Print, Religion, and Canon in Colonial India: The publication of Ramalinga Adigal's Tiruvarutpa[*]

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Abstract

In India in the 1860s, print was becoming the primary medium for the reproduction of religious texts. The accessibility of print, and its ready uptake within a highly stratified and competitive religious landscape, had a significant effect on the ways in which groups contended for textual, and thus spiritual, authority. In 1867, the popular Tamil Shaiva mystic Ramalinga Adigal and his followers published *Tiruvarutpa*, a book of Ramalinga's poems that would help establish his reputation as a great Shaiva saint. Ramalinga and his disciples chose to publish the work in a form that shared the content and the material features of contemporaneous publications of Tamil classics, thereby claiming a place for his poems alongside the revered Shaiva canon. They showed an acute awareness that it was not solely the content of religious texts, but also the materiality of the printed object in which texts appeared, that sustained assertions for authority. This article argues that leaders on the margins of established centres of religious power in South India sought authority by exploiting the material aspects of print as the new medium of religious canons.

Introduction

The publication in 1867 of *Tiruvarutpā*, a book of devotional poems in Tamil by the popular Shaiva mystic Ramalinga Adigal (1823–1874), was a landmark event in the history of his legacy and community. At the time of publication, Ramalinga's writings and teachings were enjoying increasing fame in the metropolis of Chennai, and also throughout the eastern regions of the Kaveri Delta, an area that had been the literary and institutional heartland of Tamil Shaivism for at least a

thousand years. His students had worked for years to publish his poems on a grand scale, which they finally achieved with the 1867 edition. They presented the work as an authoritative Shaiva text that should stand alongside established Shaiva literary classics. The audacity of their publication is perhaps best indicated by the vitriolic attack on *Tiruvarutpa* by Arumuga Navalar, the well-known Tamil pandit and polemicist from Jaffna, and a staunch advocate of Shaiva ritual and textual orthodoxy.[1] Focusing on the choices that Ramalinga and his followers made regarding the material form, organization, and content of the 1867 publication, I will argue that they used print as a tool to garner religious and textual authority. As a technology new to religious communications in South Asia, print provided novel possibilities for canonical claims, especially for religious leaders like Ramalinga, who did not have the backing of the long-standing and powerful Shaiva institutions that dominated Tamil literary production and status until at least the end of the nineteenth century.

Scholars of the emergence of the Protestant Reformation in early modern Europe have recognized for some time the potential of print to empower religious leaders who stand outside established halls of power. Since the publication of Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* in 1979, the impact of print on Christendom has been a central concern to scholars of book history and of the early Reformation.[2] For Eisenstein, print enabled religious leaders in Europe to carry 'democratic and patriotic' messages to the 'everyman'.[3] Catholics also used print to standardize priestly goals, Church theology, and oral teaching, but Eisenstein argues that the burgeoning print industry was more aligned with novel religious expression than with conservative churchmen,

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[1] Navalar's attack initiated a debate that continued at least into the 1980s. P. Saravanan has completed the arduous task of collecting the most important works of this debate, including Navalar's polemical text, in Pa. Caravaṇaṉ, *Arutpā Marutpā: Kaṇṭaṉattiraṭṭu* [Verses of Divine Grace, Verses of Delusion: A Collection of Condemnation Literature] (Nagarkovil: Kalaccuvatu Patippakam, 2010). I have not used diacritical marks in rendering Tamil personal names in the main text of this paper, but I have included diacritics in footnote references. Ramalinga's name appears in a variety of forms in different editions of *Tiruvarutpa*, so I have simplified these by using 'Ramalinga Adigal' as author for all editions, while retaining the original name cited in the extended titles for each work.

[2] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[3] Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, pp. 362–363.

communicating 'more democratic and national forms of worship'.[4] Eisenstein understandably has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the way in which the established Church employed print to its advantage.[5] Yet even if we do not accept Eisenstein's view of a natural affinity between print and heterodoxy, print remained, as Alexandra Walsham argues, a vital tool in spreading unorthodox religious messages, providing dissenters with a 'powerful device for communicating with both their co-religionists and the wider world'.[6] Print benefited religious groups and leaders on the margins of established power by providing an efficient and inexpensive means for the wide circulation of their messages. However, in India in the latter half of the nineteenth century, print offered possibilities and meanings other than just efficiency. In Tamil Shaivism, print became the medium through which Shaiva leaders and pandits re-established their canon by producing handsome volumes of well-known Shaiva works.[7] Ramalinga and his followers exploited this use of print to make a bid for the canonicity of Ramalinga's poems, publishing them in a material form that was identical to that of Shaiva classics.

In South Asia, as in Europe, the spread of print technology transformed the religious landscape. However, in stark contrast to scholarship on early print in Europe, little attention has been paid to the impact of print on Hindu traditions in nineteenth-century India.[8] This lapse is particularly significant if we consider that a large

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[4] Ibid, pp. 353–354.

[5] For a critique of Eisenstein along these lines, see A. Pettegree and M. Hall, 'The Reformation and the Book: A Reconsideration', *Historical Journal* 47, no. 4 (2004).

[6] Alexandra Walsham, 'Preaching Without Speaking: Script, Print and Religious Dissent', in Julia C. Crick and Alexandra Walsham (eds), *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 212. In the same volume, David d'Avray argues that Luther might have done very well without print. See David d'Avray, 'Printing, Mass Communication, and Religious Reformation: The Middle Ages and After', in Crick and Walsham (eds), *The Uses of Script and Print*.

[7] On the reformulation of the Tamil literary canon at the end of the nineteenth century, see A. R. Venkatachalapathy, 'The Making of a Canon: Literature in Colonial Tamilnadu', in A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *In Those Days There Was No Coffee: Writings in Cultural History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006).

[8] One exception is Ulrike Stark, 'Publishers as Patrons and the Commodification of Hindu Religious Texts in Nineteenth-Century North India', in Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels (ed.), *Patronage and Popularisation, Pilgrimage and Procession: Channels of Transcultural Translation and Transmission in Early Modern South Asia; Papers in Honour of Monika Horstmann* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009). Works that look at the impact of print on Islam in South Asia include: J. B. P. More, *Muslim Identity, Print Culture, and the Dravidian Factor in Tamil Nadu* (Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman, 2004); Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change—Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern*

percentage of published works in Indian languages in the nineteenth century can be classified as religious. James Long, an Irish missionary who compiled statistics on the publication of Bengali books in the 1850s, estimated that over 50 per cent of Bengali books published between 1844 and 1852 were religious, with Hindu works accounting for 36 per cent of all titles published.[9] Tamil publishing was similar, with many—perhaps most—of the printed books available in Tamil in the 1860s being religious in character. John Murdoch, inspired by Long's surveys of Bengali books, produced a similar volume for works in Tamil, published in 1865 as a *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*. Murdoch compiled a list of 1,755 publications in Tamil that were available to him, classifying about 69 per cent as religious works, and including 29 per cent of all works under the heading 'Hinduism'.[10] A decade later, in his report to the director of public instruction, V. Kristnama Charri, registrar of books for Madras Presidency, noted that nearly 48 per cent of the works printed in the presidency in 1875 were religious, including 46 per cent of books in the 'Vernacular languages'. The majority of these books were Hindu, including 'reprints of old standard works . . . [that] have an interest of their own' as well as 'an abundance of humble efforts and very little of marked excellence'.[11]

The 'standard works' Kristnama Charri mentions are canonical texts, and the 'humble efforts' probably refer to popular publications. Murdoch's catalogue has many entries for classical Shaiva literary texts, as well as for popular literature. Most of the works that comprise the Shaiva literary canon—the 'Tirumuṟai'—appear in the catalogue. For example, there is an entry for the *Periya Purāṇam*, a twelfth-century hagiography of Shaiva saints. About half of the entire work,

Asian Studies 27, no. 1 (1993); and C. Ryan Perkins, 'From the Mehfil to the Printed Word: Public Debate and Discourse in Late Colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 1 (2013).

[9] Long's data for works published between 1853 and 1867 show a greater diversity of content and genres than in the earlier period, but religious—and especially Hindu—works still represented a significant percentage of all titles published. See Tapti Roy, 'Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 39, 51.

[10] About 38 per cent of the total were Christian, and 2 per cent were Islamic. John Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books, with Introductory Notices* (Madras: The Christian Vernacular Education Society, 1865), Preface, p. v.

[11] V. Kristnama Charri, *Return of the Publications Registered in the Madras Presidency During the Year 1875* (Madras: Madras Government, 1876), pp. 73, 75.

with commentary, was published in two volumes which were together 802 pages long, in 8vo size, and available for three and a quarter rupees, a high price that would put the publication out of reach of all but the keenest readers.[12] Murdoch's catalogue unfortunately does not include publication dates or editors' names. I saw a copy of the first volume of a multi-volume publication of the *Periya Purāṇam* at the Roja Muthiah Research Library in Chennai, which is almost certainly the one in Murdoch's catalogue. This copy was published in 1859 'for everyone's easy reading'.[13] It was edited by Kanchipuram Sabhapati Mudaliyar, Tamil pandit at Pacchaiyappa School in Chennai.[14] The first of several benedictory compositions in praise of the work was written by Dandavaraya Swamigal, a pandit of the Tiruvavadudurai monastery, indicating that this edition had the endorsement of this powerful Shaiva institution.[15]

If Tamils, and Indians more generally, were printing canonical religious literature in order to widen the readership of classical works, they were also publishing inexpensive printed books for devotional purposes and to address the daily needs of their clientele. Murdoch's catalogue lists many such works, such as *Vākkuvātam*, 'a very popular work in which the wives of Vishnu and Shiva rake up stories against each other's husband'. The pamphlet was only seven pages long, 18mo size, anonymous, and cost just three pie.[16] Canonical editions differed from popular works in content, price, size, durability, and (presumably) prestige. The popular works in the catalogue were in pamphlet form, 18mo, a few pages long, and inexpensive, while canonical works were invariably larger 8vo printings, with lengths running into hundreds of pages, and were relatively expensive, usually

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[12] Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, p. 81. Octavo, or 8vo, or is about eight by ten inches, or 20cm x 25cm.

[13] All translations from Tamil are my own. Kāñcipuram Capāpati Mutaliyār (ed.), *Periya Purāṇam* (Chennai: Kalvi Vilakka Press, 1859), Vol. 1, title page. The Kalvi Vilakka Press played a significant role in the publication of Tamil classics. See V. Rajesh, 'The Reproduction and Reception of Classical Tamil Literature in Colonial Tamilnadu, 1800–1920', PhD thesis, Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, 2010, pp. 112–116.

[14] Kamil Zvelebil places Ramalinga in the lineage of Kancipuram Sabhapati Mudaliyar, but I have not yet come across evidence that Mudaliyar taught Ramalinga, and unfortunately Zvelebil does not cite a source for his claim. See Kamil Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), p. 262.

[15] Mutaliyār, *Periya Purāṇam*.

[16] Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, p. 118. There were 16 annas in a rupee, and 12 pies in an anna. Octodecimo size, or 18 mo, is about four by six inches, or 10 cm x 15 cm.

costing at least one rupee. Their audiences would likewise have varied, with the classics appealing to an educated public with the means to purchase these volumes.

By the mid to late 1860s, then, print had become the favoured medium for the production and dissemination in Tamil of cheap, popular religious literature and also of prestigious Shaiva classics. Religious actors used print not only to spread their messages more widely, but print itself became an avenue for advancing claims for authority. Stuart Blackburn notes that from the time of the publication of the Tamil classic *Tirukkuṟaḷ* in 1812 at the College of Fort St George, 'textual authenticity would not rely solely on the reputation of the pundit. After 1812, printing would also be used by pundits as an "instrument" to ensure authenticity.'[17] Ulrike Stark, speaking of commercial publishers in northern India in the second half of the nineteenth century, argues that 'the successful publisher's choices not only *responded* to readership tastes and reflected processes of canonization as well as current trends in literary activity, they also *shaped* these processes'.[18] What is true for literary canons was equally true for religious canons, and here I argue that by the 1860s, publication in printed form was becoming a *sine qua non* for a work to be considered a Tamil Shaiva classic. That is, for an authoritative text to maintain its prestige, it was imperative that it made its way into print, as editors, patrons, and publishers of Shaiva literature were re-establishing the Shaiva canon. Likewise, the publication of a new work displaying the specific features of the canonical works being published at the time might signal a claim for canonicity.[19] Print thereby enabled someone like Ramalinga, on the margins of Shaiva institutional power, to make a bid for the canonicity of his writings.

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[17] Stuart H. Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 90.

[18] Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), p. 11. Italics in original.

[19] This does not mean that all printed works were simply accepted as authoritative. As Adrian Johns has shown, printed works have not always been associated with veracity, let alone canonicity, and the association of print with truth develops through specific histories. Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). The great Tamil poet-scholar Minakshisundaram Pillai (1815–1876) expressed misgivings about print, warning his star pupil U. V. Swaminatha Iyer that, 'Print does not validate everything. People who are not proficient in the [Tamil] language may print anything.' Quoted in A. R. Venkatachalapathy, 'Reading Practices and Modes of Reading in Colonial Tamil Nadu', *Studies in History* 10, no. 2 (1994), p. 275.

The pre-publication history of *Tiruvarutpa*

Ramalinga Adigal, also known as Ramalinga Swamigal or, more commonly, as simply Vallalar, was born Ramalinga Pillai in 1823 in Marudur, near Chidambaram.[20] His father was a village accountant, from the Karuniga caste, a Tamil community of scribes and bookkeepers.[21] After his father died, his family relocated to Chennai, where he spent his formative years. It was in Chennai that Ramalinga began to gather a following, and he maintained close connections with disciples in the city throughout his life. He left Chennai in 1857, migrating south to the region of his birth in his search for a quiet village life and presumably to be closer to the shrinal centre of Tamil Shaivism. He remained in this area for the rest of his life. Ramalinga had a traditional Tamil education, but he was not educated in English and had little apparent contact with colonial institutions or networks. He worshipped at major Murugan and Shiva temples, such as Tiruttani and Chidambaram, as well as at local temples such as Kandar Kottam and Tiruvottriyur in Chennai. He also won the devotion of people from a range of castes, including a priest at the famous Chidambaram Shiva temple.[22] However, his connections to established temples were informal, and his relationships with non-Brahman Tamil monasteries were strained at best. This tension arose from distinctive visions of Shaivism, and was most dramatically displayed in the famous and prolonged conflict between Ramalinga's followers and residents of the

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[20] There are many biographies of Ramalinga's life. The earliest account with details of his life is Toluvur Velayuda Mudaliyar's '*Tiruvarutpā Varalāṟu*', which was appended to Ramalinga's verses in the 1867 publication of *Tiruvarutpa*. R. Ilakkuvan guided me in the reading of this difficult work. Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu*', in Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār (ed.), *Citamparam Irāmaliṅkapiḷḷai Avarkaḷ Tiruvāymalarntaruḷiyatiruvaruṭpā* (Madras: Asiatic Press, 1867). The most authoritative of recent biographies is that of Uran Adigal. Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, *Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ Varalāṟu* [Biography of Ramalinga Adigal], 3rd edition (Vadalur: Samarasa Sanmarga Araycchi Nilayam, 2006).

[21] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu*', verse 4. A. R. Venkatachalapathy notes that Ramalinga's detractors would frequently call him '*Kanakku Iramalingam*', or 'Calculation Ramalinga', to stress that his caste status was lower than that of the Vellalar castes that dominate established Shaiva institutions in South India. Ā. Irā Vēṅkaṭācalapati, "'*Tappai Oppeṉṟu Tāpittalum, Oppait Tappeṉṟu Vātittalum*"; Tamilil Kaṇṭaṉa Ilakkiyam ["Establishing Wrong as Right, and Arguing That Right Is Wrong": Condemnation Literature in Tamil]', in Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (ed.), *Aruṭpā Maruṭpā*, p. 36.

[22] Āṟumuka Nāvalar (under the name of Māvaṇṭūr Tiyākēca Mutaliyār), '*Pōliyaruṭpā Maṟuppu* [Critique of the Pseudo-Divine Verses]', in Pa. Caravaṇaṉ (ed.), *Aruṭpā Maruṭpā*.

nearby Tiruvavadudurai monastery. Ramalinga therefore established a number of his own institutions, including a temple and a hall for feeding the poor, which would serve the needs and aspirations of his community.

Over his lifetime, Ramalinga composed a number of prose works as well as thousands of verses in Tamil. His students collected these verses and eventually published them in the monumental volume *Tiruvarutpa* [*Poems of Divine Grace*], which records his reflections on Shiva, devotion, contemporary religious practices, and social reform.[23] At this time Ramalinga had a devoted following in and around his local village of Karunguli, as well as in Chennai. The publication of his verses was an important event in the history of this community, facilitating the establishment of a 'textual community' in the sense that Brian Stock uses the term. That is, Ramalinga's followers came to use *Tiruvarutpa* 'as a reference system both for everyday activities and for giving shape to many larger vehicles of explanation'.[24] Stock argues that heretical groups in early medieval Europe used texts 'to structure the internal behaviour of the groups' members and to provide solidarity against the outside world'.[25] This is precisely how *Tiruvarutpa* came to serve the people who had gathered around Ramalinga. The status of the community would depend on the prestige of the text, so it was vital that the work be produced in such a way that it invoked authority. As we will see, Ramalinga's followers ensured that its material form was identical to other canonical Shaiva works being published at the time.

One of Ramalinga's primary devotees was Irakkam Irattina Mudaliyar, who spent several years collecting Ramalinga's verses. We find details of these efforts in letters that Ramalinga wrote to Irattina Mudaliyar, which also provide a fascinating picture of the relationship between Ramalinga and one of his closest devotees.[26] The dates of the

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[23] Ramalinga's verses, which would come to form *Tiruvarutpa*, were published in three instalments—the first in 1867, the second in 1880, and the last in 1885. Uran Adigal gives a useful sketch of the publication of these three volumes in his introduction to his edition of *Tiruvarutpa*. Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ (ed.), 'Introduction', in Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpirakācavaḷḷalār Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ Aruḷiya Tiru Arutpā* (Vadalur, India: Samaraca Sanmarga Araycci Nilayam, 1972), pp. 43–53.

[24] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 3.

[25] Ibid, p. 90.

[26] Ramalinga Adigal, *Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ Tiruvāymalarntaruḷiya Tiru Arutpā*, ed. Ā. Pālakiruṣṇa Piḷḷai, 2nd edition, 12 volumes (Chennai: Nam Tamilar Patippakam, 2010), Vol. 5.

letters range from 1858, just one year after Ramalinga's departure
from Chennai, to 1869, a period when Ramalinga was in Karunguli
and Irattina Mudaliyar was in Chennai. In the letters, Ramalinga
gives advice to the young Mudaliyar on marriage and health, thanks
him for posting books and gifts, reports on people close to him and
asks about friends in Chennai, makes financial requests, and reminds
Mudaliyar to think often of Shiva. There are also several references to
the collection of verses for eventual publication, and to Ramalinga's
ongoing composition of verses, which give important details of the
efforts leading up to the publication of *Tiruvarutpa*.

A. Balakrishna Pillai had access to these letters and made them
public for the first time in his edition of *Tiruvarutpa*, published between
1931 and 1958. The first letter of particular interest to the publication
effort is one that Ramalinga wrote to Irattina Mudaliyar on the
seventh day of the Tamil month of Tai (mid-January to mid-February).
Unfortunately he did not indicate the year—I will follow Balakrishna
Pillai in dating it to either 1859 or 1860.[27] In the letter, Ramalinga
instructs Irattina Mudaliyar to constantly meditate on the five syllables
of Shiva ('nama Shivaya') with a clear mind, citing verses from
Auvaiyar's *Nalvaḻi* and Manikkavacakar's *Tiruvācakam* that encourage
this practice. He also includes one of his own verses to support his
advice: 'What merit have I done, that I have been blessed with a
fleshy tongue that recites "*civāya nama*" (praise to Shiva)?' Ramalinga
does not distinguish his verse in any way from those earlier, eminent
works, quoting the three in succession as if they each reflect equal
authority. Indeed, he does not even acknowledge that this verse is
his own, giving all three without citing author or text, presumably
confident that Irattina Mudaliyar would know the provenance of each.
The verse would appear later in the *Tiruvarutpa*, indicating that by this
time Ramalinga was composing and keeping verses which he used to
instruct his followers.[28]

Ramalinga wrote down poems throughout his life. He wrote on
palm leaves, paper, and in notebooks, as his life bridged the period
of transition from manuscript to print. For the most part, he wrote
on palm leaves when he was in Chennai, and on paper after he left

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[27] Ibid, Vol. 5, p. 30.
[28] Ibid, Vol. 5, pp. 31–32. The verse is from the poem '*Tiruvaruṇmuṟaiyīṭu*'
in Ramalinga Adigal, *Citamparam Irāmaliṅkapiḷḷai Avarkaḷ Tiruvāymalarntaruḷiya
Tiruvarutpā*, ed. Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār (Madras: Asiatic Press, 1867), Tirumurai
1, p. 123. This is verse number 2260 in Uran Adigal's edition.

Chennai in 1857.[29] Many of his verses ended up in the possession of his followers. One long, palm-leaf manuscript of 202 leaves, with verses of devotion to Shiva at Tiruvottriyur, was kept by his student Selvaraya Mudaliyar.[30] Later editions of *Tiruvarutpa* reproduced images of Ramalinga's handwritten verses. These verses show few signs of editing, indicating either that they were clean, final copies that Ramalinga had written out after working through earlier versions, or that he was particularly skilful in composing verses orally before writing them down.[31] Despite writing down his verses, Ramalinga, as is common in Tamil literary traditions, generally wrote that he 'sang' (*pāṭu*) these verses. This suggests that he considered his poems to be oral compositions, sung directly to Shiva. Indeed, in his verses he usually addresses Shiva using vocative forms. Ramalinga did not clearly distinguish between the written and spoken word, between literacy and orality.

In a letter written on 30 December 1860, Ramalinga writes that he had 'sung' (*pāṭiya*) many songs since arriving back in his home at Karunguli from Chennai, where it is likely he met with Irattina Mudaliyar. He continues: 'I didn't intend to write them down and collect them all together, so they lie scattered around.' He promises to collect the poems and to deliver them personally to Mudaliyar in Chennai.[32] Ramalinga expresses a certain disregard for collecting and looking after his writings, a sentiment that he repeats in later letters. Why did he write them down at all? Perhaps it was to share the verses with his followers, since his poems were dispersed among his closest students. For example, in this same letter Ramalinga tells Irattina Mudaliyar that Kumarasami Pillai and Shanmuga Pillai Reddiyar have about 50 of his poems.[33] Ramalinga's willingness to acquiesce to Mudaliyar's request to send verses seems to have been sparked by Mudaliyar's vow to eat only once a day until he received some poems. Ramalinga continues in the same letter:

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[29] See Uran Adigal's introduction to his edition of *Tiruvarutpa*. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition], pp. 58–62.

[30] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu*', verse 43; Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition], p. 59.

[31] See, for example, the images of Ramalinga's handwritten verses in Uran Adigal's introduction to his edition of *Tiruvarutpa*. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition].

[32] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 5, pp. 38–39.

[33] Ibid, Vol. 5, p. 39.

You who are so dear to me, I pray that you do what I ask. Earlier, you wrote, 'Until I get a parcel containing these verses, I'll only eat once a day.' Since seeing those words, rice isn't agreeable to me. I'm like one who is fasting. To give me peace of mind, please leave aside this vow to eat just once a day, and let me know immediately by post, or else I won't get rid of my weariness. I'm only eating once a day. This is true. It's my vow. You should let me know as soon as you abandon this vow. Two months from now the verses will definitely reach you.[34]

It may be that Ramalinga's indifference to prior requests for verses drove Mudaliyar to fast in order to cajole poems from his reluctant guru.

In the same letter, Ramalinga notes that many of his poems had already been published, and he asks Mudaliyar not to be angry about this.[35] Ramalinga's reference to earlier publication of his work is important, as it indicates that some of his verses were already in print. His request that Irattina Mudaliyar tolerate these earlier publications hints at tensions and competition over the publication of his poems. From this letter it is not clear whether Ramalinga contributed in any way to the publication of these earlier compilations, but his reluctance to assist Mudaliyar, a close devotee, in the publication of his verses, indicates that these early publications were pursued independently of Ramalinga's input. It is also not clear from the letter which poems were published, or in what form. I have not found any extant publications of Ramalinga's verses prior to the 1867 edition of *Tiruvarutpa*.

Velayuda Mudaliyar's 'History of *Tiruvarutpa*', included at the end of the 1867 edition of *Tiruvarutpa*, gives more details of these earlier publications. Mudaliyar wrote that one of Ramalinga's followers by the name of Muttusami sang some of Ramalinga's verses in front of the image of Shiva at Tiruvottriyur, a temple just north of Chennai. Other devotees, overhearing these 'verses of grace' (*aruṭpā*), spoke about their desire to have them in written form. Some 'people who shall remain unnamed' searched out Muttusami and copied those verses. With the intention to make a profit, they 'foolishly' ignored propriety and printed them in 'small publications'.[36] A few of Ramalinga's followers, including Velayuda Mudaliyar, Irattina Mudaliyar, and Selvaraya Mudaliyar, approached them and asked them to stop publishing these verses and even offered them a little money. However, those 'unnamed'

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[34] Ibid

[35] Ibid.

[36] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu*', verses 46–48.

people continued to publish verses, and even stole some poems for publication. It was then that Ramalinga's disciples approached Ramalinga himself to ask if they might publish his poems 'in the proper way'. Ramalinga initially denied their request, but Irattina Mudaliyar persisted and eventually won his guru's approval.[37]

We find a few more details of this encounter in a later biographical work on Ramalinga by S. M. Kandasami Pillai, 'Biographical Details of Ramalinga Swami', which Pillai included in his 1924 edition of *Tiruvarutpa*. According to Kandasami Pillai's version of events, a few people were publishing Ramalinga's verses, but in 'individual pamphlets [literally "small books"] and with printing errors'. Learning of these inferior publications, some members of Ramalinga's 'Society of The True Path of Unity and the Vedas', including Puduvai Velu Mudaliyar, Selvaraya Mudaliyar, and Irattina Mudaliyar, approached Ramalinga and made known their desire to publish his verses. Ramalinga did not agree at first, but eventually gave in to their request.[38]

Balakrishna Pillai, in his edition of *Tiruvarutpa* published between 1931 and 1958, mentions that two of Ramalinga's poems to Murugan—'*Teyva Maṇimālai*' and '*Kantar Caraṇa Pattu*'—were printed in a single volume, perhaps prior to 1851.[39] These two poems comprise 41 verses of eight lines each, so it is likely they would have been published as a pamphlet. However, the poems' focus on Murugan and the pre-1851 date do not accord with Velayuda Mudaliyar's narrative, which suggests that the illicitly published verses were addressed to Shiva at Tiruvottriyur and were published later than 1851. It may be that prior to the publication of *Tiruvarutpa* in 1867, there were a number of editions of Ramalinga's verses in circulation in inexpensive formats. In any case, none of these copies of earlier works seems to be extant, and their existence is largely forgotten except in the scattered references noted above.

One concern of Ramalinga's followers was that these works contained mistakes, which Kandasami Pillai calls '*accup piḻaikaḷ*' (printing errors), clarifying that these errors should not be attributed to Ramalinga himself. Just as importantly, they worried about the publication of his verses in small and, more than likely, cheap

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[37] Ibid, verses 48–53, p. 57.

[38] Cited in Uran Adigal's introduction to his edition of *Tiruvarutpa*. See Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Arutpā* [Uran Adigal edition], p. 45.

[39] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Arutpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 9, pp. 136, 169.

pamphlets. Such pamphlets would not have had a long life span, and probably would have circulated at the bazaars and markets alongside other cheap publications. Murdoch notes that such cheap publications were widely available in bazaars: 'Books published by natives are sold in the Madras Book Bazar, and to some extent, in every town of any size in the Tamil country... The more expensive books are not kept on sale at the Bazar; but the hawkers can readily procure them.'[40] Throughout India, popular works were often held in low esteem by elite authors, editors, and publishers, as well as by British administrators. For example, in his 1872 history of Bengali literature, Ramgati Nyayaratna laments the proliferation of Bengali books: 'Books which are being churned out in this manner will not be read by ordinary people nor will they last long; they will cease to exist after a few days. There are some among these which, in fact, smell of the gutter.'[41]

These are precisely the sorts of works from which Ramalinga's followers wanted to distinguish their publication. His students seemed concerned that the ephemeral quality of these cheap publications, to be read and then disposed of, would detract from the prestige of Ramalinga's poetry. In creating a volume that would establish the authority of his words, they needed to ensure that the volume would last. Their collection of verses, when published years later, would contrast sharply with any earlier publications of Ramalinga's verses, benefiting as it did from the careful editing of a Chennai pandit, and published in a handsome, hefty, and expensive volume boasting a price out of reach of most readers. Ramalinga's disciples sought to give the physical publication the quality of timelessness that characterizes a literary classic, manufacturing a volume that would last for decades or, indeed, centuries.[42] Time has justified their approach: earlier, shorter collections have been lost and forgotten, while *Tiruvarutpa* continues to be held in high esteem and is widely available.

After his letter of 30 December 1860, Ramalinga did not explicitly mention the publication of his verses for nearly five years. In a letter that arrived in Chennai on 19 November 1865, he refers to a registered letter from Irattina Mudaliyar that he received on 13 November. 'The matter that you refer to in your letter is not of much importance to

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[40] Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, p. xlii.
[41] Quoted in Roy, 'Disciplining the Printed Text', p. 55.
[42] Copies of the 1867 edition are extant. I consulted a copy held by the Maraimalai Adigal Library in Chennai.

me. However, as is your wish, you and Selvaraya Mudaliyar may use only those verses which speak of Shiva in my heart . . . '[43] It seems that Ramalinga did not warm much to the idea of publishing his verses in the intervening years, or perhaps he wished to appear indifferent to a project that might be seen as vain, which would be contrary to the persona of modesty and simplicity that he usually projected. In later biographies, his indifference to the publication is generally viewed as evidence of his humility, and it shielded him to some degree from the controversies that were to follow.[44]

By 1866, preparations for publication were in full swing. In a letter mailed from Chidambaram on 14 February 1866, Ramalinga appears to be more committed to the project, asking Irattina Mudaliyar to hold off on the publication of poems to Shiva at Tiruvottriyur, since he had composed a few additional poems that he would like to add. Similarly, in a letter written on 28 March 1866, Ramalinga tells Irattina Mudaliyar that since returning home to Karunguli, he had composed about 200 verses in praise of Shiva at Chidambaram. He also promises to send a verse preface in a few days. Ramalinga ends his letter by responding to a prior request that Irattina Mudaliyar had apparently made: 'I don't give my permission that the work be brought out under the name "Ramalingasami" [as author]. Why? Because it seems that this name is controversial, so it shouldn't be used.'[45] There appears to have been some controversy at this time in referring to Ramalinga as 'Ramalinga Sami', as 'Sami' or 'Swami' is an appellation that designates spiritual authority and leadership. The eventual publication of *Tiruvarutpa* refers to Ramalinga as 'Tiruvaruṭpirakāca Vaḷḷalār, Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai', that is, 'Iramalinga Pillai of Chidambaram, the generous one who is radiant with holy grace'.[46] Ramalinga's desire to avoid controversy in this case is noteworthy, because his legacy today is that of a radical critic of caste society, and because the publication of *Tiruvarutpa* sparked a controversy that was to continue for decades.

[43] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 5, pp. 59–60.

[44] See, for example, Dr Ma. Po. Sivagnanam, *The Universal Vision of Saint Ramalinga, Vallalar Kanda Orumaippadu*, trans. R. Ganapathy (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1987), p. 136.

[45] A Balakrishna Pillai notes that we know nothing about this verse preface that Ramalinga promised. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 5, p. 61.

[46] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], title page.

The organization and content of *Tiruvarutpa*

Tiruvarutpa was published in large 8vo format in February 1867 by Asiatic Press, 292 Lingee Chetty Street, Madras.[47] Ramalinga's poems fill 406 pages of the volume. Front matter includes a table of contents, a benedictory verse, and a page with details for purchasing the publication. The back material begins with Velayuda Mudaliyar's 'History of *Tiruvarutpa*', a composition of 63 verses that eulogises Ramalinga and his verses and narrates events leading up to the publication of the work. This is followed by another benedictory verse, a list of errors and corrections, a list of Ramalinga's poems yet to be published, and finally an alphabetical list of verses ordered by the first word of each verse. The pages are bound in a hard cover, making for an impressive volume.

An advertisement at the beginning of the work informs the reader that copies of *Tiruvarutpa* could be purchased for three rupees directly from a few of Ramalinga's disciples, giving street addresses in Chennai; Vellore, about 105 kilometres west of Chennai; and Cuddalore, the largest town near Ramalinga's residence. Those who lived at some distance could order copies through the post.[48] The purchase of books through the post in India was not unusual; Ulrike Stark similarly notes that the distribution of books by mail was common in North India by 1870.[49] The advertisement also states that Mayilai Cikkitti Chettiyar and Somasundara Chettiyar provided financial support for the publication.[50] The printing of Tamil classics

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[47] Ibid. 'Asiatic Press' is a popular name for presses in India, and indeed throughout Asia, from the nineteenth century to the present day. I was not able to find specific information on this Chennai-based 'Asiatic Press', but at least a few other Tamil works were published by an Asiatic Press in Chennai at the time, including: Teraiyar's *Nīrniṟakkuṟi Neykkuṟic Cāstiraṅkaḷ*, ed. Kanci Sabhapati Mudaliyar (Chennai, 1868); Minakshisundaram Pillai's *Tirunākaikkārōṇap Purāṇam* (Chennai, 1869); Vedanayagam Pillai's *Peṇmatimālaiyum Peṇkalviyum Peṇmāṇamum*, 2nd edition (Chennai, 1870); and *Tiruvōṟṟiyūr Purāṇam* (Madras, 1869). This last work was cited in David Shulman, 'The Enemy Within: Idealism and Dissent in South Indian Hinduism', in S. N. Eisenstadt, Reuven Kahane and David Dean Shulman (eds), *Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, and Dissent in India* (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), p. 54. If all of these books were indeed published by the same Asiatic Press, it would indicate that the Press did not adhere to a single ideological or sectarian position, since these works include a *siddhar* text; a conventional temple *puranam* composed by perhaps the most celebrated Tamil poet-scholar of the nineteenth century; and a work on women's reform by a well-known Christian poet and author.
[48] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], front matter.
[49] Stark, 'Publishers as Patrons', pp. 193–194.
[50] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], front matter.

throughout the nineteenth century usually required the support of wealthy patrons and institutions, highlighting that printing books was not always a cheap way to publicize messages, as it was often an expensive enterprise.[51]

The cost of publication—three rupees—was high for a published work at the time. Murdoch's 1865 catalogue includes the prices for 127 Shaiva works. Of these, only two exceed three rupees: a two-volume edition of *Periya Purāṇam* for three-and-a-quarter rupees, and a three-volume edition of Sambandar's *Tēvāram* verses for four rupees.[52] These are both part of the Shaiva devotional canon, esteemed company for *Tiruvarutpa*.[53] Given its high price, it is doubtful that *Tiruvarutpa* would have been distributed in markets or bazaars, and it would not have enjoyed the sales volumes of popular religious literature. Unfortunately, there are no distribution figures for the 1867 printing of *Tiruvarutpa*, but Ramalinga's followers clearly opted for a prestigious, impressive publication rather than a cheaper one that would be more widely distributed and read. Although print in this case served to widen claims to religious authority, it did so not in its capacity for efficient reproduction, but because it was the new, primary medium through which claims to textual authority were advanced.

At the bottom of the title page, in English, are the words 'Registered Copy-right'. In 1857, James Long noted the relative pricing of books marked with copyright: 'The new Bengali works published by Natives are generally rather high priced when they are copy-wright, as various natives now find the composing of Bengali books profitable, and some authors draw a regular income from them . . . Books for the masses, not copy-wright, are very cheap.'[54] It is unlikely that *Tiruvarutpa* was subject to the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, which presumably would have only been enforced for books published in 1868 and after.[55] However, Murdoch noted in 1865 that 'a considerable

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[51] For a poignant account of the efforts of authors to win patronage, see A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu* (Ranikhet, India: Permanent Black, 2012). On p. 33, Venkatachalapathy specifically describes the prominent role of Chettiyars in the publication of Tamil classics.

[52] Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, pp. 75–106.

[53] The *Tēvāram* is a collection of devotional verses to Shiva that is the earliest and probably the most important part of the Shaiva Tirumurai canon.

[54] Cited in Roy, 'Disciplining the Printed Text', p. 44.

[55] Robert Darnton, 'Book Production in British India, 1850–1900', *Book History* 5, no. 1 (2002), p. 245.

number of native books now bear on their title pages, "Registered Copyright". This is always printed in English, being considered much more effective in that language.' In Tamil Shaiva publishing in this period, prestigious canonical works were marked as copyright, setting them apart from the vast range and quantity of popular religious publications of the time.[56] Murdoch wrote that publishers told him that they could register books with the government for a fee of two rupees, and suggested that claims may have been made that some were registered without being so.[57] Velayuda Mudaliyar wrote that *Tiruvarutpa* was being published so that 'the government will know', perhaps referring to some form of official registration.[58] With the competition over the publication of Ramalinga's verses, and accusation of theft and unauthorized publication, labelling the work with 'Registered Copy-right' may have offered some legal protection. Perhaps, just as importantly, the note of 'Copy-right' distinguished the 1867 work from prior publications of Ramalinga's verses, marking this as the authorized, and also as the authoritative, edition of his poems.

The work was edited and arranged by Toluvur Velayuda Mudaliyar, a Tamil scholar based in Chennai and a follower of Ramalinga since 1849. He later took up the prestigious position of Tamil pandit at Presidency College, Chennai.[59] The editing of the work by a pandit followed the publishing model of Tamil and Sanskrit classics. Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century, Tamil pandits had played a vital role in publishing traditional Tamil works, editing texts, and also endorsing the work of other pandits through conventional

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[56] Other works from this period that I have seen marked as copy-right are the *Periya Purāṇam* and part of the *Tēvāram*. Mutaliyār, *Periya Purāṇam*; Kāñcipuram Capāpati Mutaliyār (ed.), *Tirunāvukkaracucuvāmikaḷ Arulicceyta Tēvārappatikattirumuṟaikaḷ* (Chennai: Kalaniti Press; Kalaratnacuram Press, 1866).

[57] Murdoch, *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books*, p. lxii. See also A. R. Venkatachalapathy's discussion of copyright in Tamil publishing in his *The Province of the Book*, pp. 184–187.

[58] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvarutpā Varalāṟu*', verse 57.

[59] Velayuda Mudaliyar includes these details in an account of Ramalinga's life that he wrote for a Theosophical publication, *Hints on Esoteric Theosophy*. This is reproduced in Ūraṇ Aṭikaḷ, *Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ Varalāṟu*, pp. 648–660. Srilata Raman gives a detailed analysis of Velayuda Mudaliyar's work in Srilata Raman, 'Departure and Prophecy: The Disappearance of Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ in the Early Narratives of His Life', *Indologica Taurinensia* 28 (2002). For a brief biography of Mudaliyar, see U. Vē Cāminātaiyar, *Piṟkālap Pulavarkaḷ* [Latter-Day Poets], ed. Ec. Vaittiyanātaṉ (Chennai: U. V. Saminatha Iyer Library, 2000), p. 288.

prefaces in verse or prose.[60] Blackburn notes that pandits, increasingly associated with schools and colleges modelled on British institutions, had a hand in the publication of most of the approximately 200 Tamil works published in Chennai in the first half of the nineteenth century.[61] For example, *Tēvāram* and *Periya Purāṇam*, published just prior to *Tiruvarutpa*, were edited by Kanci Sabhapati Mudaliyar, a Tamil pandit at the Paccaiyappa School in Chennai.[62]

The title page of the 1867 edition describes Velayuda Mudaliyar as 'a student of this master [Ramalinga] and one of the scholars of the Society of The True Path of Unity and the Vedas'.[63] The link to this Society, which Ramalinga established in 1865, gave the work an institutional home. It was common for institutions, especially Shaiva monasteries, to provide financial support and residency to editors of classical literature. Arumuga Navalar, U. V. Saminatha Iyer, and Damodaram Pillai, the leading editors of Tamil literature in the nineteenth century, all received patronage from the Tiruvavadudurai monastery, probably the most powerful of the Tamil Shaiva non-Brahman monasteries. The influence that these institutions exerted on the editing and publishing of Tamil classics, and the prestige derived from their association with such powerful institutions, prompted Damodaram Pillai to call this period of Tamil literary history 'The Age of Mutts [Monasteries]'.[64] Ramalinga, an outsider to Shaiva monastic networks, founded a number of his own institutions from the mid-1860s until his death in 1874. These included a temple, an almshouse, and a society of like-minded devotees, which served as centres for his teachings and charity work. Velayuda Mudaliyar sought to establish his scholarly credentials by invoking Ramalinga's 'Society of the True Path' as a source of institutional prestige, albeit one that

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[60] On the role of pandits in nineteenth-century Tamil publishing, see Blackburn's chapter 'Pundits, Publishing and Protest', in Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, pp. 73–124. On pandits, patronage, and printing, see Rajesh, 'The Reproduction and Reception of Classical Tamil Literature'; Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*.

[61] Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, pp. 74–75. On the role of Tamil pandits in the philological work of the College of Fort St George, see Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Thomas R. Trautmann (ed.), *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[62] Cāminātaiyar, *Piṟkālap Pulavarkaḷ*, p. 145.

[63] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition].

[64] Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book*, pp. 28–29.

clearly stood apart from the established centres of Shaiva institutional power.

In addition to editing the work, Velayuda Mudaliyar divided all the poems in his possession into six sections as a way of ordering the verses. He called these divisions 'Tirumurai', the same term used to refer to the Shaiva canonical corpus.[65] He explains the rationale for this division in his 'History of *Tiruvarutpa*':

> *Tiru Arutpa* is divided into six distinct sections [*muṟai*], because [1] it is a *shastra* (teaching) and [2] a *stottiram* (praise poem), elucidating the rituals of worship; because [3] it generates the truth of the five original, ancient syllables [*civāya nama*] that illuminate all things; because [4] it reveals that which is understood by those of the six religious systems [*aṟucamayam*], and by those outside these traditions, and because [5] it reveals that which is beyond their understanding; and because [6] it removes faults and explains that which is higher than the established paths to liberation [*attuvā*].[66]

I have translated '*muṟai*' here as 'section', which is roughly consistent with its use in the Shaiva Tirumurai canon, where it refers to the canon as a whole, and also to each of its 12 individual parts (e.g. the eleventh Tirumurai). Tirumurai also has the sense of a holy path or tradition, drawing on the broader meaning of '*muṟai*' as path or way.[67] Velayuda Mudaliyar uses the term in both senses, to refer to the way he divided the text into six parts, and also to point to aspects of Ramalinga's verses that suggest distinct paths of religious practice. He emphasizes that *Tiruvarutpa* illuminates the paths taught in the six established religious traditions [*aṟucamayam*], which include Shaivism, while it also teaches truths that are beyond the understanding of those established traditions. Despite advancing this critique of long-standing traditions, Velayuda Mudaliyar situates *Tiruvarutpa* within Shaivism by using the term 'Tirumurai' to link *Tiruvarutpa* to the established Shaiva corpus.

A concern surrounding the publication was what name would be used for Ramalinga. We have seen that Ramalinga objected to the use of Ramalingasami, but it is not clear that the name that did appear on the

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[65] Karen Pechilis Prentiss, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 143–144; Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *Poems to Siva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[66] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, 'Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu', verses 37–39. Uran Adigal reads these three verses differently than I do, linking the six Tirumurai to the six syllables [ōm civāya nama], to the six religious systems, and to the six paths of liberation. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition], p. 43.

[67] Indira Peterson translates Tirumurai as 'sacred tradition'. Peterson, *Poems to Siva*, p. 15.

title page—'Iramalinga Pillai of Chidambaram, the generous one who is radiant with holy grace'—was much of a gesture in the direction of humility.[68] While Ramalinga clearly had some input into such details, it was probably Velayuda Mudaliyar who gave Ramalinga this title.[69] If Ramalinga was concerned about the way he would be referred to in the publication, there is no indication that he was unhappy with the title given to the work: *Tiruvarutpa*, *'Poems of Divine Grace'*. It would be the title, however, that would cause the most controversy in the coming years. Velayuda Mudaliyar explains the choice of title in his 'History of *Tiruvarutpa*':

Our Ramalinga's words, full of grace, are nectar that flows in torrents of Tamil. These words melt the hearts of great people with content minds who seize that precious grace, as well as the hearts of those sinners like me who suffer with delusion. These words, cultivating grace that provides unlimited love, are crowned with the name 'Arutpa', songs of grace, because they cut through karma and enable one to unite with the rich, flowery feet of Shiva, whose left side has the form of a woman with laughing, fish-like eyes with golden jasmine. A few people like me, our understanding deluded with confusion, grasped the words of Arutpa as speech with divine benevolence. The words of Arutpa are imbued with grace, grace that creates auspiciousness and brings clarity to clouded minds like mine.[70]

Velayuda Mudaliyar emphasizes that because Ramalinga's poems are composed with grace, and because they reveal Shiva's grace to their readers, it is appropriate to refer to them as 'songs of grace', and to Ramalinga himself as 'radiant with holy grace'. As Ramalinga's staunch critic Arumuga Navalar later pointed out, the term 'Arutpa' sometimes referred to the most revered Shaiva literary works.[71] Navalar, and presumably others, took the title as a claim by Ramalinga that his writings were equal to those Shaiva classics.

There were two *cirappu pāyiram*, or celebratory verses, in the volume.[72] The first was written by Chidambara Swamigal, of the Madurai Tirugnanasambandaswamigal Monastery, 'the renowned

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[68] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], title page.

[69] In his 'Tiruvarutpā Varalāṟu', Velayuda Mudaliyar frequently refers to Ramalinga as *'arutpirakāca'* ('radiant with grace'). Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, *'Tiruvarutpā Varalāṟu'*, verses 28, 33, 34, 42, 56, 60, 61.

[70] Ibid, verses 34, 35, 36.

[71] Ārumuka Nāvalar, *'Pōliyarutpā Maṟuppu* [Critique of the Pseudo-Divine Verses]'.

[72] On *cirappuppāyiram* ('special preface') conventions in the nineteenth century, see Sascha Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), pp. 62–73.

seat of religious teachers of pure Shaiva Siddhanta based on the Vedas and Agamas'. This is the book's only explicit link to the powerful Shaiva monastic network, and indicates that Ramalinga was not entirely devoid of the support of established Shaiva institutions. Chidambara Swamigal's foreword was a single verse with the title 'The Greatness of *Tiruvarutpa*':

Revere the greatness and dignity of the path [muṟai] of the fine Arutpa of our dear Ramalinga. That path creates prosperity, such that the drinking water of ordinary people abounds with power, as in the event when water had power to fuel a lamp's flame.

The verse indicates that the poems of *Tiruvarutpa* reveal a '*murai*', a path or tradition. The Shaiva path was often described as the 'Shaiva murai', so the phrase 'Arutpa murai' suggests a distinct, and novel, religious path embodied in *Tiruvarutpa*.[73]

The mention of a lamp's flame fuelled by water refers to one of the most popular legends about Ramalinga. The story is repeated in many hagiographies and is the foundational event for a popular shrine in Karunguli. Uran Adigal's extensive and knowledgeable biography, first published in 1971, gives the following narrative account.[74] Ramalinga, it seems, always had a lamp burning near him throughout the night. When he was staying at Karunguli, a follower named Muttiyalammal, the matron of a nearby household, would come into Ramalinga's room daily to clean, fill, and light the oil lamp. She would place a separate vessel of oil nearby that Ramalinga could use during the night to refill the lantern. One day the oil vessel broke and was replaced by another vessel, this one filled with water. Muttiyalammal was out of town so did not come to fill the vessel with oil. Legend has it that Ramalinga unknowingly filled the lamp with water throughout the night, and the lamp continued to burn brightly. The next day, Muttiyalammal discovered the vessel filled with water, and asked Ramalinga about it. Ramalinga confirmed that the lamp had burned throughout the night. The story of the miraculous event spread quickly among Ramalinga's

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[73] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], front matter.

[74] Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, *Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ Varalāṟu*. This book won a prize from the Tamil Nadu government in 1975, presented by DMK Chief Minister K. M. Karunanidhi. There is a certain irony in the DMK, the main Dravidianist party, with a history of anti-Hindu agitation, presenting an award for a biography of a Hindu leader. Ramalinga, however, has long been accepted by Dravidianist political leaders because of his anti-caste verses. See Pa. Caravaṇaṉ, *Vāḷaiyaṭi Vāḷaiyeṉa . . . Vaḷḷalār Kaṟṟatum Vaḷḷalāril Peṟṟatum* [At the Base of a Plantain Tree, a Plantain: The Teachings of Vallalar and His Heritage] (Chennai: Cantiya Patippakam, 2009), pp. 13–26.

followers as a sign of his divine character.[75] Ramalinga composed a verse recounting this event, which appears in the 1867 publication.[76]

Such stories of miraculous events abound in literature on Ramalinga's life, and were widely recognized when he was alive.[77] His reputation as a thaumaturge caught the attention of the urban elite, with the 5 July 1871 edition of the *Madras Mail* reporting that 'One Ramalinga Pillai, a Tamil Scholar of some repute, it appears [sic] has set himself up for a god and, promises his votaries the resurrection of their relatives and friends that have departed this world. Thousands throng there daily; and a Pandal is being erected at the cost of 15,000 Rs.!!! in honor of the coming day when that glorious miracle will be wrought.'[78] To his followers, Ramalinga was not only a poet whose words were filled with Shiva's grace, but also a powerful leader capable of working miracles. In combining poetic skill with claims of extraordinary power, Ramalinga resembled the great poet-saints of Shaivism, the celebrated authors of the most revered Shaiva devotional literature in Tamil. The *Periya Purāṇam*, for example, is replete with stories of the supernatural acts of the authors of the *Tēvāram*. Ramalinga himself frequently refers to the extraordinary powers of the 'Nālvar', the four most renowned Shaiva saints: Sambandar, Appar, Sundarar, and Manikkavasagar.[79] Stories of Ramalinga's extraordinary abilities further helped legitimate his place among the pantheon of Shaiva saints. They also fuelled heated criticism, as in an 1869 publication of Arumuga Navalar which questions the veracity of this legend.[80]

The other preface, by Ponneri Sundaram Pillai, one of Ramalinga's close disciples, made a clear claim for the divinity of Ramalinga by asserting that he was an incarnation of Shiva himself.

God, with the highest grace, in order to destroy [the suffering of] our individual births and the bonds of our personal karma, took incarnation in a holy body out of compassion: is it eight shoulders or two? Three eyes, or two eyes of grace? A name of five syllables, or the miraculous name of grace,

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[75] Ūraṉ Aṭikaḷ, *Irāmaliṅka Aṭikaḷ Varalāṟu*, pp. 303–304.

[76] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 2, p. 141.

[77] Āṟumuka Nāvalar, '*Pōliyarutpā Maṟuppu* [Critique of the Pseudo-Divine Verses]'.

[78] *Madras Mail*, 5 July 1871, p. 3.

[79] See especially the poems that were specifically addressed to the Nālvar. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 4, pp. 33–38.

[80] Āṟumuka Nāvalar, '*Pōliyarutpā Maṟuppu* [Critique of the Pseudo-Divine Verses]'.

Iramalinga? The four Vedas, or the six Murais [of *Tiruvarutpa*]? In these ways you reapportioned yourself, ascetic [Shiva] who destroys illusion.[81]

In addition to claiming the divinity of Ramalinga, Sundaram Pillai also equates *Tiruvarutpa* with the Vedas, asserting the canonical status of Ramalinga's writings. The two claims are related, since a bid for canonical status is usually premised on the extraordinary insight and abilities of a work's author. Ramalinga did not claim divinity for himself in his verses, but rather emphasized his sinful nature and Shiva's grace in granting him access and wisdom. However, he did give permission for the publication of these benedictory verses in a letter to Putuvai Velu Mudaliyar. 'The *pāyiram* (preface) of our Sundara Pillai is good. Go ahead and publish it. The preface of our Chidambara Samigal is also good, so publish that one too.'[82] We can assume, then, that he did not object to Sundaram Pillai's identification of him with Shiva.

Ramalinga's verses that appeared in the 1867 edition of *Tiruvarutpa* run to over 400 pages. Most are devotional poems to Shiva in a few important temples. The verses are highly reflexive, narrating Ramalinga's encounters with god, and often stress his feelings of unworthiness. It would be impossible to give a thorough account of the content of these poems here, so instead I will cite a few verses that give the flavour of the work. First is a brief prefatory verse:[83]

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[81] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], back matter.

[82] There is no date for this letter, but it is likely that it was written in 1866. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 5, p. 85.

[83] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition]. Later editions of *Tiruvarutpa* diverge from the ordering of verses in the first edition. A. Balakrishna Pillai's edition mostly follows Velayuda Mudaliyar's ordering, but reversed the fourth and fifth Tirumurai, and added six volumes of other writings not included in the original publications, including prose works, letters, and scattered verses. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition]. Uran Adikal, in his 1972 edition, attempted to order the verses chronologically by matching verses to details of Ramalinga's biography. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition]. Auvai C. Duraisami Pillai, in his 1980s edition with commentary, followed Uran Adikal's arrangement of verses. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā Mūlamum Uraiyum*, ed. Auvai Cu. Turaicāmi Piḷḷai, 10 volumes (Chidambaram: Annamalai University, 1988). On the various editions of *Tiruvarutpa*, see Uran Adigal's introduction in Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Uran Adigal edition], pp. 52–58. Also see the useful overview by Pa. Caravaṇaṉ, *Navīṉa Nōkkil Vaḷḷalār*[A New Perspective on Vallalar] (Nagarkovil: Kalaccuvatu Patippakam, 2010), pp. 216–232.

The happiness which destroys the defects of attachment and cruel illusion, and which rests beyond the radiant core of light—my lord, will that happiness come today, tomorrow, or another day? I don't know.[84]

The first Tirumurai begins after this verse with a poem of 128 feet entitled '*Tiruvaṭippukaḻcci*', 'Praise of [Shiva's] Holy Feet'. The poem, full of Shaiva theological language, starts with the line 'The greatest wealth is the destiny to enjoy the essence of Shiva, which is full of the pure intelligence of the highest state of being.'[85] Given that the editor Velayutha Mudaliyar was a Tamil scholar, lecturer, and intellectual, it may be that he chose to begin with a highly abstract verse in order to foreground the philosophical dimension of Ramalinga's writings.

Most of the poems in the volume, however, are descriptive and devotional, extolling Shiva in various mythological manifestations drawn from Puranic sources. S. P. Annamalai notes that Ramalinga's simple style shares more with works like *Tēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam* than it does with the more technically sophisticated writing of his contemporary Minakshisundaram Pillai.[86] Many verses are highly personal, recounting specific experiences of devotion and interaction with Shiva, lauding particular temples where he worshipped, especially Tiruvottriyur and Chidambaram, and lamenting his moral lapses and unworthiness. For example, in a poem titled '*Aruḷiyal Viṉāval*' ('Examining the Nature of Grace'), Ramalinga begins with a verse to Shiva in his form of Masilamani of the temple at Mullaivayil, just west of Chennai:

Oh ocean of divine grace which is sweet like honey! Oh pure nectar, divine nature, oh god who is like the sky, oh Masilamani who lives at Mullaivayil! I lack discernment, dwelling in a fleshy body. Even so, when I came to your holy temple, you did not question my coming, remaining silent. Isn't this the nature of your holy grace?'[87]

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[84] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], front matter. For commentary, see Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [Duraisami Pillai edition], Vol. 4, p. 201. In the latter volume, the verse appears as the first verse of the third Tirumurai, and number 1959 of the collection.

[85] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], p. 1.

[86] S. P. Annamalai, *The Life and Teachings of Saint Ramalingar*, 2nd edition (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988), pp. 36–38. On the literary virtuosity of Minakshisundaram Pillai, see Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words*.

[87] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 2, p. 15. I was helped in my translations by the commentary of Duraisami Pillai. See Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [Duraisami Pillai edition], Vol. 2, verse 653.

Ramalinga frequently recalls his encounters with Shiva throughout his life, beginning when he was a young child. In his poem 'Tiruvaruṇmuṟaiyīṭu' ('Petition to Divine Grace'), Ramalinga writes:

When I was young, without any wisdom at all, playing in the streets, my little legs flapping around, at that period of my life you gave me valuable knowledge and had me sing about you, you who took form in formlessness. Who else enjoys your soothing intimacy?'[88]

Ramalinga often speaks of his special relationship with Shiva, claiming that Shiva had elevated him over other devotees. In a verse of his 'Piracāta Mālai' ('Sanctified Garland'), he describes how Shiva singled him out from other devotees:

Taking on a divine body of radiant beauty, you appeared in your grace before me, your servant. Smiling with grace, you put me in the middle of an assembly of devotees. You gave them all sacred ash, and then turning to me, your face blossoming with compassion, you took a beautiful red flower of light from your alms bag and gave it to me. I don't understand this sign of yours, my guru! Oh master, taking the form of brilliant light, you beautifully performed the dance of enjoyment in the public hall [of Chidambaram] set with jewels, radiant with a robe of a young elephant.[89]

Ramalinga's poetry was clearly influenced by the themes and content of Shaiva *bhakti* literature, especially the writings of the Nalvar, the four most important poet-saints of Tamil Shaivism, and he even wrote poems addressed to these four.[90] In the 1867 verses, Ramalinga drew inspiration from the Shaiva literary past for content or genre, not from modern influences.[91] The poems are highly conventional, consisting of heartfelt praise to Shiva expressed in familiar idioms; reflections on Ramalinga's own inadequacies, especially when compared to Shiva himself and to other Shaiva saints; and celebrations of the narratives, temples, and geography of Tamil Saivism. Ramalinga uses a range of metres and forms typical of classical Tamil literature and common in

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[88] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 1, p. 118; Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [Duraisami Pillai edition], Vol. 6, verse 2218.
[89] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 4, p. 21; Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [Duraisami Pillai edition], Vol. 8, verse 3162.
[90] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvarutpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 4, pp. 33–38.
[91] Tamil prose was emerging at the time as a literary form and as a form of religious communication, and Ramalinga himself used prose to communicate with his followers. In Shaiva contexts, prose was used as a form of communication between co-religionists, or to enter into a debate with one's adversaries, but not as speech addressed to Shiva.

the *Tēvāram*, such as *nerisai*, *viruttam*, and *patigam*.[92] All poems except those to the Nalvar focus on the worship of Shiva. We have seen that Ramalinga's letter of 19 November 1865 instructed Irattina Mudaliyar that 'you and Selvaraya Mudaliyar may use only those verses which speak of Shiva in my heart . . . '[93] The letter suggests that Irattina Mudaliyar and Selvaraya Mudaliyar had poems that were not specifically about Shiva, poems that Ramalinga did not want to be published. Accordingly, the poems that Ramalinga wrote to Murugan do not appear in the 1867 edition, and were only published in 1880 as the fifth Tirumurai.[94] The exclusive emphasis on Shiva in the 1867 work is a quality that François Gros has noted also for the *Tēvāram*: 'The majesty of Shiva dominates the *Tēvāram* and seems not to accommodate anecdote very comfortably. This may be why, in these decidedly Tamil hymns, Murukaṉ has so little place . . . '[95] Whatever the reason for Ramalinga's exclusion of verses to Murugan, the effect was to bring *Tiruvarutpa* more in line with the *Tēvāram* hymns. This conventional character of *Tiruvarutpa* made the work suited to be compared to other works of the Shaiva canon, and was indeed an essential characteristic of the work that would qualify it to be considered a Shaiva classic.

It would have been difficult to make the case for canonicity of a less conventional work, or a work with a message that diverged much from the teachings of the established Shaiva canonical works. Accordingly, also absent from the 1867 publication were the radical, confrontational verses that Ramalinga is best known for today, which denounce caste distinctions, orthodox institutions, and Sanskrit works like the *Vedas* and *Shaiva Agamas*.[96] These controversial verses only appeared in print in 1885 in the sixth Tirumurai, published in a

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[92] On prosody in the *Tēvāram*, see Peterson, *Poems to Siva*.

[93] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiru Aruṭpā* [Balakrishna Pillai edition], Vol. 5, pp. 59–60.

[94] Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā Tiruttaṇikai Patikam* (Madras: Memorial Press, 1880).

[95] Gros also notes the influence of the *Tēvāram* on Ramalinga. François Gros, 'Towards Reading the *Tēvāram*', in M. Kannan and Jennifer Clare (eds), *Deep Rivers: Selected Writings on Tamil Literature* (Pondicherry; Berkeley: Institut Francais De Pondichery; Tamil Chair, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 2009), pp. 213, 216.

[96] One exception is a verse of the poem '*Civanēca Veṇpā*', in which Ramalinga praises Shiva for cutting through the shackles of caste and bringing light to the world. However, this verse lacks the radical message of social change of the verses in the sixth Tirumurai. Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [1867 edition], Tirumurai 1, p. 84; Ramalinga Adigal, *Tiruvaruṭpā* [Duraisami Pillai edition], Vol. 5, verse 1972.

third instalment of *Tiruvarutpa* without the participation of Velayuda Mudaliyar or others who had worked on the publication of the first five Tirumurai.[97] Velayuda Mudaliyar, in his '*Tiruvarutpā Varalāṟu*', indicated that in 1867 he already had in his possession poems that would be included in the sixth Tirumurai, and he explicitly stated that it was not yet time to publish these.[98] Subsequent to the publication of those polemical verses, Ramalinga's oeuvre has most often been compared to the works of the Tamil *siddhars*, the decidedly unorthodox, anti-establishment Shaiva poets whose works are not included in the Shaiva canon.[99] In 1867, however, Ramalinga and his followers did not want to publish controversial verses, but rather aimed to produce a work that shared the content and message of the canonical Shaiva texts.

Conclusion

At the time of *Tiruvarutpa*'s publication, print was becoming the most widespread medium for textual transmission in South Asia. Print served a wide variety of religious groups and audiences—elite, popular, orthodox, and heterodox—which used the technology to produce and distribute texts across vast distances and to diverse social groups. However, the publication of *Tiruvarutpa* as an expensive volume highlights that the transformative power of print lay not only in being a cheap, efficient medium of reproduction; it also carried other meanings for readers and consumers. By the 1860s in South India, print had become the primary medium of canonical publications, and any work that aspired to canonicity needed to appear in print. The printing press, accessible to any group that had the money to employ it, provided a tool for religious groups on the margins of established religious centres to make bids for that authority. In doing so, it offered the potential to transform the relationships of authority between established religious institutions and leaders, on the one hand, and those who were articulating new religious visions from the institutional margins, on the other.

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[97] Ramalinga Adigal, *Citamparam Irāmaliṅkacuvāmikaḷ Tiruvāymalarntaruḷiya Tiruvaruṭpā, Āṟāvatu Tirumuṟai* (Madras: Authikalanithi Press, 1885).

[98] Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār, '*Tiruvaruṭpā Varalāṟu*', verse 45.

[99] The exception is the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumular, but this work is very different from the work of other *siddhar* poems.

If the content and literary style of the first volume of *Tiruvarutpa* was largely conventional, its publication was not. In contrast to contemporaneous publications of canonical Shaiva literature, *Tiruvarutpa* was produced by a group of individuals working outside traditional centres of Shaiva authority. By publishing the work in the style of classical Shaiva books, they claimed the revelatory authority of new, original verses attributed to a living author. While the content of the text is the work of Ramalinga himself, many of the decisions that shaped the publication as canonical resulted from the cooperation of Ramalinga and his close disciples. These included a skilful Tamil pandit who proved to be a capable editor, a few wealthy men who provided financial backing to the publication, and a group of devoted disciples who worked hard to bring the work to press. Their goal was to produce a text with prestige to rival that of the Shaiva devotional corpus, a work that would consolidate the legacy of Ramalinga. *Tiruvarutpa* came to occupy the centre of communities that formed around Ramalinga's teachings, so perhaps it is fitting that the publication was itself a community effort.

Nowhere in his letters did Ramalinga refer to his poems as comprising a unified whole. He never set out to write a comprehensive work, and he consistently referred only to individual poems. The longest of the 1867 poems was '*Neñcaṟivuṟuttal*', which fills just under 50 published pages. The majority of his poems were much shorter, so they were well suited for publication in pamphlet form. However, cheap publications did not carry the authority of a larger volume published to the high standard of Shaiva canonical works. Ramalinga's followers produced the work in a form that would maximize its prestige, opting for an expensive volume made to last, presented as a unified work by a poet-saint. This choice certainly made the work less accessible, since it was beyond the purchasing power of most readers, and it is doubtful that it was on offer in market and bazaars. Despite Ramalinga's reputation today as a saint of the common people, in 1867 the prevalent aspiration of his community for his work was more for the status of established institutions than for wide readership across a range of castes and classes.