

A full-length portrait of a South Indian ruler, likely a Maharaja, standing in a room. He is wearing an elaborate golden and blue patterned tunic with a wide golden belt, a tall ornate golden crown with a red tassel, and a large necklace. He holds a sword in his right hand and a red book in his left. To his right is a table covered with a green cloth, holding a vase of red and pink flowers and several other books. In the background, a stone structure resembling a temple tower is visible.

Colonizing the Realm of Words

The Transformation of Tamil Literature
in Nineteenth-Century South India

Sascha Ebeling

Colonizing the Realm of Words

SUNY series in Hindu Studies

Wendy Doniger, editor

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in Nineteenth-Century South India

SASCHA EBELING

SUNY
P R E S S

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*Meinen Großeltern
Emmy Ebeling (1915–2001)
und
Aloys Heller (1918–2007)
in tiefempfundener Verehrung
und Dankbarkeit*

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Colonialism transformed many things, inexorably, decisively. But what about ways of narrating and listening, of reading and writing, of using one's imagination to do things with words? What about literature? How can the realm of words, the language we use and what we do with it, be colonized? During the course of the nineteenth century, all of India's literatures were thoroughly transformed under the impact of colonialism and Western modernity. This book examines the complexities of this momentous transformation by focusing on the case of Tamil, India's second oldest classical language besides Sanskrit. Based on extensive archival research and a wealth of textual material, this book tackles a variety of issues pertinent to Tamil elite literary production and consumption during the nineteenth century: the functioning and decline of traditional systems of literary production in which poet-scholars were patronized by religious institutions, landowners, and local kings; the anatomy of changes in textual practices, genres, styles, poetics, themes, tastes, and audiences; and the role of literature in the politics of social reform, gender, and incipient nationalism. By concluding with a discussion of what was at the time the most striking new genre—the Tamil novel—this book illuminates the larger picture of nineteenth-century Tamil literary culture.

Many of the questions discussed below are of course not limited to Tamil literature alone, but rather equally concern other literatures of South Asia or even other regions. In what follows, I have therefore tried to point to parallels and analogies as much and often as the scope of this book permitted. But I am aware that what I could only allude to or mention in passing would require a much more detailed comparative discussion—a discussion that could not be the aim of the present work and that, in any case, would presuppose in-depth studies of other literatures that we do not yet possess. Also, Tamil

presents a special case. As the only living Indian language with over two thousand years of documented literary activity, it provides us with a particularly rich archive—an archive that scholars have only just begun to explore. Many areas on the map of Tamil literary history are still blank. In writing about the nineteenth century, I am exploring one such largely uncharted terrain, a terrain that, for a long time, has been actively dismissed as “the dark period” of Tamil literature and that has only recently begun to receive due attention. I will return to that problem in the Introduction. In order to be able to discuss here what one may call the most “representative” works, I have surveyed over four hundred Tamil texts written during the nineteenth century. Still, the question of which authors and texts to include, the problem of selection and judgment any literary historian faces, has remained a vexing one. Given the limited space of a single volume, it seemed a good idea to focus on a few select texts and authors illustrating my arguments most clearly. To compensate, at least in part, for what had to be passed over, I have included a substantial number of notes intended to point readers to the available primary and secondary literature. In these notes, I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible with regard to nineteenth-century Tamil literature.¹

Since this is a book about the destinies of other books, it seems appropriate to dwell for a moment on its own destiny. A few sections of Chapters 4 and 5 appeared in earlier versions as my afterword in: Vedanayakam Pillai, Mayuram. 2005. *The Life and Times of Pratapa Mudaliar*. tr. by Meenakshi Tyagarajan. New Delhi: Katha. This material has been revised for the present book. This book began, in a sense, more than a decade ago, when my Tamil teacher, Thomas Malten of the University of Cologne, Germany, first initiated me to the works of Māyūram Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai and the wonders of nineteenth-century Tamil literature. I am profoundly grateful for his unceasing support, encouragement and advice during all these years. During my time at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), I was fortunate to have the opportunity to study with Stuart Blackburn, who was at the time himself working on nineteenth-century Tamil, and who greatly encouraged me in my interests and kindly shared his materials. I am grateful that he has remained interested in my project even after I left SOAS. Eventually, I submitted a PhD dis-

1. I am currently compiling an encyclopedia of nineteenth-century Tamil literature that will include entries on individual authors, works, genres, publishers, etc., and that will hopefully one day serve as a reference companion to this book. The footnotes here are meant for the interim.

sertation to the University of Cologne, which might be seen as this book's earlier avatar. The work on the dissertation received generous funding and support from various agencies at different points of time. I would like to thank the *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes* (German National Academic Foundation), the *Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst* (DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service) and the *Käthe Hack Stiftung* at the University of Cologne for their support, as well as the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* (German Oriental Society) for honoring this manuscript with their research award in 2007. Special thanks are also due to the late Margarethe Klenk and her sons and grandchildren for kindly sharing with me the most congenial living atmosphere of their charming villa in Köln-Lindenthal where much of this book was written. Finally, a generous award by the Whiting Foundation for excellence in Undergraduate Core teaching at the University of Chicago provided me with a very welcome sabbatical year during which I was able to make the final revisions to this book. As R. G. Collingwood remarked with characteristic clarity: "The duties of a professor may not be very arduous, but they do not encourage a state of mind favourable to the writing of books" (1972: viii). Thus, I thank Martha Roth, Dean of the Humanities Division of the University of Chicago, and Mario Santana, Master of the College, for granting me this leave.

To Dieter B. Kapp, my mentor and the supervisor of my dissertation, I owe a debt of gratitude. During the period of my studies in Cologne, he has been both teacher and friend, and much I have learned from him was not taught formally in a classroom. Ulrike Niklas, who first taught me Classical Tamil language and literature, has been an ever-generous teacher, friend, host, and ally in many projects as well as in life in general. Daud Ali, also at SOAS in London, taught me many things, and I am glad that he, respected teacher, friend, roommate, and accomplice on so many book raids in South India, continues to share his ideas and insights with me. When during an extended research period in South India in the year 2000 I was desperately trying to find a Tamil scholar to discuss a number of questions regarding the complex works of the nineteenth-century Tamil poets, I had great trouble finding someone competent and willing to read and discuss these works with me. Invariably, the answer I received was that those works were too difficult and that I should try someone else. At last, the late Pandit T. V. Gopal Iyer and his brother, the late Pandit T. S. Gangadharan, both of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) in Pondicherry, graciously opened an entire library of "sealed books" for me by initiating me to the works

I was curious to understand and by never refusing to discuss any text about which I would ask them. Without their constant generous help and those many weeks of discussions, this study would not have been possible. Pandit Gopal Iyer passed away on April 1st, 2007, and Pandit Gangadharan followed him on December 30, 2009. Their absence will continue to be felt by all of us who had the privilege of working with them.

I furthermore wish to thank the staff at various libraries and research institutions in India and around the world, viz. the Tamil Nadu Archives, the U. V. Swaminatha Iyer Library, the Roja Muthaiah Library, the Connemara Public Library, all in Chennai; the libraries of the French Institute and the EFEO as well as the National Archives in Pondicherry; the British Library and the SOAS Library in London; and finally the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. Access to the precious book and manuscript collections of the Tiruvavatuturai Atinam has been graciously granted by His Holiness the 23rd Mahasannidhanam Seer-vala-Seer Sivaprakasa Desika Paramacharya Swamigal and Ramji. Moreover, I wish to express my appreciation to the Honourable Judges of the Madras High Court for generously granting permission to consult the administrative records in the High Court Archives. Megan Macken and her most helpful staff at the Visual Resources Collection of the University of Chicago have kindly assisted me with the illustrations for this book. I am also grateful to my editors at SUNY Press, Nancy Ellegate, Eileen Meehan, and Michael Campochiaro, for their fine work and for making the experience of working jointly on this book such a pleasure.

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advice on virtually everything have become much cherished, indispensable parts of my life. I hope we will continue our conversations, over steaks and shakes, for many years.

This study would never have been conceived without Tharmarajah Suppiah ("Rajah") and his family who opened my eyes to the beauties and miracles of Tamil when I was still a young boy and without whom I would never have pursued the study of Tamil through my later days. I am grateful that these friends have so profoundly influenced the course of my life. Michael Goeke has also profoundly influenced my life, perhaps more so than he knows, and I am truly grateful for the privilege of his friendship through all these many years. A *fuerte abrazo* goes to Eva Fernández Casaña for making his life so happy.

What I owe to Nisha Kommattam is difficult to put into words. I wish to thank her for being with me in times of both *khushi* and *gham* as my harshest critic and most ardent supporter. Only she knows all the secrets behind these lines. Miffy, too, provided all the support that I could possibly expect from a young Beagle puppy. He has effectively taught me to look at life *sub specie canis*, and he and his bunny brother Mop have to be commended for their merciful decision not to eat my manuscript before I could send it to press.

Finally, this book would never have been completed without the ongoing encouragement which, expressed in so many wonderful ways, I continue to receive from my family: my parents Teja and Renate Ebeling, and my sister Mareike (whom I have too often unduly bothered by using her room, computer, printer, and e-mail). Crucial to my years as a student, and indeed to all my life, has also been the constant and generous loving support offered by my grandfather Aloys Heller and my grandmother Emmy Ebeling, two extraordinary human beings. Both carried in them the wisdom of almost an entire century, but they wrote no books, composed no operas, painted no paintings. The traces they left are what lives in those few of us who had the privilege of knowing them and of sharing their lives. Both have given me everything, and both have always been curious to know how my work progressed. Sadly, neither of them lived to see the printed book. To their memory this study is dedicated as a token of my heartfelt admiration and lifelong gratitude.

Chicago, 6 January 2010

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviated Titles of Sources

All references are to page numbers unless otherwise indicated.

EC	<i>En carittiram</i> = Cāminātaiyar (2000).
ETL 2	<i>Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature</i> , vol. 2 = Hikosaka/Samuel (1992).
ETL 3	<i>Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature</i> , vol. 3 = Hikosaka/Samuel (1996).
SMPC I	<i>Śrī Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ carittiram</i> , vol. 1 = Cāminātaiyar (1933).
SMPC II	<i>Śrī Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ carittiram</i> , vol. 2 = Cāminātaiyar (1940).
SMPT	<i>Śrī Mīṇāṭcicuntaram Piḷḷaiyavarkaḷ pirapantattiraṭṭu</i> = Cāminātaiyar (1926). Reference is to number of poem.
TCC	<i>Taṇicceyyuṭcintāmaṇi</i> = Kantacāmikkavirāyar (1908).
TPT 2	<i>Taṇippāṭal tiraṭṭu</i> , vol. 2 = Irāmacāmippulavar (1964a). Reference is to number of poem.
TPT 3	<i>Taṇippāṭal tiraṭṭu</i> , vol. 3 = Irāmacāmippulavar (1964b). Reference is to number of poem.
TPT 4	<i>Taṇippāṭal tiraṭṭu</i> , vol. 4 = Irāmacāmippulavar (1964c). Reference is to number of poem.
TPTC	<i>Taṇippāṭarṟiraṭṭu</i> = Cuppiramaṇiyappiḷḷai (1939).

Other Abbreviations

b.	born	ftn.	footnote	pp.	pages
ch.	chapter	Mal.	Malayalam	r.	ruled
chs.	chapters	Mar.	Marathi	Skt.	Sanskrit
d.	died	MS	Manuscript	st.	stanza(s)
Engl.	English	MSS	Manuscripts	Tam.	Tamil
esp.	especially	p.	page		

Note on Transliteration, Pronunciation, and Translations of Tamil Primary Sources

Besides certain obvious exceptions (such as well-known place names or proper names), I have used the standard transliteration system for Tamil as explained in Beythan (1943) so as to satisfy specialist readers and enable non-specialist readers to pronounce the unfamiliar words they encounter. Similarly, words from other Indian languages have generally been transliterated following the standard conventions for the language in question. The pronunciation of Tamil is approximately as follows:

Vowels

The vowels *a*, *i*, *u*, *e*, *o* are pronounced as in Italian and short unless marked by a macron which denotes long vowels (*ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ē*, *ō*). It is important always to pay attention to that distinction. *ai* is pronounced as in Engl. *stray*, *au* as in *house*. Word-initial *e/ē* and *o/ō* are pronounced with a glide [jɛ]/[je:] (as in *Yemen* and *Yeats*) and [wo]/[wo:] (as in *wombat* and *woe*). Word-final *u* is pronounced short with the lips spread [ʊ], not rounded.

Consonants

The consonants are pronounced approximately as in English with the following exceptions. Double consonants *tt*, *mm*, *pp* etc. always have to

be pronounced distinctly. *ṭ*, *ṇ*, and *ḷ* are retroflex sounds pronounced with the tip of the tongue curved back to touch the hard palate [ʈ], [ṇ], [ʡ]. Intervocally and after nasals, *k*, *t*, *ṭ*, *p* become voiced, e.g., Vētanāyakam [ve:da'na:jagam], Kampan [ˈkamban]. Intervocalical *k* can be softened to *h* as in *akam* [ˈaham]. *ḷ* is pronounced like the *r* in American Engl. *purr*; *ṇ* as in Engl. *pin*. *c* and *cc* are pronounced [tʃ] as in Engl. *match*, but word-initial and intervocalical *c* is often pronounced [s] as in Engl. *sea*, e.g., Caṅkam [ˈsaŋgam]. *ṇ* is the velar nasal *ng* [ŋ] in Engl. *sing*; followed by *k* it is pronounced [ŋg], e.g., *iṅkē* “here” rhymes with English *sing gay*. *ṇ* is pronounced as in Spanish [nj] or like Engl. *ny* in *banyan*. *r* and *ṛ* are both trilled as in Spanish, but *ṛṛ* is pronounced somewhat like *tr* in English *tree*, and *ṛṛ* like *ndr* in *laundry*.

Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine. While this book is primarily a historical study of the uses of literature, it is also meant—in its reliance on Tamil primary sources—to be philologically grounded. Many of the texts I discuss below are little known and not easily accessible even to Tamil specialists. I have therefore decided to include quotations from Tamil primary sources at some length. The translations from Tamil I give here do not lay any claim to literary status. Rather than “sounding nice,” they are intended as philologically accurate renderings of the original Tamil text. However, given the present state of affairs in the field of Tamil studies, to attempt such renderings is fraught with many difficulties, particularly when we translate pre-modern texts, such as the works of the poets discussed here. In far too many cases, we still do not really understand these texts well enough and thus cannot afford to change texts in translation simply to make them sound better in English. Also, some of the texts discussed here are literary in a very self-conscious way. Their very essence is to play with language and poetic conventions, to mislead and surprise the reader, to obfuscate and to be ambiguous. Consequently, rather than glossing over these problems, I have decided to address them directly whenever possible. As such discussions of textual minutiae might distract the reader from the general historical argument of the book, they have been kept to a minimum and relegated to a separate appendix where the original Tamil texts of all the primary sources used may be found together with brief annotations. These hopefully fulfill a major philological requirement: to illustrate the translation process and to make my decisions transparent, so that the reader can see why I adopted a particular reading and discarded others. All the original quotations are numbered, and this number is found in square brackets [] in the main text of this book so as to allow for easy reference.

However, when my analysis deals with the language of a particular text (as in the discussion of *cittirakkavi* stanzas in Chapter 2), the original Tamil text had to be quoted in the main text. In the most puzzling of these cases, I have inserted the original Tamil words into the English translation between braces { } in order to show accurately how the original maps onto its English shadow and to reduce some of the violence inherent in any act of translation. I am not sure whether—in adhering to these general guidelines—I have always managed to steer clear of what some have called “Translatorese” or “Indologese” (see e.g. Doniger/Smith 1991: lxxiii). I can only say that I have very much tried to do so. But on the other hand, we still know so little about the semantic and morphological niceties of pre-modern Tamil. Therefore, I am convinced that in cases of doubt greater precision ultimately warrants a slightly less “sexy” translation.



Figure 1.1. His Highness Dambadas Ramachandra Tondaiman Bahadur (1829–1886), painting by Raja Ravi Varma (1879).

Introduction

The cover of this book and Fig. 1.1 show the imposing figure of His Highness Dambadas Ramachandra Tondaiman Bahadur (1829–1886) who ruled the South Indian princely state Pudukkottai from 1839 until his death.¹ We see the raja, a seasoned quinquagenarian potentate, clad in a typical Indian royal outfit, the long, richly embroidered overcoat, the ornate crown, the sword, cane, and fine jewelry—all-in-all a sight familiar to students of British India from many paintings and photographs.² The South Indian locale is also depicted rather unambiguously by the temple tower (Tam. *kōpuram*) in the background. At first glance, this seems to be a rather stereotypical image of what the British used to call a “native ruler.” On closer scrutiny, however, the image is complicated by a small detail: the book the king is holding up with his left hand. It bears on its spine three words, all of them proper names, all of them far from innocent signifiers: Homer, *Iliad*, London. What is Homer’s *Iliad* doing in a small kingdom in nineteenth-century South India? Why is the book there? The portrait was painted in December 1879, and by that time book printing had already spread widely throughout Southern India. Local rulers and landlords had a long-standing tradition as patrons of the arts, and as the new medium was gaining ground, they often sponsored the expensive printing process. At one level, then, the raja is here portrayed as a typical patron, a lover of arts and letters, a generous donor who embraces a new cultural medium. The newness of the book as a medium, even as a commodity, is important in this context, and it is connected to the remaining question: why Homer’s *Iliad* out of all possible texts?

1. For more on the kingdom of Pudukkottai and Ramachandra Tondaiman, see the monographs by Dirks (1987) and Waghorne (1994), which both have further portraits (including photographs) of this much-depicted ruler. See also Chapter 3.

2. Compare for instance the portraits found in Bayly (1990) or Worswick/Embree (1976).

If the book, the physical object, is already a clear, unmistakable sign of Western-style modernity, London as its place of publication and the identification of the text serve to underscore the message. In other words, it is hard not to read this portrait as a striking allegory of Empire, or more precisely, of the cultural effects sparked by the colonial encounter. Here we see an Indian king embracing not only Western literature but the very pinnacle of Western cultural traditions, the West's "classic" foundations. The raja as bibliophile is presented to us as simultaneously Western, modern,³ and well-read, perhaps we may say enlightened. For, if the heroic tale of the *Iliad* was appropriate reading for any *Western* ruler, it demonstrates beyond doubt that the Raja of Pudukkottai was a man of style, literary gusto, and classical education. Now, if I have uncovered the allegory successfully, there is of course another question which immediately suggests itself: Why would the Raja of Pudukkottai want to be portrayed like this? The long answer to this question is a story of many cultural transformations taking place in nineteenth-century South India—and this story is the subject of this book.

From our distance as spectators of the twenty-first century it is impossible to tell whether Raja Ramachandra himself suggested the precise details of his portrait. It is likely that the artist who painted the king influenced the decision, for the artist was none other than Raja Ravi Varma (1848–1906), one of India's most celebrated modern painters.⁴ Varma was an expert painter of Indian royalty who always crafted the composition of his paintings with great care. Note, for instance, how here the brightness of the flower bouquet directs our attention to focus on the book—a good reason to assume that the

3. I follow Stuart Blackburn in my use of the terms "modern" and "modernity" in this book to refer "broadly to that condition which a diverse range of changes, from rationality and hygiene to the novel, were thought to create [in India], often in imitation of European models but always as a break with 'tradition,' a set of beliefs and practices, including language and literature, thought to represent authentic Indian culture" (2003: 3). Analogously, texts, practices, etc., existing before or not affected by these changes will be referred to as "pre-modern" or "traditional." The expression "colonial modernity" links these changes explicitly to the colonial situation. Outside of my literary-historical use of these terms, there is a considerable body of literature discussing the implication of using the terms "modernity" and "modern" in the Indian context. Here I can only mention the discussions by Washbrook (1997; 1998) and van der Veer (1998), Chakrabarty (2002, esp. in the introduction), Menon (2004), and the special issue on "Multiple Modernities" of the journal *Daedalus* (Winter 2000).

4. On Ravi Varma see Mitter (1994, ch. 5), Guha Thakurta (1986), Arunima (2003), Neumayer/Schelberger (2005) and the beautiful, lavishly illustrated volume by Parsram Mangharam (2003).

painting's symbolism was at least in part carefully calculated. While Varma portrayed several men and women with books in their hands or on tables following a general Western fashion of his times, this is the only painting I have seen in which we find a classical Western literary text in such a prominent position, i.e., in the hand of an Indian ruler.⁵ Thus, the allegory of Raja Ramachandra, or India embracing classical Western culture, seems indeed unique amongst Varma's paintings. Now, if this painting points to the story of South India's cultural transformations, Ravi Varma's life and all his art, which India's Viceroy Lord Curzon saw as "a happy blend of Western technique and Indian subject" (Mitter 1994: 180), could also be examined as an example of how Indian cultural traditions were transformed under colonial influence. For the purposes of this book, however, we need to remain in the realm of words rather than colours. The year of 1879, the year in which Ravi Varma painted the ruler of Pudukkottai, is no insignificant moment in the literary histories of either the British colonizers or colonized South India. In this year, the religious reformer and famous editor of classical Tamil texts Ārumuka Nāvalar (b. 1822) passed away, as did, far away in Britain, George William MacArthur Reynolds (b. 1814), the forgotten popular novelist whose long-running serialized novel *The Mysteries of London* (1844) was avidly read all over India and influenced the development of many modern Indian literatures. Fellow novelist Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856–1925), known for his adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), was at the time involved in the Anglo-Zulu war, an event that altered perceptions of the British Empire at home and abroad. While Józef Konrad Korzeniowski (1857–1924), better known as Joseph Conrad, was still learning the English language which he would later so profoundly enrich with his writings, Edward Morgan Forster (d. 1970) was born. His novel *A Passage to India* (1924) influenced the destinies of many who thought about India in the West. In September of 1879,

5. In Mangharam's (2003) catalogue of Varma's paintings we find eleven portraits that include books. The portrait that comes closest in composition to Raja Ramachandra's is the one of Maharaja Sayajirao III of Baroda at his Investiture dated 1882 (Mangharam 2003: 146), which includes a copy of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, thus forming a rather different sort of imperial allegory. Sir T. Madhava Rao, the Dewan of Baroda, is painted with various volumes of administrative reports by his side (153), while the Englishman P. S. Melville, an agent to the Governor General, stands next to "Scott's Poetical Works" and a volume labeled "Shakespere [sic]" among others (155). Maharani Lakshmi Bayi of Travancore is depicted in 1883 with two interesting titles: *Near Rome or Europe Described* and *The Young Ladies' Book* (85; see also Neumayer/Schelberger 2005: 301).

the celebrated Tamil politician and social reformer Ī. Vī. Rāmacāmi Nāyakkar (better known as “E.V.R.” or “Periyar,” d. 1973) was born. Still in the same *annus mirabilis*, several months before a man named Thomas Alva Edison invented the electric lightbulb, a man named Māyūram Vētanāyakam Piḷḷai (1826–1889) invented the Tamil novel. While much has already been written about the former invention, the latter takes up a good part of the following discussion. However, the story of how the Tamil novel emerged cannot be told without also telling the story of the raja’s new books: of how traditional systems of literary production—in which poet-scholars were patronized by religious institutions, landowners, and local kings—gradually declined; of how textual practices, genres, styles, poetics, themes, tastes, and audiences changed; and of the role literature played in the politics of social reform, gender, and nationalism—in short, by telling the larger story of nineteenth-century Tamil literary culture. The aim of this book, then, is to examine how a literature was transformed under colonial influence. Before we look at the particular case of Tamil literary culture, the terms “literature” and “colonialism,” heavily overdetermined as they are, require further reflection.

Colonizing the Realm of Words: Literature and Colonialism

Scholars have for some time pointed to the importance of texts in general and literary texts in particular for “colonial” enterprises around the world and at various times.⁶ As Elleke Boehmer (2005: 14) has emphasized, “empire was in itself, at least in part, a textual exercise” depending on a wealth of writings, such as official reports, admin-

6. I use quotation marks here to suggest that “colonialism” itself is not a straightforward and undisputed term that could be used without further qualification. Skeptical of large-scale generalizations rather common in the field of Postcolonial Studies, I would like to emphasize the trivial but often neglected problem that “colonialism,” the “colonial encounter,” etc., did not mean the same thing everywhere and at all times. In the remainder of this book, then, the terms “colonial,” “colonialism,” etc., will be used without quotation marks to refer to colonial India during the period examined here, the nineteenth century, unless indicated otherwise (as for instance in the present section and in the Epilogue where somewhat broader claims are made). For a critique of the concept of and the historiography employing the term “colonialism,” see Washbrook (2004). Cooper/Stoler (1997) as well as Dodson (2007) have also emphasized the complexity of “colonialism” and cautioned against using the term indiscriminately for historically diverse processes. See also Osterhammel (1997) for an attempt to disambiguate the terminology.

istrative papers, newspapers, political treatises, pamphlets, diaries, popular verse, letters, etc. Ania Loomba specifies that “literary texts [. . .] encode the tensions, complexities and nuances within colonial cultures. [. . .] Literature written on both sides of the colonial divide often absorbs, appropriates and inscribes aspects of the ‘other’ culture, creating new genres, ideas and identities in the process” (1998: 70). In other words, the transformations must be seen as mutual; colonial encounters transform both the literature of the colonizer and the literature of the colonized. Drawing on the terminology suggested by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in her study on travel writing, Loomba further explains that “[l]iterature is an important ‘contact zone,’ to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, where ‘transculturation’ takes place in all its complexity” (1998: 70). For Pratt, ‘contact zones’ are “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often as highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (1992: 4) or spaces “in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). “Transculturation,” then, refers to the mutually transformative processes happening in this “contact zone.”⁷ Pratt elaborates that a

“contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized [. . .] not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (7)

Viewing literature as a “contact zone” allows us to examine how colonialism affected practices centered around the production and consumption of what we call “literary” texts on both sides of the colonizer/colonized divide without forgetting that such a divide was never fixed and given but historically shifting, therefore requiring our critical analysis. As we shall see in the discussion below, negotiations within this contact zone of literature could reach very far. They could reformulate both literary “form” (genres, styles) and “content” (themes, ideas), as well as thinking about texts in terms of aesthetics or poetics.

7. In a similar sense, Daniel Jeyaraj uses the term “inculturation” (*Inkulturation*) in his study of the Danish Halle Mission in eighteenth-century South India (see Jeyaraj 1996).

These complex processes of queries, adjustments, and reformulations taking place within the contact zone of literature are what I would like to refer to with the shorthand expression “colonization of literature.”

Proceeding from the insight that colonial interaction obviously affected the literature of the colonizer, a large number of critical studies have examined this literature—British literature in particular.⁸ Notably the works of a number of ‘colonialist’ writers, such as the above-mentioned Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster or Henry Rider Haggard (and we have to add Rudyard Kipling, 1865–1936) have received extended and repeated critical attention.⁹ Their works are now part of a veritable canon of colonial, or colonialist, writing that haunts departments of English and Comparative Literature. Furthermore, we also possess a better understanding of those English authors who did not explicitly respond to imperial developments, but who “participated in the representation of British global power mainly by taking it for granted” (Boehmer 2005: 24). Indeed, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has cautioned, “it should not be possible, in principle, to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (1999: 113). Edward Said, focusing more specifically on the novel, has highlighted that “imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible [. . .] to read one without in some way dealing with the other” (1994: 84). While in his work Said offers an important argument about the history of the novel in *Western* literature, we may look beyond the novel’s history in the West and note that it was precisely during the colonial encounter that Indian authors produced what they called ‘novels’ in various Indian languages. We will return to this point in Chapter 5.

While the transformations of the colonizers’ literatures have attracted considerable attention (with still no end in sight), the literatures of the colonized have not fared equally well.¹⁰ As far as I can see,

8. This literature is too vast to allow the citation of individual works here. For a good overview see Boehmer (2005) and the short but very informative chapter by Theo D’haen (2002).

9. I use the term “colonialist” in Elleke Boehmer’s sense to refer to literature “which was specifically concerned with colonial expansion. On the whole it was literature by and for colonizing Europeans about non-European lands dominated by them” (2005: 3).

10. One of the few studies to examine both the literatures of the colonizer and of the colonized, the reception of English literature in India, and the representation of India in English literature, in conjunction is Trivedi (1993). From a different angle, Joshi (2002) studies both the reception of novels from England and the writing of novels in English in colonial India.

this observation is true for colonial South and Southeast Asia as well as Africa and possibly for other areas too. As Rosinka Chaudhuri has observed in 2002, “Postcolonial studies, following Said’s *Orientalism*, [...] has still not adequately articulated the response of the ‘East’ in its encounter with the forces of colonization” (2002: 9). Already in the 1980s, Aijaz Ahmad had criticized Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), a foundational text for the field of Postcolonial Studies, of ignoring the responses and perspectives of the colonized:

A notable feature of *Orientalism* is that it examines the history of Western textualities about the non-West quite in isolation from how these textualities might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonized countries: not as an undifferentiated mass but as situated social agents impelled by our own conflicts, contradictions, distinct social and political locations, of class, gender, region, religious affiliation, and so on—hence a peculiar disjuncture in the architecture of the book. (Ahmad 1992: 172)

While I agree with Laurie J. Sears that this was somewhat inadequate as a critique of Said’s particular project and its achievements,¹¹ it is intriguing that, as Rosinka Chaudhuri remarks, despite this critique much work after Said has “continued in the same vein, emphasizing the deconstruction of Western colonialist discourse rather than the complexities in the situation of the colonized” (2002: 9). The problem with this approach is not only that it presents merely one side of the coin. More importantly, by systematically ignoring the side of the colonized it runs the risk of reiterating and cementing the very Western cultural hegemony it professes to call into question. To say this more explicitly: The question of how literatures were colonized, through mutual processes of transculturation, cannot be answered by

11. Sears writes: “Said clearly states that his purpose is to show how the Orient has been produced in European and American texts. Had Said’s *Orientalism* not focused on European discourses, it is doubtful whether it would have received the attention that it did. In effect, his work presents a clear challenge to Asians and Middle Easterners, and those who write about them with empathy, to explore the reception of and resistance to the discursive formations of Orientalism” (1996: 14, fn. 31). Also, in the 1970s when Said was writing his book, still so little was known about non-Western literatures in the West that it would simply not have been possible for a single author to produce a study with the level of insight of *Orientalism* while doing equal justice to the literatures of colonizer and colonized. It is, in fact, still doubtful whether such a project could be undertaken even now, three decades after Said.

examining merely the literature of the colonizer. This might seem a trivial observation indeed, but very few critics so far seem to have realized it. The few attempts that have been made to explore the literatures of colonial India have focused on Indian writing *in English* rather than on writing in the many indigenous Indian languages.¹² Again, we find a number of much-discussed, 'canonical' authors, in particular Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), R. K. Narayan (1906–2001), and Raja Rao (1908–2006), who have come to represent the voices of the colonized in literature departments in the West. In contrast, the rich literatures produced in the colonized countries in many different languages other than English still remain largely unexplored, one might say marginalized. This is again particularly true for India. The largest amount of work on non-English colonial Indian writing has been done on Bengali, notably on the works of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–1894), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873), and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).¹³ This body of work is followed by a few studies on colonial North India,¹⁴ while the South—with its major languages Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam—has only just begun to receive due attention.¹⁵

Given that many postcolonial critics originally set out precisely to query or destabilize the hegemony of the center and the agency

12. On Indian writing in English, see the recent surveys by Mehrotra (2003) and Rege (2004) and the literature cited there. Chaudhuri (2002) is an illuminating study of English poetry written in colonial Bengal.

13. While there exists a considerable secondary literature in Bengali, I only point to the more recent among the studies in English: Kaviraj (1995), Chatterjee (1995), Roy (1995), Banerjee (1998), Sarkar (2001), Raychaudhuri (2002), Bhattacharya (2005), and Ghosh (2006) and the literature cited there.

14. Important monographs in English, some of which focus not on literature proper but on language history and politics or book history, include King (1994), Dalmia (1997) and Orsini (2002) for Hindi materials, Russell (1972), Pritchett (1994), and Stark (2007) for Urdu, Naregal (2001) for Marathi, Dwyer (2001) for Gujarati, Mohapatra (1997) for Oriya, and Pinto (2007) for print in Goa. Bhatia (2004) discusses theater in colonial North India.

15. On Telugu see Leonard (1970), Sai Prasad (1991), Schmitthenner (2001), Vijayasree (2002), Mantena (2002; 2005), Mitchell (2005; 2009), Rajagopal (2004; 2005), Katten (2005), and Velcheru Narayana Rao's introduction and afterword in Apparao (2007). On Malayalam, see Panikkar (1996), Arunima (1997; 2004), Menon (1997; 2002; 2004), Kumar (2002), and the essays in Ravindran (2001). On Kannada, see Padikkal (1993; 2002), Ramachandran (2001), and Amur (2001). Significantly, Stuart Blackburn's and Vasudha Dalmia's recent volume on nineteenth-century Indian literatures contains only four (out of fourteen) essays which deal with South Indian materials (two essays on Tamil, one on Telugu, and one on Malayalam). See Blackburn/Dalmia (2004).

of the colonizer, this is a somewhat peculiar development. Though avowing time and again that the “Empire” is writing back and that Western critics should take literary production in the “Third World” more seriously, what has happened is predominantly a large-scale amplification of the colonizer’s writing, of the center, not the periphery. In circles of endless introspection, the colonial center continues to look at its own navel. If the “provincialization” of Europe, and, one might add, of North America—the renewal of European and North American thought “from and for the margins” which Dipesh Chakrabarty (2001: 16) has called for—is an ideal to aspire to or at least a caveat to heed in critical inquiry in the twenty-first century, the study of literature under colonialism does not so far appear to show much interest in this approach.¹⁶ As Ania Loomba observed already a decade ago:

[Our contemporary] globality is often reduced to discussions of literatures written or translated into English, reminding us that in many ways postcolonial studies is simply a reworking of the older concepts of “Commonwealth literatures” or “Third World literatures.” But even these literatures cannot be adequately discussed outside of the difficult interplay between their local and global contexts, an awareness that is all too often erased as we celebrate the hybridity or polyphony or magic realism of these texts! (1998: 257)

Thus, what we need as scholars of non-Western literatures as well as Comparative Literature is quite simply a more sustained shift of emphasis. We need to examine the literatures produced in the colonized languages more systematically and with both greater depth and breadth. We need to study the individual colonized literary cultures in India, Southeast Asia, or Africa in much greater detail, paying attention to their own complex histories before, during, and after colonial contact. To determine how indigenous literary cultures fared in the colonial contact zone, we need to be prepared to engage with them with the same amount and finesse of close reading that we have applied to Western colonial texts. The present book attempts a small step in that direction by studying the transformation of literary

16. There are, of course, exceptions, such as the work of Patrick Colm Hogan (e.g., 2000a; 2000b; 2004) who has striven for over a decade to enrich Western academic debates on literature with non-Western categories, examples, and approaches.

practices under colonialism through a particular detailed case study, that of Tamil literature.

As such, the present study may be viewed as a contribution to very recent debates raised by those scholars who attempt to explore the phenomenon of colonialism in India through an analysis of the transformation of indigenous cultural practices under its impact. Theoretically and methodologically, attempts to explore the colonial transformations of cultural practices have been nourished by the ever-increasing body of secondary literature that is devoted to identifying ways in which “colonial knowledge” was constructed—“those forms and bodies of knowledge that enabled European colonizers to achieve domination over their colonized subjects around the globe” in Phillip Wagoner’s words (2003: 783).¹⁷ If one works from this definition, the diverse indigenous cultural practices, such as elite and folk literature, music, dance, and so on can, of course, not easily be subsumed under the label ‘colonial knowledge.’ But there are ways in which they intersect with and inform the epistemological strategies employed to construct this knowledge, for instance when the nature and quality of indigenous literary production was debated in antiquarian concerns to recover Indian history, or in the debate about the Dravidian family of languages, as Thomas R. Trautmann has shown (1999a; 1999b; 2006). More specifically, as I will discuss further below, the interest of missionaries and colonial officials in the Tamil language and literature was certainly part of the larger process of colonial

17. The literature which explores the construction of “colonial knowledge” in India is copious, so that merely a few important studies can be cited here. These may be classified, following Phillip Wagoner (2003) into two broad categories: The first category which largely subscribes to the view that the role played by the colonized subjects in the production of “colonial knowledge” was negligible, and which Wagoner labels “postcolonialist,” consists of a number of influential works which have helped us to see that European colonial conquest depended not exclusively on military, economic or political power, but to a decisive extent also on the power of knowledge. These are among others: Said (1978), Inden (1986; 1990), Cohn (1987; 1992; 1996), Dirks (1989; 1993; 2001), Metcalf (1994), and Viswanathan (1989). The second category, which has grown out of the first and which Wagoner calls “collaborationist,” insists that indigenous agents contributed actively to the process of knowledge formation. This position has emerged notably through the following works: Irschick (1994), Bayly (1999), Trautmann (1999a; 1999b; 2006; 2009), Peabody (2001; 2003), Pinch (1999), Eaton (2000), and Tavakoli-Targhi (2001). Specific “cultural technologies of rule,” as Dirks (2001: 9) has called them, have also been addressed in numerous studies: On the census, see Cohn (1987, ch. 10) and Appadurai (1993). The geographical survey is discussed in Edney (1990), while public health regulations are treated in Arnold (1986; 1993), and colonial anthropology in Dirks (1997). Architecture and town planning form the subject of Oldenberg (1984) and Dossal (1991).

knowledge production on India in general. In recent scholarship on colonial constructions of knowledge, the occupation with language and literature has been viewed in relation to similar disciplines, e.g., geography and ethnology.¹⁸ Establishing these disciplines was one of the essential mechanisms through which colonial domination operated. Domination through science meant an attempt to control the bewildering, alien variety of peoples, languages, and behavior patterns which the colonizers initially found on the Indian soil. As Veena Naregal has argued, scientific classification was “the cognitive predilection that the European mind had developed for responding to the unfamiliar” (2001: 44). While it may not be a specifically European strategy, the colonial classificatory program was certainly far-reaching, highly systematic, and potentially all-encompassing. Much of the administrative labor during the nineteenth century centred around researching into and documenting law codes and regulations, mapping the geographical dimensions of the empire, counting its people, determining races, castes, religions, languages, and so on. All these activities were “appropriation techniques” applied in order to come to terms with and ultimately control Europe’s alien ‘Other.’

Thus, the colonial situation provided a specific background for the development of Tamil literary activities as the activities of the colonized. A study such as the present one, which attempts to recover indigenous cultural practices under the impact of colonialism, will by definition tend to amplify the voices of the colonized, and will show the *agency* on the part of indigenous groups. It will serve to demonstrate that Indians were not simply ‘helpless’ subaltern victims who were forced to surrender to an external cultural hegemony, but that indigenous agendas were fashioned and re-fashioned in a situation of cross-cultural dialogue.¹⁹ In such an insistence on indigenous agency, it will become clear that not only colonial knowledge in a strict sense of the term, but also cultural practices were reformulated “through a complex form of collaboration between colonizers and colonized, and an attendant process of epistemic confrontation and adjustment between European and indigenous knowledge systems” (Wagoner 2003: 783). It is no secret that the colonial encounter affected Indian

18. See e.g., Naregal (2001: 45).

19. In using the term “dialogue” here, which partially rests on Irschick (1994), I certainly do not wish to explain away the violent and exploitative side of colonialism. But unlike Sanjay Subrahmanyam, who considers the term altogether inappropriate (2001, ch. 1), I do think that it helps to explain *some* of the complex and varied cultural interactions between India and the West.

literatures, music, dance, and other cultural forms. But it did so not in a unidirectional way by simply imposing European norms and standards onto existing ones. Neither does a simplistic dichotomous model of “Western impact” and “indigenous response” capture the full historical reality.²⁰ As becomes apparent when one actually confronts the cultural artifacts—the texts, songs, paintings produced during the colonial period—the situation was much more complex than this, and it is these complex inter- and intra-cultural processes of multifaceted, multilateral “epistemic confrontation and adjustment” that the present study is concerned with.

One further clarification is perhaps required, when one speaks about confrontations between “European and indigenous knowledge systems.” As David Washbrook has emphasized, “European culture never became entirely synonymous with *British* colonial rule” (2004: 493, emphasis added). From the sixteenth century onward, the European presence in South India comprised Portuguese, Dutch, Danish, French and Germans, so that not all “Europeans” were British. Washbrook rightly points out that “[e]ngaging with European knowledge, therefore, did not have the immediate effect of implying subordination to colonial authority” (*ibid.*). We will have to bear this in mind, when we try to address the question to what extent and in what ways Indian authors and intellectuals engaged with European ideas. The fact that those ideas were not *eo ipso* perceived as the ideas of the colonial oppressors, and that the ‘West’ was not automatically “British,” accounts for the openmindedness with which some social reformers and authors assessed and responded to Western knowledge.

Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India

Another clarification concerns the historical period examined here. I am using the term ‘nineteenth century’ to refer loosely to the period under discussion rather than as a strict delimitation. The one hundred years between 1800 and 1900 are merely the *focus period* for what follows, and I will have to transgress these temporal boundaries occasionally, as cultural phenomena more often than not refuse to conform to the constraints of artificial time limits. I wish to emphasize that it is first of all merely the time period in which most of the texts, people, and events discussed here are located. My aim is not to try to establish a specific “epoch” within the history of Tamil literature, which could

20. See e.g., Das (1991).

be posited (in a more or less essentialist way) as something internally coherent, clearly circumscribed, and monolithic. The reason for this caution is that, given our current knowledge of nineteenth-century Tamil texts, we are simply not (yet) in a position to say which (or if any) factors may ultimately produce such internal coherence.²¹ Also, strictly speaking, the colonization of Tamil literature in the sense elaborated above did of course not simply stop at the turn of the century. For a comprehensive view, one would have to include the period from 1900 up to India's Independence in 1947. However, given the enormous literary production during that period and given how little research has been done on it so far, I could not do more than allude to a few trends and developments at the end of Chapter 5 and in the Epilogue. Doing full justice to this period would require a separate monograph.

The next clarification of the subtitle of this book, the one concerning the expression "Tamil literature," will require some more consideration, as the term disguises somewhat its own linguistic, aesthetic, geographical, and socio-political dimensions. The present study focuses on South India, or, more specifically, on the Tamil-speaking areas of what was during the nineteenth century the Madras Presidency. Although occasionally Sri Lankan scholars and authors are mentioned, I have had to exclude for reasons of space a detailed discussion of the literature(s) produced not only in Sri Lanka, but notably in Singapore and Malaysia where a rapidly increasing literary production in Tamil started during the nineteenth century.²² From a linguistic point of view, the term "Tamil" may seem clear enough, but we should bear in mind that no language lives in isolation or as a single, monolithic entity. There were, in fact, many "Tamils" during the period discussed here. The idiom used by the first novelists, for instance, was a heavily sanskritized Tamil, which was newly fashioned to be capable of expressing modern Western ideas and concepts. The missionaries, too, struggled to create a language that would reach the

21. See, however, the recent volume on nineteenth-century Indian literatures edited by Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia which, in the editors' words, "attempts to look at the colonial century as a whole, as an historical period in its own right" (2004: 8).

22. On nineteenth-century Tamil literature in Sri Lanka, see Kaṇapatip Piḷḷai (1967), Celvarācaṇ (1967), Vithiananthan (1969), Vimalachandra (1969), Young/Jebanesan (1995), Civaliṅkarājā/Civaliṅkarājā (2000), and the literature cited there. Most of what is available on Tamil literature in Malaysia focuses on the twentieth century, see Dhandayudham (1973), Venugopal (1999), and Irāmaiyā (1978). Singapore Tamil literature is discussed in Tiṇṇappan (1993) and Tiṇṇappan/Civakumāraṇ (2003).

masses, but still convey Christian ideas with appropriate accuracy.²³ Additionally, English found its way into the Tamil language, not only through new lexical items, but also at the level of syntax, when sentences first “thought” in English were formulated in Tamil. In trying to capture the contemporary spoken language of the city of Madras and elsewhere, nineteenth-century playwrights often used not only individual English terms, but entire phrases in their Tamil plays.²⁴ Furthermore, the Madras Presidency was clearly a multiethnic and multilingual environment. In colonial Madras city speakers of Tamil, Telugu, Hindustani, Persian, Gujarati, and Marathi, as well as Armenian, Portuguese, and English lived side by side, and “society was accustomed to a multiplicity of ‘tongues,’ ” as David Washbrook observes (1991: 180).²⁵ At the court of the Maratha rulers in Thanjavur, scholars and poets composed works in Telugu, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Marathi.²⁶ Entire genres, such as the *kuravañci*, were borrowed from one language by another or developed simultaneously, and we also find genres and individual texts which employ more than one language.²⁷

Having thus qualified the term ‘Tamil,’ we are left with the question of what “literature” is supposed to refer to. This question is important, since the present study does not cover the entire spectrum of texts that would (ideally) be included in a conventional handbook

23. Writing in 1900, the missionary and Professor of Tamil George U. Pope observed: “There exists now much of what is called Christian Tamil, a dialect created by the Danish missionaries of Tranquebar; enriched by generations of Tanjore, German, and other missionaries; modified, purified, and *refrigerated* by the Swiss Rhenius and the very composite Tinnevely school; expanded and harmonized by Englishmen, amongst whom Bower (a Eurasian) was foremost in his day; and, finally, waiting now for the touch of some heaven-born genius among the Tamil community to make it as sweet and effective as any language on earth, living or dead” (1995: xii, original emphasis).

24. See e.g., the social plays *Ṭampāccāri vilācam* (c. 1867) by Caitāpuram Kācivicuvanāta Mutaliyār (?1806–1871) and *Piratāpa Cantira vilācam* (1877) by Pa.Va. Irāmacāmi Rāju (1852–1897).

25. For South India as a multilingual environment, see Washbrook (1991). Washbrook has also pointed out that certain languages became associated with particular functions: “Persian, Marathi and Telugu were ubiquitous languages of state; ‘Hindustani’ the *lingua franca* of war; Gujarati, Armenian and Telugu were languages of commerce” (2004: 495).

26. See the discussion of the Thanjavur Maratha court in Chapter 3.

27. The “language question” became politically important during the late colonial period, when extended debates over the coining of technical and scientific terms for educational purposes took place in connection with the non-brahmin movement. These debates have been examined by Venkatachalapathy (1995). For the nexus between the Tamil language and formulations of Tamil identity, see also Ramaswamy (1997).