



Religion, Caste, and Nation in South India: Maraimalai Adigal, the Neo-Saivite Movement, and Tamil Nationalism, 1876-1950

V. Ravi Vaithees

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The extraordinary power and solidity of regional ethno-nationalist identities such as the Tamil in South Asia continue to defy easy explanations. In this work, Ravi Vaithees, departing sharply from conventional 'secular' accounts, examines the deeper religious roots of Tamil/Dravidian identity formation and its relationship to broader processes of nationality formation in South Asia.

Through a close and innovative reading of the life and career of Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950), who played a central role in consolidating the intellectual and cultural foundation for non-Brahmin Tamil nationalism and the Dravidian movement, the author presents interesting insights into the history of the neo-Saivite revival.

The neo-Saivite articulation of non-Brahmin Tamil nationalism endowed it with a critical spirit that not only eschewed the philosophical idealism found in Brahmanism and neo-Vedantic thought but also celebrated the more firmly grounded, earthy, and sensuous Tamil tradition reflected in ancient Tamil and Bhakti poetry and Tamil Saiva Siddhanta. This has been brought forth by drawing from a range of influences including colonial and Christian missionary critiques of Brahminism and neo-Vedantic currents.

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