Taylor 2003; Venkatachalapathy 2012). And when speaking of political practice in early twentieth-century South India, scholars frequently link the "press and the platform" in a single phrase. (That is, if we include the platform at all; homiletic oratory, what this study adds to the focus on writing and print, has generally been forgotten in the genealogies of such imaginaries.) Indeed, in much of India, print-mediated discourse of the sort that interests such scholars circulated in synergy with genres of vernacular oratory.

We tend to think of press and platform as similar because of the ways that we read history (or the way we read, period), in particular, because of our penchant for focusing on the denotational elements of the text—that is, what the text says—rather than thinking of these practices as real sensuous activity, as embodied forms of action. It is thus often assumed that such practices—in particular, public oratory—are natural and panhuman rather than part of a new technology (Bate 2014, 544).[7] Yet this is precisely what vernacular, public oratory was in South India at this historical juncture: a new genre and infrastructure of interpellative communication.

Anyone familiar with Tamil Nadu will find this claim bizarre and counterintuitive: twentieth-century Tamil country was an empire of orators. Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy, founder of the first major Tamil nationalist organization, the Dravidar Kazhagam (Dravidian Federation), emerged as a major politician in the 1920s by virtue of his charismatic, if folksy, oratory. "Ariñar" (Scholar) C. N. Annadurai and "Kalaiñar" (Artist) Mu. Karunanidhi likewise recast Dravidianism within a democratic modality with the formation of the electoral political party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progress Federation), along with a brand-new refined style of political oratory marked by literary citations, poetic alliteration, and use of language that sounded ancient (Sivathamby 1978; Kailasapathy 1986; M. S. S. Pandian 1996; Ramaswamy 1997; Bate 2009b; Cody 2011a, 2011b). The Dravidian paradigm of political oratory sounded as if the orators were speaking in the voices of ancient Dravidian kings, which was exactly the point: to effect not only a political distinction between the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Indian National Congress but also a civilizational and epochal distinction between the antiquity and autochthony of the Dravidian Tamils and the otherness of the Northern Aryans. The orator became an

avatar of Tamil's purity, antiquity, autochthony, and civilizational right to lead the people. To suggest that there was a time in which such a highly developed and everyday practice did not exist violates the commonsense understanding of the order of things in the Tamil world.[8]

But there was such a time.

The case of Tamil oratory thus presents something unexpected in this otherwise familiar scenario. Tamil contains myriad interpellative practices that stretch back into dim antiquity, including various forms of theatrical and musical performance (e.g., *kūttu*, *villupāṭṭu*; see Blackburn 1988), text-recitation genres (e.g., readings of sacred texts such as the *Tēvāram* or *Kantapurāṇam* in temples; see Peterson 1991), and lower-class and -caste funeral petitions and drums (Clark-Decès 2005). But what is odd in the case of Tamil is that its nearly two-thousand-year literary record demonstrates that there was nothing resembling homiletic oratory[9]—at least embodied by higher-status people addressing anything resembling an undifferentiated mass of lower-status people—until the advent of the Protestant sermon and its uptake in non-Protestant contexts (also see Hudson 1992a, 1992b; Young and Jebanesan 1995).[10] And it was the utilization of that form that, from the middle of the nineteenth century until the first two decades of the twentieth century, eventually became vernacular political oratory in the Tamil-speaking lands.[11]

In terms of sociocultural praxis, the press and the platform are utterly different modes of communicative production that operate through very different political economic modalities and social processes. While the vernacular press developed, famously, through print capitalism, the platform developed in South Asia almost entirely via the passions and values of the orators themselves, whether Protestant Christianity in the Protestant sermon (Chapter 1), Saivite revivalism in the Saivite sermon (Chapter 2), Swadeshism in early vernacular lectures of 1907–8 (Chapters 3–5), or the Home Rule movement in 1915–16 and Labor movement in 1917–20 (Epilogue).[12] In opposition to print—which major theory asserts was spread via capitalist means of production (Anderson [1983] 2006)—modern oratory spread in South Asia (and far more broadly) largely through motivations of the heart, in appeals to the imagination, in promises of salvation and of the reconciliation of God and man and the reconciliation of man and man in the universalization of

the concept of natural or human rights. Protestant missionaries, as I discuss later in this chapter and show in more detail in Chapter 1, were agents of such radical Enlightenment discourses, despite their positions within what we might consider rather conservative colonial structures of power. They attacked the caste system along with the priesthood; they fought for the dignity of human beings regardless of sex or status; they educated the population, including young women. Their sermons were not unrelated to these ethical impulses, and through them they spread their universalizing, democratic vision of the Social to new kinds of addressees, inaugurating new kinds of social collectivities such as the "Tamil people."

While both of these communicative modalities—press and platform—were quite consequential in and of themselves, together, or symbiotically, they created something far more powerful than either one alone. To put an even finer point on this argument, I suggest that vernacular oratory qualitatively and quantitatively transformed what politics would be. In oratory, as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, the elite political class came to interpellate people utterly unlike themselves, calling on them to participate in the political. Eclipsing print by its greater centrality within wider sets of social praxis, then, vernacular oratory became *the* central communicative frame within which mass politics cohered as a genre of action within the Indian Independence movement, Tamil nationalism, and postcolonial democratic politics. By the mid-twentieth century, this process had transformed Tamil Nadu into an empire of orators whose political success depended on mastery of baroque oratorical genres that embodied a vision of Tamil's singular historical, literary, and aesthetic experience (Sivathamby 1978; Bate 2009b). This empire would not have been possible without the oratorical conventions of the Protestant sermon.

The Newness of Oratory

It is an odd thing to say that Tamil oratory is new. It violates the commonsense order of things in the Tamil political—and literary-cultural—in any number of dimensions. In some respects, it is a wildly offensive thing to say. Yet it is true. What was this newness?

Protestant sermons brought along new "epistemizations" of language—that

is, new ways of conceptualizing, knowing, and doing with language (what linguistic anthropologists call "language ideology" [Woolard 1998])—reducing the functionality of language to denotation, truth functionality, and reference. This was in contrast to the focus on the sensuous, performative nature of language, as characteristic in Indic concepts of language, textuality, and performance (e.g., in poesy, music, magical incantation, and the like). Under such new epistemizations, above all else the transparency of signs was paramount (Keane 2007). This shift in ideologies promoted vernacular languages that all could understand rather than superposed (ritual) languages such as Latin or Sanskrit, associated with (non-modern) Catholicism or Brahminical Hinduism, that were accessible to only an elite few (on which, more later in this chapter).

Second, during this period new ways of embodying knowledge in textual form came into being, with the production of books, tracts, and sermons. The production of such artifacts involved a completely new sociotechnological machinery, with the emergence of printing houses for newspapers, novels, chapbooks, handbills, and the like; new circuits of distribution and circulation; as well as new concepts and modes of authorship, composition, and textual reanimation (i.e., reading). The production, distribution, and reception of such artifacts were, in novel ways, spatially, temporally, and socially separated from each other (Johns 1998; Warner 2002).[13] What is critical here is that such new text artifacts—and their sociotechnological machinery—stood in contrast to, and partially displaced, older modes of embodying knowledge based on highly restricted modes of recitation and audition of high-value texts (e.g., in caste- and class-marked spaces of the temple, the court, and the like).[14] Indeed, such new texts and ideologies of textuality involved new ideologies and ethics of textual circulation—importantly, the universalization of the text—which is to say, new social relations of textual production and reception.

Most centrally, Protestants mandated that high-value texts be intelligible and available to all regardless of status—an ethic and ideology markedly counter to most Indic modes of textual practice in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Chapter 1). Literacy was rare, and texts were animated—brought to life in practice—in the social and ritual contexts that were most often purposefully delimited. The call to translate and propagate the vernacular Word of God to everyone regardless of caste, sex, or status

entailed the establishment of new institutions and practices: schools, presses, and sermons to preach the Gospel to all people. Only some of those people actually converted to Protestantism, but the universalizing oratorical practices of the Protestant sermon were taken up by non-Christian agents throughout the late nineteenth century and developed in their own educational and religious contexts (Chapter 2). By the first two decades of the twentieth century, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, politicians began to speak in Tamil (rather than English) to larger and larger audiences, first in the Swadeshi movement, India's first modern political mobilization (1905–8), and then later, as I show in the Epilogue, in the establishment of the Labor movement in 1917–20 (Sarkar [1973] 2010; Veeraraghavan 2013).

This turning toward the common man to address him as a political agent was unprecedented and revolutionary in Tamil political speech. With these new oratorical forms, the ideologies of the Swadeshi movement and the Labor movement now crossed outside caste and class boundaries, moving from elite to subaltern spaces, from English to Tamil. As the full-blown mass outrage of the Independence movement was impossible to ignore by 1919, the vernacular became the foundation on which formal politics would be conducted from that point forward. The empire of orators had begun.

The Emergence of Modern Politics

In essence, there could have been no modern vernacular political movements in India without that vernacular turning, and the first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed an eruption of the vernacular within the Indian political at large. This genealogy of the vernacular oratory in South India can be linked to transformed political and communicative practice in a global context, in which political actors deployed a universalizing textuality to address a universal citizen. That is, this vernacularizing process in Tamil Nadu is not linked just to its proximal missionary antecedents but to the global, general emergence of modern politics itself (Weber [1904–5] 1958; Walzer 1965).

Following Max Weber's argument regarding Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism, Michael Walzer (1965) identifies the post-Calvinist saint as the archetype of a new political man, the citizen who held an abstract society

at arm's length and evaluated (or epistemized) it as a whole and demanded that all men within it—not only princes, not merely priests—be responsible for its reform. "What Calvinists said of the saint," wrote Walzer, "other men would later say of the citizen: the same sense of civic virtue, of discipline and duty, lies behind the two names" (2). Each man would be equal to another in the eyes of God; no caste or estate would have a privileged role to play in the great work of reform in which all are called to participate. For Walzer, it was the activity of such new men that "played as important a part in the formation of the modern state as did the sovereign power of princes" (2). I argue that the semeiosically stripped-down and universalizing textuality of the Protestant sermon lies at the basis of the communicative production of this new kind of political subjectivity at the heart of modern revolutionary, and more broadly democratic, politics.[15] The political men discussed in this book are direct descendants of these saints.

What I add to Walzer's insight, however, is how communicative genres such as a universalizing oratory and print framed (Goffman 1974) or stipulated (Silverstein 1976, 1993) the social relations, ethics, and ideologies that people would embody in their engagements with the world. That is, the infrastructural process by which their civic vision was effected was communicative. It was poetic (Jakobson 1960; Friedrich 1986). It was rhetorical (Bate 2014). Through a dialogic process (Bakhtin 1981), these new modes of communicative, poetic practice laid down over time new kinds of entities in interaction (e.g., the people, the public, the nation) and ritually instantiated national time and space, the history and geography of a modern people, and a new agency to be mastered by the vernacular politician. The emergence of their oratory—and its associated universalization of the call to the political to everyone—had a material structuring effect on social order.[16]

Yet if what we broadly call the *poetic* was central to the formation of modern social imaginaries, this was in two ways, corresponding to two senses of the term. The world, the Tamil world—the world that could be named Tamil in the modern sense of a people, a polity, a transhistorical ethnolinguistic community inhabiting a place called Tamilagam—was structured, in key respects, by the first aspect of the poetic. And that structure was given life, palpability, and power by the second. The first was a foreign import, brought over by

missionaries, that restructured the social relations of textual production; the second was born of Tamil soil wherein songs have come from far away, to be sure, but have a singularity of rhythm and melody and image and feeling peculiar to the Tamil lands. The first is what Roman Jakobson called the poetic function of language; the second is poesy itself.

Jakobson's (1960) poetic function of language—what he also later called "poeticity" (1987, 368)[17]—is that aspect of every utterance that calls attention to the form of the message, the parallelisms (in rhyme, meter, image) that define poetry as a special form of language. The formal elements of poetic texts point to the fact that such texts are "poetry," or at least they are special kinds of language that stand apart from what we think of as "ordinary language" (though, to be sure, the difference between them is hardly hard and fast). It is this difference that adds a kind of fundamental frame around an utterance that stipulates a particular meaning, not denotationally but in terms of what kind of communicative form the utterance is. So just as it is the poetic function of language that tells us that a poem is a poem, it is that same poetic function that stipulates that an oration, for instance, is an oration.[18]

The second use of the poetic is closer to more conventional notions of the term, what I here call "poesy": the relationship language draws between sound, myth, emotion, and the imagination, what we might broadly call the aesthetics of language. Jakobson called this the "palpability of language," "when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named" (1987, 378). Needless to say, poesy has long occupied a central concern in philosophies of language going back to Aristotle. However, anthropologies of language (Friedrich 1979, 1986, 1991, 2006; Fernandez 1986, 1991; see also Tyler 1978; Strecker and Tyler 2009) posit a much more powerful role for poesy, those elements of language that structure the mind and move the heart, draw connections between disparate domains of life, link macro- and microcosms in ritual or politics, and ultimately massively affect the individual imagination and move individuals to action. In this way, too, the poetic is world building (Chapter 4).[19]

One of the big arguments of this book, then, is that rhetoric and oratory—as embodied in real, dialogic, sensuous textual practice (i.e., in its poetics and its poesy)—have infrastructural effects on the unfolding of history and the

structuring of social order (Vološinov 1977; Bakhtin 1981). By demonstrating the emergence of political modernity through a genealogy of Tamil political oratory, this book shows how this vernacularizing process was both aesthetically singular to the Tamil world—for all its newness, vernacular oratory tied language to older and deeper cultural aesthetics, poetics, and lifeways (Kaviraj 1992, 2005a; Chatterjee 1993, 2004; Ramaswamy 1997)—and exemplary of the global emergence of new geographies and histories of political belonging of modern peoples, nations, and publics. Indeed, modern nationalist oratory all over the world—for example, in the Philippines (Rosaldo 1984), Madagascar (Jackson 2006, 2008, 2009, 2013), Papua New Guinea (Kulick 1993, 1998; Robbins 2001), Nigeria (Larkin 2008), Indonesia (Keane 2007), and West Africa (Irvine 1989; Yankah 1995; also see Makihara and Schieffelin 2007)—appears to have had, at its roots, Protestant forms of textuality (Chapter 1).[20] It may not be universal, but it is certainly a broad pattern across the world: new modes of address that interpellate these strange new modern social imaginaries are strongly marked by Protestant forms of textuality, often carried forth by poet-figures, oratorical artists such as Subramania Bharati, arguably the greatest Tamil poet of the twentieth century and the national poet of the Tamil people, a figure that I discuss in Chapter 4 who embodied and effectuated these transformations.[21]

Protestant Textuality, Tamil Modern

As its title suggests, this book is divided into two halves. Chapters 1–2 deal with what I call "Protestant textuality" in missionary, religious, and literary discourse that emerged in what we might call the long nineteenth century (though I focus on the second half of the nineteenth century). Chapters 3–5 deal with what I call the "Tamil Modern," the co-emergence of political oratory and the modern political field in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the rest of the Introduction, I sketch out this history, aspects of which individual chapters take up in more detail.

Protestant Textuality

Part I of this book considers the proposition that Protestantism brought with it the basis of communicative modernity in the Tamil country of India and

Sri Lanka and that Protestant forms of textuality mediated the production of such modern social imaginaries as the public sphere, the nation, and the people (Taylor 2003).

By *textuality*, I refer to ideologies, ethics, and aesthetics of discursive semiosis, to cultural and historical concepts of what semiotic, communicative activity is and should be, can and should do. As I show in Chapters 1 and 2, new textualities tracked the production of new kinds of communicative institutions and practices central to the political transformations that concern this book. Many of these practices and institutions were built squarely on semiotic ideologies of the Protestant Bible brought with the first Protestant missionaries in the early eighteenth century—the Halle Mission at Tranquebar—and developed by subsequent missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, London Missionary Society of Tirunelveli, and the Americans of Jaffna, Madurai, Madras, and Arcot (Frykenberg 1999). In particular, the necessity of translating and propagating the vernacular Bible to everyone regardless of sex or status—a peculiarity of Protestant textuality—entailed the establishment of three kinds of institutions and institutionalized practices: schools to teach the Gospel; presses to produce Bibles, tracts, and newspapers; and (often forgotten but immensely important) sermons to preach the Gospel to the people. This attitude toward the Bible is well-known, but it shared semiotic ideologies with other new rationalizations of semiotic functionality in Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's calculus, Francis Bacon's science, and John Locke's semiotic (Bauman and Briggs 2003), among other foundational works of what Sudipta Kaviraj (2005b), following Weber, called "cognitive modernity."

Arguably, the essence of this modern semiotic ideology is that signs must be carriers of fixed and stable meanings: a sign must have a single referent, must have a single sense; it must be clear (or transparent); and it must carry the same meaning regardless of who speaks to whom or in which context. My use of the term "must" is pointed, for this ideology was an ethical as much as a semiotic imperative, as we shall see (Bauman and Briggs 2003; Keane 2007, 13–16). It is no accident that just such semiotic ideologies (of fixed referentiality, transparency, and universality) were deployed along with the teaching of the Bible and science in Protestant schools in nineteenth-century South India (cf. Peterson 1999, 2002).[22]

Equally essential was the Protestants' ethical imperative to broadcast the Word of God to the world at large: "And he said unto them, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mark 16:15). Such an imperative has long linked Protestant forms of universal interpellation to the formation of modern social imaginaries in what has been called "informational revolutions" (Bayly 1993, 1996; Frykenberg 1999). In India, this entailed the transformation of processes of information transmission and reproduction from kin- and caste-based systems to systems that basically universalized texts by interpellating generalized "publics" (as it were).[23] Missionaries encountered literate elites of Indic religiosities, including Indian Catholics, whose textualities, from their Protestant perspective at least, emphasized states of being over states of knowing, memorization of the sheer aesthetic experience of linguistic sound (*nāta*) over the denotationality of the word (*logos*), poetic over prose forms, onticity over episteme, and in Valentine Daniel's (1996) terms, mood over mind.

They also encountered a world in which the social relations of the text were often purposefully highly restricted in terms of person, space, and time. High-valued texts had been animated in highly restricted contexts, usually among those men whose caste and training qualified them to animate—or enjoy the benefits of animation—in times and places set aside for their recital. Many such higher-status literary people such as poets, teachers, and scholars had very different understandings of textual authority: rather than interpellating an audience, much of their authority resulted from the rote memorization of texts and their recitation in highly restricted contexts.[24] The texts, as Kamil Zvelebil (1992) and others (e.g., Kersenboom 1995) have argued, were performative and tended to forefront the quality of *nāta*, the power of sound itself (Yelle 2003), over *logos*, the word in its denotational functionality (Kaviraj 1992, 27). The reciter (*ōtuvar*) of text was, in essence, the text embodied (a relation taken up later by Dravidianist politicians as a form of political legitimacy; see Bate 2009b), a stark contrast to the ideological model of modern oratory, where the object was to effect some kind of change, to transform the world and the hearers from one state in a linear chain of becoming to the next.[25]

Protestants confronted such Indic textualities with righteous vigor, and their efforts were not in vain. By the mid-nineteenth century, schools, presses,

and sermonizing had been widely taken up by non-Christian agents such as Arumuga Navalar and others (Chapter 2; also see Hudson 1992a, 1992b, 1994; Grafe 1999; M. S. S. Pandian 2007; Young and Jebanesan 1995) in the epistemization of entirely new modes of religiosity that we call "Religion" (Asad 1993; King 1999; Daniel 2002) and, some decades later, into new modes of agency and political subjectivity that we call "Politics" (see Chapters 3–5)—that is, what Paul Ricoeur (1965, cited in Marchart 2007, 35–60) called *la politique*, that realm of action expressly epistemized, set apart, and named as such, in contrast to *le politique*, "the political," that set of practices that involves any number and kinds of calculations and weighings of instrumental action (also see Arendt 1958; Bate 2014, 147–48).[26]

While I discuss such transformations in ideologies of textuality in Chapters 1 and 2, I here consider two linked elements of textuality that were transformed by Protestant missionaries.[27] The first is the social relations of the text. The second is the reduction of textual functionality to the referential or denotational function. The example comes from the first half of the nineteenth century, surrounding events reported by missionaries of the American Ceylon Mission (ACM) between 1827 and 1855 in what was then considered a comparative backwater, Jaffna.

In Jaffna of that time, the *Kantapurāṇam* (known in English as *Skanda* or *Scanda Purana*) was among the highest-valued texts associated with the ruling Vellala caste on the peninsula. The missionaries took it, along with the Vedas, to be a textual other par excellence. The American H. M. Scudder, writing in the first Tamil homiletic, *Kiraṇamālikai* (*The Bazaar Book, or, Vernacular Preacher's Companion*, 1865), cites the *Kantapurāṇam* extensively to illustrate Hindu falsehoods and errors of "Sastras," especially in regard to geographical or astronomical knowledge that could be compared against scientific forms of the Europeans (1865, 20–21). The false information contained in the shastra, however, was merely a superficial problem compared to its social relations of textuality and lack of referential transparency.

In a sermon titled "The Sastra" (in this case referring to the four Vedas), Scudder inveighs against the fact that the Vedas pertain only to Brahmins and others invested with the "sacred cord" and excludes women and Sudras who "are in no case to read or even hear them read," an unthinkable act if it

is God, indeed, that gave the Vedas to man (1865, 19). Scudder further notes that the Vedas' language, Sanskrit, is "utterly unknown and unintelligible to ordinary people," as well as "abstruse and obscure" in its style, and thus "useless to the world of mankind" (19). As Scudder concludes, the Vedas must not have God as their author but the "fraudulent and tricky Bramins [*sic*]" (19). In contrast to this is the Christian Veda, "the true Sastra," a text whose language and expression is plain and intelligible and thus through which truths are easily understood (25) and salvation able to be discovered. For Scudder, textual transparency is linked in an intimate fashion with the social relations of textual animation. And these two elements not only lie at the basis of a rationalized mode of scientific inquiry leading to truth in the mundane world but to the truth of the Gospels as well.

For the Saivites, however, the point was that texts such as the *Kantapurāṇam* (and all other sacred texts, including those that dealt with natural history) were not only about the transmission of denotational textuality but, more important, the embodiment of the text in its recitation by a person qualified to do so, both by social standing and training. Texts were to be memorized and sung in highly restricted times and spaces, such as in temples on auspicious dates and times by and to people qualified to hear it (most often, upper-caste men). Recitation operated on the logic of what we might call "textual emblematization," where the animator iconically and indexically embodies the text, effecting, as it were, consubstantiality between text and person. In terms of the aesthetics of hearing the text, it was probably closer to hearing music: the denotationality of the text (*logos*) was less important than its sheer sound and musicality (*nāta*), which itself would have beneficial consequences for the hearers as well as for the world at large, a world in which the text had been sung.

The differences between the two forms of textuality came to a head when the American missionaries at Vattukottai attempted to teach the *Kantapurāṇam* in their schools. "It had often been remarked," wrote the principal, "'that if you were acquainted with the contents of the Scanda Purana, you would not think it necessary to make known to us the Christian Scriptures.' The use of this book in the Seminary produced no small degree of excitement among the people around, some of whom exerted themselves to hinder the students from reading it" (ACM TR 1830, 4).[28]

Focusing on the denotational aspects of the text, the missionaries had the instructor transform the text by "rendering" it "from the Poetic dialect into plain Tamul prose" and read it out loud to the students in a general assembly:

> At the first meeting for this purpose, there was a very unexpected disclosure of feeling; some of the Students were evidently afraid of the consequences, some much ashamed, and others were pleased that the hidden mysteries of the Scanda Purana were about to be brought into the light. These proceedings immediately excited the attention of many in the vicinity. Sad predictions were uttered, by the Brahmins and others, against all who were in any way concerned in this profanation of their sacred writings, and many considerations were suggested, for the purpose of dissuading the members of the Seminary from risking the consequences of entering on forbidden ground. As it was left optional with all whether to attend the meetings for reading, or not, the number of attendants gradually diminished, and consequently the exercise was discontinued. Enough, however, was read to convince all who would reflect, that the book is filled with the most extravagant fictions, many of which are in an immoral tendency "for all the people will walk every one in the name of God." (ACM TR 1830, 23–24)

It is impossible to know exactly what happened, whether the sad predictions were found fulfilled and the students refused to return to the readings out of concern for the blasphemous reading of the text out of its ordained spaces and times or, as the missionaries felt, that the readings proved the inconsequentiality of the text. From the missionaries' point of view, of course, the failure of the exercise was only a confirmation of the virtue and superiority of their faith and of the system of textuality in which that faith was transmitted. It is ironic that the passions that moved missionaries to travel across the world would be passionately embodied in systems of semeiosic rationality. And that rationality would be fateful.

The Tamil Modern and the Communicative Revolution

The career of the ACM was impressive from a social transformative point of view, if not from an evangelical one. From the missionaries' landing in 1816

to 1855, they had produced a network of elite English and vernacular Tamil schools—for both boys and girls—that resulted in the education of some 30,000 students in a population estimated to be approximately 120,000. They had established a major press, Ceylon's first Tamil newspaper, the *Morning Star* (*Uthayatharakai* in Tamil), and began producing a new colonial elite among upper-class Jaffna Tamils. A comparative hinterland in the world, a dry peninsula far from any major city, Jaffna may have been among the most literate places on earth.

Yet during a period of evangelical efflorescence and conservative reaction in the United States, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the governing board of foreign missions, decided that the ACM had basically failed, that it had spent a great deal of money and energy educating all of these people for forty years with only four hundred or so members in the church.[29] Furthermore, the main seminary in Vattukottai had since shut down, as it had become a center of anti-Christian and pro-Saivite activism among the student body. A successful (formal) testament to the ACM's (substantive) failure, these well-educated young men bypassed the Protestant message and took up the political principles of the Enlightenment as new kinds of free political agents. In essence, the mission had failed to do what the missionaries had hoped it would do: they wanted Jaffna to be a burned-over district, a land where the fire of the Gospel burned away all error and sin, where the population would be evangelized and fervent in their faith. It was not to be.

But while Protestantism had failed, Protestant textuality emerged as dominant. The communicative revolution of Arumuga Navalar—about whom we will have more to consider in Chapter 2—serves to illustrate the point. A Saivite educated by the Wesleyan Methodists (who followed the Americans), Navalar produced Saivite institutions that were, in essence, organized according to Protestant textuality. He was involved in the first productions of prose Tamil in Saivite and educational literature; the establishment of Saivite schools; and a vast expansion of Tamil printing through his presses in Lanka and Madras. And, significantly for our purposes, he is credited with being the first non-Christian to give a sermon along the lines of Protestant homiletic, on 31 December 1847, inside the high-walled grounds of a Siva temple outside Jaffna Town. His role as printer, builder of educational institutions, "reformer"

(better, rationalizer) of Saivism as a "religion" per se, and his oratorical and literary impulses suggest that Navalar was producing Tamil as a language that could be used to address some wider imagined community, a Tamil that could be used to address something resembling a public.

Arumuga Navalar's communicative revolution was not all that revolutionary from a Protestant point of view, and it was loudly decried as such at the time. But outside a Christian context it was profoundly revolutionary. It began a process that utterly transformed Jaffna society on the basis of new forms of textuality that established entirely novel types of social action, not least of which was the agency of the orator. It was that communicative restructuring of textual practice, that new interpellation, that spoke into being the Tamil public sphere. Here, language came under a peculiar kind of scrutiny, reepistemized as a new way of knowing and being that could be used to imagine a population that had a commonality in, and solidarity based on, language (Trautmann 2006; Mitchell 2009).

Previously, people who spoke Tamil were not Tamil as such; rather, they could be characterized with any number of identities based more on local community, caste, lineage, hereditary office, religious sect, and so on (Frykenberg 1999, 6–7). But after this communicative revolution, to speak Tamil was to *be* Tamil, and a new kind of political subjectivity was born that could enable the imaginary of a homogeneous sociality ("Society"), a flat social order of "zero-degree individuals" (Kaviraj 1997, 90) to accompany a new flat spatiotemporality (i.e., homogeneous empty time). And, indeed, those categories that were politicized at the same time, in particular, the Brahmin (see M. S. S. Pandian 2007), became problematic categories that were to be resisted in every conceivable way. And therein lies the heart of twentieth-century Tamil politics, that is, that dual process of modernization that involves a radical and simultaneous individuation and totalization, the formation of new specific social categories within a total social order.

But while the Protestants made history, to be sure, they did not do so as they pleased. There were other textualities still operating that were the ground, so to speak, upon which the Tamil public sphere would be experienced. An ancient vernacular aesthetic of textual production appears to have remained immanent, perhaps we can say *inhered*, within the transformations of Protestant

textuality that yielded a qualitative difference in the nature of the formation of the public. The poetic and rhetorical textual forms were carried over from the ancient into the production of the modern. And it was those poetics and rhetorics that made the experience of a Tamil public sphere utterly different from the experience of the public sphere in other times and places. The bodily apperception of the sheer sound of language, the music of language (*nāta*), remained a key element of the entire project and would come to have fateful political impacts later on in the Dravidianist uptake of such poesy as an index of their Tamil cultural authenticity and their antiquity in the new democratic order of mid-twentieth-century Tamil Nadu (Bate 2009b), even as the poetic form of such sonorous poesy was the modern, Protestant homiletic sermon.[30]

The Newness of Vernacular Political Speeches

Politics (*la politique*) in royal courts in India, certainly in the Tamil-speaking lands of South India, were polyglot affairs. A wonderful index of this polyglossia is the library of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Marathi-speaking court of Thanjavur. A brief tour of the public exhibits of their vast palm-leaf manuscript collection features Sanskrit texts written in Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Modi, and Nāgarī scripts. At that time, specific scripts for specific languages had not been rationalized as such, in contrast to today, when each language is written in a script of its own. Indira Peterson (2011) has unearthed a vast trove of plays staged for the court whose characters spoke in Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, and Brajbhasha (Hindustani), each language indexing different stock characters, kinds of persons, qualities of personhood, ethics, and humors. The world of the early modern political in India was heteroglossic, from top to bottom.

In general, despite monoglot (sub)nationalist histories of Tamil and Telugu in South India, languages had yet to become fixed, parallel codes mapped onto a territory for the purposes of state or education. Literate people would find themselves using a wide variety of codes to do a variety of different tasks. Scholars such as Bernard Cohn (1996) for North India and Lisa Mitchell (2009) for South India have shown how different spaces of dealing with the state involved different registers of speaking and writing. The British, wrote Cohn, encountered a profoundly heteroglossic situation with languages they did

not understand—not only denotationally but as they were used in different contexts by different peoples for different purposes. Specialists in language abounded: *akhund*s, or "Muhammadan school teachers," in Bengal were specialists in composing and interpreting letters in Persian; *dubashi*s (literally, two languages) were official interpreters; *vakil*s (lawyers) were specialists in the appropriate modes of court procedures. In early nineteenth-century Madras, one might write a letter home in Tamil, compose poetry and lyrics in Telugu, petition the government in Persian, trade with coastal merchants in Portuguese and inland merchants in Moors (Hindustani), and present wares to another market in English (Mitchell 2009; also see Bhavani Raman 2012 for a discussion of "cutcherry Tamil").

In short, the situation the British encountered in India was among the most profoundly institutionalized heteroglossias in the world. Languages were not parallel codes (Sakai 1997), each one appropriate for all tasks. What linguists might call languages, mutually unintelligible codes, functioned more as registers for different purposes, social contexts, and projects. Cosmopolitan actors used a wide range of such codes to index their erudition and sophistication in a wide range of institutional settings. For Tamil to become the naturalized language of the Tamil people (*tamiḻarkaḷ*) in Tamil lands (*tamiḻagam*), for Telugu to become its counterpart in Andhra, there had to be a massive transformation of what languages were and how they were practiced.

This is the import of the eruption of the vernacular in the first decade of the twentieth century. For it was around 1905 that Tamil and Telugu emerged nearly simultaneously as political languages in the transformation of a previous regime of linguistic practices associated with statecraft to what we can call a vernacular, monoglot imperative that characterized twentieth-century political praxis.

Vernacular political oratory exploded across British India as the political modus vivendi of the Swadeshi movement, 1905–8, what some have called India's first modern political mobilization (Chapter 3). Such oratory became the defining feature of a new kind of political practice associated with Swadeshi that emerged across British India in 1905 following the partition of Bengal. This was the first time that political actors systematically took to vernacular oratory. This is not to say that Tamil oratory itself was created at this moment.

But the Swadeshi movement saw the first *systematic* use of vernacular political oratory delivered to far-flung "common" or "illiterate" people well beyond anything that had gone on before. In other words, the meetings of the Swadeshi movement were the forerunners of the new kinds of practices that dominated twentieth-century politics in Tamil Nadu.[31]

We know that there was, of course, a prehistory to this eruption. The great Congressman and pioneer newspaper publisher G. Subramania Iyer had taken a speaking tour in July–August 1882 throughout the Tamil-speaking parts of the Madras Presidency (Suntharalingam 1974, 181–82).[32] G. Subramania Iyer was a giant in the Madras Presidency, one of the founders of *The Hindu* and the founding editor of the Tamil daily *Swadesamitran*. He was also one of a core group of young men to form the Madras Mahajana Sabha (Madras Gentlemen's Society) and the Indian National Congress (INC) itself in the early 1880s (Suntharalingam 1974). G. Subramania Iyer undertook his 1882 tour—and another in 1888—with the aim of propagating new ideas surrounding the formation of the INC. In conjunction with these tours, a series of "Congress Catechisms" (*Kāṅgiras Vinā Viḍai*) was developed to answer questions about self-rule and elite political organizations such as Madras Mahajana Sabha and the INC.[33] Written in a clear and simple Tamil, the question-answer catechetical style was borrowed directly from missionary practice to bring the Gospel to the widest possible audience (Chapter 1). A *Swadesamitran* editorial of 24 December 1887 used the Christian metaphor of "irrigation" or "drawing water" (*iraittal*) in its announcement that "little books of easily understood catechism had been printed and Congress Committeemen were coming to irrigate every nook and corner of every village and town about the Congress and independence" (Mani 2005, 22).

But it is not clear that these were Tamil-only speaking tours; it is more likely that most of the speeches were in English, as G. Subramania Iyer was famous as an accomplished English speaker well into the Swadeshi period.[34] The historian R. Suntharalingam writes that "his visit to the mofussil towns excited interest among local leaders who were anxious to know his views on important public questions" (1974, 182), suggesting to me that these were meetings of English-speaking elites, not the *pāmara makkaḷ* (common people), as they would have been called in the language of the time.

In any event, the 1880s tours appeared to be one-off events, and the Congress did not engage in any systematic vernacular oratory addressed to subaltern publics for another twenty-some years. It was only with the eruption of the vernacular in the Swadeshi movement (Chapter 3) and, later, the Home Rule movement and Labor movement of 1917–20 (Epilogue) that such tours were undertaken in earnest and with transformative effect.

Something within the political changed dramatically during the two decades between 1900 and 1920 insofar as elites began quite pointedly to direct their utterances toward people they never bothered with before as political agents. The difference is the universalization of Ricoeur's politics (*la politique*). And this was well understood at the time. B. P. Wadia, a Theosophist and elite labor organizer, wrote the following in an open letter published in *New India* in June 1918:

> We want to bring the masses into line with the educated classes. Much lecturing work has been done already and what seems now necessary is to combine them in . . . Agricultural societies, Trade and Labour Unions, Ryot Combines, Craft Guilds. . . . The masses do possess political outlook; they have lost the art of making themselves heard, and our task should be to persuade them into speech and action. (1921, xvi)

In this passage, Wadia links the political, the masses, speech, and action in a way that is perhaps entirely unprecedented in Indian history—and he ties it together with a particular form of action, "lecturing work." This, we might say, marks the transformation from the political (*le politique*) to politics (*la politique*), from a generalized set of actions into what Hannah Arendt (1958) called Action itself. And when elites made the conscious move to turn toward, to face (*nōkku*) and begin addressing the common man, when the everyman was called to join into the political, a new agency—the orator (Chapter 4) and the people (Chapters 3, 5)—was formed along with a new definition of what politics would look like.[35]

A Pause in Lieu of a Conclusion

The themes of the Swadeshi speeches of 1905–8 were the boycott of *paradeshi* (foreign) clothes, support and patronage of *swadeshi* (national) industry, a

call for a "return" to Indian ways of doing things, Indian gods, Indian spirituality, Indian epic literature, and Indian brotherhood. The Swadeshi movement, in the largest sense, pioneered and established the basic idioms of the Indian Independence movement, forms and themes that Mohandas Gandhi would appropriate in his satyagraha over the next forty years. But perhaps the most basic innovation of Swadeshi was the attention to new forms of language, especially as the leadership sought to bring the light of freedom to the darkness of the uneducated masses in places such as the Andhra deltas. They did so in whatever language was appropriate to the region within a single ideological paradigm, a single nationalism. It was a polyglot nationalism, to be sure, articulated through the means of each vernacular language: Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Bengali.

And so perhaps one of the great ironies of that pragmatic ideology was the formation of new geographies of monoglot politics, new spaces within which those very languages would become not merely expedient but necessary codes of political and ethnic belonging. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was the southern language areas, first the Telugu-speaking Andhras followed very quickly by the Tamil-speaking southern districts of the Madras Presidency, that would be the first of all Indian polities to demand recognition for their languages (Trautmann 2006; Mitchell 2009; Bate 2009b); to demand a monopoly for those languages within the newly established postcolonial states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu; to even die for their languages. What changed to enable such a transformation was nothing less than the redefinition of language itself.

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