Chapter 2

ARUMUGA NAVALAR AND THE PROTESTANT MODERN

> Sivaist preachers and stewards appeared and formed and worked a circuit somewhat on the Methodist model.
>
> —E. J. Robinson, *Hindu Pastors*

On 31 December 1847, Arumugam Pillai, some months later given the title "Navalar" ("The Able-Tongued" or "The Learned"), delivered a sermon (*pirasaṅgam*) in the Vannarpannai Siva Temple near Jaffna (Robinson 1867, 121–29; Young and Jebanesan 1995, 121–22.).[1] In doing so, he is said to have inaugurated what has since been called *mēḍaittamiḻ*, "Tamil stage speech" or "oratory" (Sivathamby 1979; Kailasapathy 1986; Bate 2000, 2009b), a practice that came to define political communicative behavior in twentieth-century Tamilagam. We know that other Tamil speakers, both South Asian and European, had delivered Tamil orations for many years before that in the form of Protestant sermons (see Chapters 1, 3). But when Arumugam spoke that night, he began a process of transforming the nature of Saivite temple practice and hence inaugurated a transformation of Saivism itself into a religion per se, on the model of Christian worship practice.

In this chapter, I consider the production of the Tamil sermon in Christian and Saivite practices, circa 1850, and suggest the fateful entailments of oratory to far larger realms of practice and understandings of the social, historical, and political order. Whatever else it may be, that which we call the political

(*la politique* in Paul Ricoeur's terms) is largely composed of communicative practices. Oratory, like print capitalism, is associated with the development of large-scale political entities such as publics and nations (Habermas [1962] 1991; Anderson [1983] 2006).[2] Both print capitalism and oratory share certain dominant analyses: both have been viewed as centrally productive of particular forms of social and political consciousness, and both have been seen as communicative modes of the production of certain sociological formations. While significant attention has been paid to the role of print in producing the public sphere or the contemporary nation-state, the role of the orator has been largely hidden in this history (see Introduction for more discussion). It is of course far easier—though not easy—to trace the development of print culture because it left a material record in the form of text artifacts. Nineteenth-century Tamil oratory, however, has left only palimpsests of its production, impressions on the minds of those who heard it and thought to describe it. There are no tape recordings or detailed linguistic transcriptions of these texts, though we can occasionally find notes by the speakers themselves or members of their audiences. We can also find texts (e.g., tracts, catechisms, or homiletics) that offer tantalizing suggestions about how their authors felt a sermon, for instance, *should* be delivered.[3] However, in comparison to American and European oratorical traditions, there is scant evidence of the material form of these events or of the texts themselves.

This is a problem. I suggest here that oratory embodies a quotidian model of social order, a ritual instantiation of the way that people understand the kinds of persons and agencies that exist within their social worlds. Any oratorical address involves peculiar notions of agency, temporality, and social being. The orator attempts to transform something or someone, to change the order of things as they stand at that moment, and to do so within a linear temporal order that can be changed (rather than merely experienced, as in a cyclical temporal order of some kind). Further, the orator (say, a Protestant missionary, a Saivite sermonizer, or their descendant, the political speaker) embodies the center of a social order that he is thought capable—entitled, authorized—of changing. He is an icon of that order and embodies it ritually as he speaks. Like the literate consumer of print, the subject par excellence of Benedict Anderson's nation-state, the orator enacts and imagines a social world that includes him and the interpellated audience as indispensable elements of that world. The case of Arumuga Navalar, his interlocutors, colleagues, and opponents provides a privileged insight not only into

the social world of the time but also into the production of whole new discrete domains of practice such as "religion" and, related to that, formal mass "politics."

Language and the Delimitation of Religion

The notion that "religion" is a somewhat recent demarcation of a wide range of practices has been argued since at least the 1950s and 1960s, specifically in the work of Cantwell Smith (1962). It has been taken up by a wide range of scholars more recently, such as Talal Asad (1993), S. N. Balagangadhara (1994), Richard King (1999), and Valentine Daniel (2002), among many others. The basic argument, with which I am in agreement, asserts that religion is not a panhuman category but rather (1) an irreducibly Christian concept; (2) a function of colonial power relations, especially in the nineteenth century; and (3) a phenomenological-cum-practical process of the demarcation or definition of a set of practices as a discrete realm of action and belief that are different from other realms of belief and practice. This last part of the problem, an element of what we might call the "blessed rage for order" that characterizes Western modernity, I argue, can be seen as a demarcation of communicative practices of one sort or another as well. Consider, again, the idea that Protestantism was defined precisely as that form of Christianity that would have a direct, unmediated, and *semantically coherent* relationship with the Word of God. A new kind of *Knowing*, to borrow Daniel's (2002) distinction, was to supplant an earlier, Roman Catholic, and (from the Protestant point of view) erroneous way of *Being*. And this Knowing was based on the idea that the Bible was the Word of God and that we could, with care, understand it even through various translations. And given that we could know it, it became imperative that we do so—hence, literacy and its institutional mode of production, schools, flourished in Protestant societies. It was, ultimately, a social movement based irreducibly on a theory of signs.

Contemporary Theravada Buddhism, too, developed as a new understanding of a great many earlier communicative practices. For Theravada Buddhism, the "game of religion" was played out through a series of public debates beginning in the 1840s and reaching their apogee in the late 1860s and early 1870s (Daniel 2002, 46–50). It was also played out in the transformation of the Sinhala *dharmadesana*, these days translated as "sermon." But prior to a reformation of

sorts inaugurated by Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933) in the late nineteenth century, it was basically a highly systematized and ritually elaborate recitation of Pali texts. As H. L. Seniveratne describes it, most listeners prior to Dharmapala's time would not have been concerned with the actual denotationality (or semantic coherence) of the texts but rather in the evocational experience of the sheer sound of the text, an aesthetic experience that in itself was generative of merit (2000, 74–76, cited in Daniel 2002, 49; see Chapter 1). It was only later in the "reforming" movements of Dharmapala and others that the term *dharmadesana* began to resemble the didactic and denotationally coherent sermon: it was reduced in length from approximately twelve hours to one hour, stripped of elaborate ritual and dramatic elements, and focused on the "meaning" of the ancient Pali text to be explicated. H. L. Seneviratne writes:

> Above all [the new *dharmadesana*] focused on a theme, a feature structurally integrated to the sermon in the form of a Pali verse that the preacher chanted explicitly recognizing it as the theme (*matrka*). While there are some precedents for this in the mediaeval Sinhala literary works which were essentially dharmadesana in written form, the new dharmadesana in its succinctness and unity resembled more the sermon that emanated from the Christian pulpit, like the ones which the young Dharmapala heard over and over again. (2000, 80–81, cited in Daniel 2002, 49–50)

As this chapter demonstrates, the transformation of the Sinhala *dharmadesana* toward the end of the nineteenth century was foreshadowed by a parallel transformation of the Saivite *pirasaṅgam* in the 1840s and 1850s by Arumuga Navalar and his colleagues. I suggest here that the focus on communicative practice by Navalar was the central activity in the production of Saivism as a religion per se. This, of course, is not to claim that Saivism did not exist as a coherent body of practices, including textual practices. I claim, however, that the Saivism we know today, the *religion*, found its first condensation *as* religion through the focus on communicative practices that Navalar began. I also want to suggest that it was on the bases of these new kinds of communicative practices that new kinds of political agency and new social imaginaries would later be founded. In particular, the public Tamil that was first produced in Christian sermons and borrowed by Saivism was

delivered within the first ritual instantiations of what would later become a Tamil public.

This chapter, then, is an attempt to recover the figure of the orator as a major player in the objectification of Saivism and a singularly Tamil public sphere through the production and transformation of communicative genres, that is, named models of discursive interaction. I later discuss the speaking events of 1847–48 and consider them in terms of their antecedents in Christian sermons and, taken together, their fateful quality as an originary moment in the production of Tamil oratory. The discussion begins with an account of Arumuga Navalar and his times, provides some rather detailed descriptions of the events in question, and closes with what I think is the significance of shifts in speech genres with transformations of larger-scale political organization. Basically, I make the claim that political transformation is intimately associated with transformations in the material form of communicative practice and in the apperception of those practices.

Arumuga Navalar, "The Able-Tongued"

Many Tamil scholars say that the sermons (*pirasaṅgam*) that Arumugam delivered in late 1847 and 1848 in and around Jaffna were the beginning of Tamil oratory. They were not the beginning of Tamil oratory. They were just the beginning of Tamil oratory outside a Protestant context, which, as it turns out, was momentous. I would call it the first Tamil oratorical revolution, and it had some rather profound historical effects.

Navalar is a giant in modern Tamil history. He has held the attentions of serious Tamil scholars since his death in 1879. His prominence in Tamil letters seems only to grow with time, the mark of what Marshall Sahlins (2004) would call "systemic agency," the mark of agency that was licensed to truly transform things—like Napoleon, for instance. He has been deified in Saivite hagiographies, considered the father of Tamil Eelam, made into an agent of working-/middle-class resistance to imperial rule, and given the title "The Champion Reformer of the Hindus."[4] I suggest here that his importance is due precisely to his role in the transformation of the materiality of Tamil communicative practices.

In addition to his oratorical prowess, he is known for his role 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. 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. Indeed, I believe he was producing a Tamil that could be used to address something resembling a "public."

Navalar was born Arumuga Pillai in 1821. His father was a poet and Tamil scholar, well versed in the Saivite canon and trained in the recitation of these texts—also called *pirasaṅgam*, the same term that Christians used for "sermon."

After receiving a traditional Tamil education by his father up to 1834, Arumugam became the favorite student of the Reverend Peter Percival, who that very year became head of the Wesleyan Mission School and principal of Jaffna Central College. There, he quickly mastered English, was made a Tamil tutor when he was fourteen years old, and was appointed teacher of Tamil and English at the school in 1841, when he was nineteen years old. Percival, in his role as head of the Jaffna Auxiliary of the Bible Society, also employed Arumugam as his assistant translator for what was to become a new Bible translation. By the end of 1847, when Arumugam began conducting his anti-Christian/pro-Saivite sermons, he had finished his work as translator and was preparing to accompany Percival to Madras to present their Bible to the Bible Society administrators, which they did in March 1848.[5]

Arumugam and Percival's Bible project met little success in Madras (though elements of it would be incorporated into a new version about twenty-five years later). In July, when he and Percival returned to Ceylon from their failed mission to the Bible Translation Society in Madras, Arumugam continued to give sermons in the temples until September 1848, when he and Percival broke their formal ties. Curiously, Arumugam engaged in these anti-Christian activities before, during, and after his trip to Madras to pitch his Bible. And his activities were common knowledge—indeed, some source of controversy. But Percival kept Arumugam on at the school for nine months, and by all accounts their parting was cordial. The two men, it is said, remained high in each other's esteem for the rest of their lives (which speaks well of them both in my mind).

From that point on, Arumugam became the leading activist in Saivism and in the creation of non-Christian educational and printing institutions until his death in 1879.

The Sermons

Let us examine more carefully the events of 1847 and 1848, the sermons in question, and the first cause of Arumugam's celebrity.

The Reverend Edward Jewitt Robinson, a missionary of the Wesleyan Methodists in Ceylon, provides the first detailed description of these events in his 1867 memoir, *Hindu Pastors*. This account becomes foundational to almost all subsequent writings about what happened. Reverend Robinson begins by relating the development of an organized opposition to Christianity in Jaffna that was of some concern to the Wesleyans:

> Sivaist preachers and stewards appeared and formed and worked a circuit somewhat on the Methodist model. In connection with the reading and recitation of passages from their sacred books, a lecture or sermon was delivered every Friday evening, in a spacious shed on the holy ground within the high wall round the temple of Siva at Wannarponne [Vannarpannai]; and appointments, though not of such frequent occurrence, were also kept [in temples of the surrounding villages] and at the important villages of Chunnagam and Manepy. Before the delivery of the 1st lecture, December 31, 1847, the officiating priest of the temple broke a cocoa-nut, in honour of Pillaiyar and the undertaking; and at the close of the meeting he solemnly rose and said, that the omens for the association were very auspicious. In the first place, the cocoa-nut had broken evenly into two equal parts; and secondly, at the commencement of the address, he had heard the sound of a bell within the temple. The principal orators, both of whom had been day-pupils in our Jaffna school, were Arumugavar, the first and most frequent, and the presiding genius through all the movement, and a friend of his named Cattigasayar [Karthigesaiyar]. The former, of the Vellala or agriculturalist caste, good looking, intelligent, studious, reserved, of grave demeanor and blameless life, not better acquainted with the Hindu shastras than with the Christian Scriptures, had been for a long period, day after day, the worthy companion and valued assistant of the gifted and plodding

> Mr. Percival in preparing and editing treatises and hymns in Tamil, and translating the Prayer-Book and the Holy Bible. Cattigasayar, a round, oily Brahmin, physically inferior to his colleague, and naturally less austere and resolute, but equally learned in Hindu lore, and quite as patriotic, would not alone have originated such an enterprise. He was the writer's [Robinson's] respected and faithful moonshee; and when bantered in the study, admitted without hesitation, and in the best temper, that he did not himself believe much of what he thought it necessary to relate to the people as unquestioned history. Poor men! (1867, 122–23)[6]

These sermons (*pirasaṅgam*) caused something of a stir. Though the Christian authorities and others were interested in receiving published accounts of them, Arumugam was loath to provide any details of the meetings; Robinson even reports that Arumugam refused a "public offer" of twenty dollars by the American editor of an important Tamil and English daily newspaper, *Uthayatharakai-Morning Star*, for authorized accounts of the sermons (123). Robinson, however, managed to receive reports of the meetings from a "zealous" young Tamil catechist named Richard Watson. Watson, armed with "the wisdom of the serpent" (124), probably bribed or otherwise cajoled a "Sivaist" participant who made notes of the meetings in Tamil on palm leaves (*ōlai*), which he translated and gave to Robinson, who writes:

> I possess in his handwriting copious outlines of twenty-nine of the addresses given at Wannarponne from February 18th to November 17, 1848. Incoherent and nonsensical to the Christian mind, yet they were not more earnestly delivered and attentively heard than for their object carefully and suitably prepared. They were constructed in imitation of such sermons as the zealous Catechist himself [Watson] was wont to deliver; a text being selected from some reputedly sacred book, and discussed under so many heads. The subjects of the discourses supplied were the following: Initiatory prayer; the holy necklace; the love of Siva; the sacred writings taking away the life of animals, two lectures; festivals; the public worship of Siva; the mortality of the body; the leading doctrines of Sivaism; the duties of women; impartial judgment; earthly and heavenly treasures; adultery; charity; sacrilege, two; drunkenness, three; gratitude; almsgiving; educa-

> tion; unity of God; the veneration due to cows, two; imitating the wise and the good; the vanity of earthly pleasures; and credulity. (124–25)

Despite Robinson's obvious and understandable prejudices, he provides a reasonably accurate account of the events that concern me here. Other accounts confirm that Arumugam began his sermons at the Vannarpannai Siva Temple on 31 December 1847 (Kailasapillai [1918] 1955, 25–26; Young and Jebanesan 1995, 121). The fullest account (thus far) published of one of these meetings, which took place at the Manippay Skanda (or Murugan) Temple, was made by an assistant to Benjamin Meigs, an American missionary in Jaffna. Again, the details here are important. Meigs writes:

> On the evening of 18 March [1848] there was a meeting at the Temple of Skanda at which about 100 people were present. The service was commenced by singing verses of Tiruvasakam [one of the central texts of the Saivite canon] by Tamber, one of the officiating Brahmins of the temple. He then showed us how to appear before the holy places of Siva. First we must wash ourselves. Secondly we must rub ashes in the form of Tripoondaram. Thirdly we must wear on the head garlands of Rutteratsham. Fourthly, the head must be bare, not covered with a turban or handkerchief. Fifthly, when we approach the temple, we must prostrate ourselves so that the eight and the five parts of the body [male and female, respectively] may touch the ground. All who will not perform these ceremonies in the prescribed form must suffer the pains of hell, where they will be obliged to sit and walk and step on pointed needles. . . .
>
> After this [Arumugam] approaching the bench professed as the subject of his discourse, to prove that there is but one God. . . . [Materialists] say that the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water are God. . . . These however are not God. Again, if we inquire if [the Jain Mahavira] is God, in my estimation he is not, but the meanest of all the gods. Neither is Budhu god [referring to Buddha], because he was procreated. But the Christian religion is the meanest of all. The God whom the Christians worship cannot therefore be the true God. Justice and mercy are prominent attributes of the true God. The God whom the Sivas worship possesses these attributes. He permits the transmigration of souls, through several births. Thus men

> atone of their sins by the sufferings which they endure. After these successive births, he receives them to heaven. In this he displays both his justice and mercy. But the God of the Christians is not so. Though a man be ever so moral and conduct himself with the greatest propriety, yet if he does not outwardly repent and be baptized, he cannot get to heaven. Therefore, the God whom the Christians worship is not just and merciful. The God of the Sivas is therefore the true God. Thus saying he finished by singing a Tiruvasakam. He also gave notice to his audience that on several succeeding weeks, he would preach upon the attributes of Siva, and show that the God of the Christians does not possess these attributes. (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 6/115, 11/04/48, Houghton Library, Harvard University, cited in Young and Jebanesan 1995, 121–22)

Analysis

There are a number of striking aspects about these accounts. His years among the Christians, his thorough familiarity with the Bible and with Protestant liturgical practices, gave Arumugam an insider's view not only of Wesleyan Methodism but perforce with how a religion per se operates: something phenomenologically demarcated from other realms of life, bounded off, and ideologically rationalized (in the Weberian sense of the term). As Robinson observes, his lectures "were constructed in imitation of such sermons as the zealous Catechist himself was wont to deliver"; his and his colleagues' travels from temple to temple are described as working "a circuit somewhat on the Methodist model."

The very form of the meetings was quite novel (from the point of view of Saivite worship practices, if not from Protestant ones): Arumugam chose some textual swatch from one of the principal texts of Saivism and proceeded to offer an exegesis and discussion in the form of a sermon that was "mellifluous to the ears and easily understood" (Muttucumaraswamy 1965, 20). One account also claims that he was able to extemporaneously deliver an address when his colleague, Karthigesaiyar, had to suddenly miss his appointed turn (Kailasapillai [1918] 1955, 26–28; Muttucumaraswamy 1965, 18–19). Based on these feats of oratorical prowess, as well as his organizational and educational activities, Arumugam "earned a reputation as the best Methodist the Jaffna

Wesleyans ever produced" (S. Sivathamby, pers. comm., cited in Young and Jebanesan 1995, 123).

Such practices would have embodied a radical contrast to the types of discursive activities theretofore practiced in the temples. Again, consider the word *pirasaṅgam*, which we have translated as both "temple recitations" of the Saivite canon and as Protestant "sermon." The *pirasaṅgam* of old involved the recitation of texts written eight hundred to one thousand years earlier, in language that, in the mid-nineteenth century, was quite archaic. Most listeners would have known the stories already, but they probably would not have followed every word that was being spoken. Rather, like the experience of nineteenth-century Sinhala speakers listening to Pali *dharmadesana*, most medieval listeners of church Latin, contemporary people listening to *fus'ha* recitations of the Qur'an, or the Sanskrit heard in temples all over India, language was not so much denotational—referential and predicational—as evocational.[7] In Valentine Daniel's terminology, it appealed more to mood than to mind (1996, 104–34; see Chapter 1). In striking similarity to Seneviratne's account of Dharmapala's transformation of the Pali *dharmadesana* some three decades later, Richard F. Young and S. Jebanesan explicitly remark on the difference between the Saivite recitational *pirasaṅgam* and Navalar's sermon:

> The performance of *piracaṅgam* was intended to evoke scenes and moods that lifted listeners out of the present into the realm of myth. Although myth subsequently provided thematic material that Āṟumukam discussed in lecture format, the content at this stage was dominated by apologetics solemnized by the exposition of texts and structured around liturgical formulas adapted from Māṇikkavācakar's Tiruvācakam and (later) the Tēvāram hymns. (1995, 122–23)

What might this oratory have sounded like? It is safe to say that it was like nothing heard in a temple before. But this does not provide us with any sense of what meanings people would have attributed to its form. While this is one of the main questions further research on this matter should attempt to address, for the moment we might begin with descriptions of his prose and some of his prescriptions for the recitation of the sacred texts. Again, his speaking was described as "mellifluous" and "easy to understand." This suggests that he

was using a contemporary lexicon, one based on the ordinary conversational Tamil heard on the streets (and on the pulpit)—but not like the archaic lexicon of the major Saivite texts. But at the same time, it was also described as *sentamiḻ*, "beautiful," "fine," or "refined" Tamil, the Tamil associated with the written word, with prosody, literature, and grammar. *Sentamiḻ* is also, perforce, defined in opposition to *koccaittamiḻ*, "vulgar" Tamil, or *koḍuntamiḻ*, the "bent" Tamil of the illiterate speaker.

In light of this distinction, then, consider the description of Navalar's prose offered by one of the senior Tamil scholars of the twentieth century, T. P. Meenakshisundaran. "On the one hand," he writes,

> there was prose known as High Senthamil, and on the other hand Kochchaithamil—an ascent and a descent—(a crest and a trough). Navalar leveled these, applied plaster to it; he made it a shining white wall. Yes! In this levelling process, many beautiful paintings on the peaks have disappeared. . . . But Arumuga Navalar did yeoman service, by ploughing and levelling a rugged old terrain that never saw the plough, and he had to sow the seeds and clear the weeds. . . . Therefore, Arumuga Navalar was the father of modern Tamil prose, and laid its foundations firm and secure. (T. P. Meenakshisundaran, "Ceylon Tamil Poets," quoted in Muttucumaraswamy 1965, 28–29)[8]

It is appropriate at this point to parenthetically note that Navalar vastly expanded the use of punctuation in Tamil and broke words up on the printed page according to word boundaries. His published texts of the classics of the Saivite canon included in their titles and introductions the phrase "easy to understand." Such practices were associated with the emergence of silent reading—a quite new model of textuality at the time—all over Tamil lands (Venkatachalapathy 1994). Clearly, Navalar was very concerned with the denotational aspects of text, reference, and predication. He was concerned, in other words, that masses of people actually understand what they were reading.

This, it seems, is the genius of his prose, and probably, too, of his Christian sermon-like oratory: the ability to combine aspects of written and spoken forms of Tamil into a new kind of oral performance in the Saivite context that would be "mellifluous," like the prosody of the sacred texts, and as "easily

understood" as the Tamil of everyday interaction (insofar as "everyday" discursive interaction is actually easily understood). That Navalar believed that Saivite discursive interaction *should* be easily understood as referential and predicational text—rather than some other form of the aural experience of sacred verse—is suggested in his prescription written in a famous and highly influential "manifesto" (*Vikkiyāpanam*) of 1860 that the "readers" (*ōtuvār*) to be appointed to recite the sacred works in Siva temples throughout Tamil lands "recite in a clear fashion" (*suttaṅgamāka ōtavum*) (Kailasapillai [1918] 1955, 49). That he should make a point of prescribing proper enunciation indicates that *pirasaṅgam* was probably not, at the time, recited in a clear fashion. And, I think, denotational clarity was not even the point (see Chapter 1).

When Navalar took these aesthetics of language along with the model of the Protestant sermon outside the church and into new arenas, he thereby re-created the arenas themselves as something brand-new. An index of this transformation is the word *pirasaṅgam* itself. One of Navalar's grandnephews, an accomplished Tamil scholar in his own right, T. Kailasapillai, made the following observation:

> *Pirasaṅgam* is a Sanskrit term. We have yet to devise its Tamil equivalent. Even in Tamil texts it is used in many different senses. Of these, the sense of one man (*oruvar*) skillfully speaking on a topic only appears in (Navalar's) time. In times before, there were many excellent *vidhvan*s who wrote textual commentaries; but I have not heard that they rose up in their assemblies, took up each topic one by one and taught the people. It must have been by (Navalar) himself that *pirasaṅgam* gained this meaning in Tamil. ([1918] 1955, 25)

That a scholar of Kailasapillai's experience could not think of a single instance in all of Tamil literature wherein an individual stands up to address an audience is not surprising: in two thousand years of continuous literary production in Tamil, no single high-status rhetor addresses a multitude until the 1891 publication of a play, *Manonmaṇiyam* (Tho. Paramasivan, pers. comm.).[9] Solitary rhetors did not address multitudes; it was the multitudes (of poets, usually) who addressed apical figures (such as gods or kings). Where gods or kings (or other high-status beings) do speak in the Tamil record, they do so in dialogic,

not monologic, modalities. When Navalar delivered a sermon, a monologic form of discursive interaction, as an element of Saivite temple *pirasaṅgam*, he instantiated a semeiosocial revolution that utterly transformed the representation of status in discursive interaction and the possible inhabitable roles higher-status persons in Tamil can embody.

The Materiality of Oratory and the Objectification of Saivism

The year following his first sermons and his break from Percival found Arumugam again in the Tamil soil of the Indian mainland. The highlight of the trip, and another turning point of his life, was an event at a Saivite center of higher learning (an *ātīnam*, or "math" or "mutt") in Thanjavur District. It was here that Arumuga Pillai became Arumuga Navalar. One of his hagiographies describes what happened:

> While in India, Navalar visited several sacred shrines and delivered religious lectures everywhere. When he was at Kumbakonam, the head of the Thiruvavaduturai Adhinam invited him to his Math for the purpose of honoring him. The head of this Math had all along been regarded as the spiritual head of the Saiva world. He received Navalar with great regard and love. At his request Navalar delivered a lecture, and the head of the Math, in order to honour him, or rather to honour it, gave him the title of Navalar. He stayed there a few days spending his time in reading rare Agamic works, not available anywhere else. Though he accepted the title, he would not accept anything tangible.[10]

The title Navalar—*nā* (tongue) + *valam* (skill)—is now almost universally translated as "orator," but it had previously been given to poets and those who recited the texts of the Saivite canon in *pirasaṅgam*. But when it was given to Arumugam in 1848, the award was based on an entirely new aesthetic of an entirely new practice, that is, the "lecture" or "sermon." From that moment on, Navalar was a sensation, a man using a model of discursive interaction that had theretofore been associated exclusively with Protestants—the very people who were at that moment waging a spirited attack against Saivism and all other forms of what we now call Hinduism. Among his admirers were wealthy

men who backed Navalar financially and made it possible for him to begin a series of new activities on behalf of Saivism, including the establishment of his school and the purchase of printing presses in Ceylon and Madras—a skillful tongue, indeed. The next few decades in Madras are called the "Navalar" or "Jaffna Period" for the revolution in communicative practices he inaugurated and later institutionalized.

Those communicative practices were, in essence, Christian or, more precisely, Protestant. The Christianity that faced Navalar as a hegemonic Other in the mid-nineteenth century was instantiated in Jaffna as a set of discursive practices defined by explicitly metapragmatic stipulation of some distinct sphere of knowledge and action that we today understand as "religion": such things as catechism; the theological training of Methodists, Anglicans, and the Congregationalists in terms of certain discursive procedures; homiletic; the "circuit rider"; and of course, the Sunday sermon. The Saivism of the time, on the other hand, involved various experiences and emotional states that were also produced in real-time discursive interaction. But there was no institutionalized realm of the metapragmatic stipulation of that action, no sets of procedures ideologically itemized, rationalized, and made available for objective uptake and distribution among those who might be called Saivites. In the Saivism of the day, being and feeling were privileged over knowing; the aesthetic over the ideological; Firstness, in Peircean terms, over Thirdness, or in Daniel's terms, mood over mind.

Arumugam's sermons, and his related liturgical rationalization, began a process in which Saivism became a religion per se, a mode of institutionally regulated/regularized action that could be stipulated in a set of discursive practices that themselves involved the institutionalized stipulation of their own production (cf. Meigs's notes on the meeting at the Vannarpannai Siva Temple on 31 December 1847: first, wash yourself; second, rub ashes; third, wear garlands of Rutteratsham; fourth, head must be bare; fifth, proper prostration, etc.)

The semeiosic stipulation of a set of beliefs and practices as a discrete realm of action is precisely what distinguishes a religion from the vast range of practices and ideas people have had regarding deities, spirits, the afterlife, cosmogony, et cetera. As Émile Durkheim so famously put it, a "religion" is

a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unites all adherents into a church—a church, note, that can be distinguished from any other church ([1912] 1995, 44). But we should point out that not all such ideas and practices relative to the sacred were, in fact, "religions" in the way we currently understand that term (as it is used, for instance, in departments of religious studies). Prior to the missionization of Jaffna by Protestants (and perhaps, Catholics), it is unlikely that most of the people who worshipped the various deities associated with Siva called themselves "Saivites." They certainly did not call themselves "Hindus," as they do today. But if one were to ask any worshipper if he "believed" that the image he worshipped in the temple was God, he most likely would have found the question nonsensical. From his point of view, the image was in fact God (or a/the God) whether one believed it so or not. The existence of the deity—and one's identity as a worshipper of it—was irrelevant to any theory of its existence.

This, of course, is not the case in Christianity, which, as Daniel discusses, is the first true religion insofar as it demands of its practitioners the total acceptance of what amounts to a theory of God (2002, 36). One cannot be a Christian in the Protestant sense of the term without professing a belief that Jesus was the Son of God/Man, that he died on the cross, that he rose up on the third day, et cetera. While Islam is most certainly a religion in this respect, most of the beliefs and practices relative to the sacred in the majority of South Asia were most certainly not. What made such things as Buddhism and Saivism religions, in the way we understand them today, was grounded in elite responses to the colonial project of Christianization and the transformation of older practices (such as *pirasaṅgam* and *dharmadesana*) into ones that were modeled explicitly on Christian ones.

As discussed at the outset of this chapter, such an observation regarding the relative "newness" of the Hindu and Buddhist "religions" is nothing new. But what I hope to have emphasized here is that the modality of transformation from some pre-religious phenomenology of the sacred to an expressly religious one is communicative and metacommunicative. Arumuga Navalar's activities in the "reforming" of Saivism were almost entirely in the transformation of communicative practices and their primary institutions. In today's Jaffna, we can speak of Saivism as a discrete phenomenological realm of action and

belief that is defined precisely as Arumuga Navalar defined it in his educational institutions, in regularizing the Tamil language to facilitate printing and in sermonizing that would be "easily understood" and "mellifluous to the ears." The transformation and objectification of Saivism as a religion was undertaken precisely on the basis of a Protestant theory of signs and their uptake in material institutional practice.

It is this ideological and aesthetic objectification of discrete realms and phenomenological entities in communicative practice that is the object of this chapter. But it also represents the beginning of a longer inquiry into the transformation of far wider realms of sociocultural and political-economic production. When Navalar inaugurated his communicative revolution that transformed Saivism into a religion, he also took the first step in the production of the material form of discursive interaction that would come to define the "public" spaces of Tamil lands—from the first public speeches in Tamil associated with the freedom struggle in what became Tamil Nadu, beginning sometime around 1904 (Chapters 3–5). And the full impact of Navalar's revolution can be appreciated in consideration of the fact that, by the second decade of the twentieth century, some seventy years after he first offered a sermon extolling the compassionate nature of God in a Siva temple near Jaffna, the Tamil lands of India and Ceylon had become an empire of orators, lands in which anyone who engaged in the sphere of formal political action was, by very definition, a *nāvalar*.