

The Publication of *Tiruvārūṭpā*

The Authority of Canon and Print

The publication in 1867 of Ramalinga's *Tiruvārūṭpā*, a book of his devotional poems in Tamil, was a landmark event in the history of his legacy and community. At the time, Ramalinga's writings and teachings were enjoying increasing fame in the metropolis of Chennai and also in the provincial area in which he lived, the eastern regions of the Kaveri Delta, which 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 was perhaps best indicated by the vitriolic attack on *Tiruvārūṭpā* 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 argue that they used print as a tool to garner religious and textual authority. As a technology new to mass religious communications in South Asia, print provided novel possibilities for canonical claims, especially for religious leaders like Ramalinga, who was without the backing of long-standing and powerful Shaiva institutions that dominated Tamil literary production and status through at least the end of the nineteenth century.

Scholars of the emergence of the Protestant Reformation in early modern Europe have for some time recognized 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 industry was more aligned with novel religious expression than with conservative churchmen, communicating “more democratic and national forms of worship.”⁴ Eisenstein has understandably been criticized for not paying enough attention to the way that the established Church employed print to its advantage.⁵ Yet even if we do not accept Eisenstein’s view of a natural affinity of 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 other possibilities and meanings rather than just efficiency. In Tamil Shaivism, print became the medium through which Shaiva leaders and pandits reestablished 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 those publications 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, there has been little attention to the impact of print on Hindu traditions in nineteenth-century India.⁸ This lapse is particularly significant if we consider that a high percentage of published works in Indian languages through the nineteenth century can be classified as religious. James Long, an Irish missionary who compiled statistics on the publication of Bengali books through the 1850s, estimated that more than 50% of Bengali books published between 1844 and 1852 were religious, with Hindu works accounting for 36% of all titles.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% as religious works.¹⁰ Religious works dominated Tamil book publishing, and as I argue below, the emergence of print as the primary medium of Tamil Shaiva texts transformed relationships of authority, expanded the accessibility of texts, reshaped canons, and led to the emergence of new literary forms. The impact of print on Hindu traditions in the nineteenth century appears to have been no less transformative than it was of Christian traditions in Europe centuries earlier.

Reform Hindu leaders like Rammohan Roy and Dayananda Saraswati were instrumental in printing editions of Hindu canonical works. They focused their efforts primarily on the Vedas, publishing translations and commentaries that would expand the readership of these elite texts. Roy produced abridged translations of Vedic works in Hindi and Bengali, and distributed these for free.¹¹ He focused on Vedic texts in an effort to counter European critiques of “superstitious” Hindu myths and practices grounded in Puranic works. In a tract defending the freedom of the native press, Roy argued that the press plays a crucial role in the “mental improvement” of Indians, “either by translations into the popular dialect of this country from the learned languages of the East, or by the circulation of literary intelligence drawn from foreign publications.”¹² Saraswati’s editing and publishing efforts focused on the earliest strata of the Vedas, the Samhitas. He wrote prose commentaries on the Vedas in Hindi in order to make them accessible to educated readers. He acquired a press and established the “Vedic Press” in 1880 to publish his works.¹³ His printed editions were available to everyone, of any caste community, who had the money to purchase them, and his publishing activities drew attacks from orthodox Hindus. These efforts earned him the title of “Luther of India.”¹⁴ The reference to Luther was not entirely misleading, since Saraswati, like Roy, utilized print to reshape Hinduism in accord with certain Protestant ideals, including critiques of image worship, priestly mediation, and narratives that did not align with natural laws.¹⁵

Closer to Ramalinga’s Tamil Shaiva context, Kanchipuram Sabhapati Mudaliyar, Tamil pandit at the Pacchaiyappa School in Chennai, was the leading figure in editing and publishing impressive editions of the Shaiva canonical works such as the *Tēvāram*, *Tiruvācakam*, and the *Periya Purāṇam* in the 1850s and 1860s. For example, he edited and published the *Periya Purāṇam*, a twelfth-century hagiography of Shaiva saints, in 1859–62. This two-volume work, with commentary, was 802 pages long, in large octavo size, and available for three and a quarter rupees, a high price that would put the publication beyond the reach of all but the most keen readers.¹⁶ The title page of volume one states that it was published “for everyone’s easy reading.” The first of several benedictory compositions in praise of the book was written by Tandavaraya Swamigal, a pandit of the Tiruvadudurai monastery, indicating that this edition had the endorsement of this powerful Shaiva institution.¹⁷ In 1852, after a period of working on a translation of the Bible into Tamil with the Methodist missionary Percival, Arumuga Navalar rendered the *Periya Purāṇam* in prose form. In a preface to that work, he reported that he published his prose version so that “scholars and those with just a little bit of education will be able to read and understand the work easily, and that uneducated men and women will ask others to read it to them.”¹⁸ Navalar chose this canonical work because its conservative message aligned with his support of established caste and ritual practices.¹⁹

These reform publishing projects addressed two sorts of missionary critiques. First, by making canonical texts available to anyone who could afford to buy them, they countered criticism of the exclusionary practice of withholding scripture from lower-caste communities. Second, publishing in prose addressed critiques that Hindu works were deliberately obscure or even incomprehensible. Reformers therefore presented classical works in translation, with explanatory commentary, and in prose renditions, in pursuit of a “Protestant literalism” that would render their scriptures accessible to ordinary readers.²⁰ As one member of the Brahma Samaj put it in 1869, they used print to “emancipate minds from the yoke of a superstition.”²¹ In the hands of Hindu reformers, print was a tool to “rationalize” Hinduism, even if this rationalization was in line with Protestant notions of rationality. By utilizing the press in this way, reformers put into practice the colonial aspiration that the “native press” would help India become a “modern society.”²² Hindu reformers thus used the press as a crucial tool to transform Hinduism in line with European notions of modernity. These printing efforts of Hindu reformers amplified the authority of canonical scriptures, enabling them to present a Hindu corpus with an authority equal to the Bible or texts of other, emerging, world religions. If their attempts to extend the readership of classical works appear to be a sort of “democratization” of knowledge, it must also be kept in mind that these works often contained messages that supported caste privilege, ritual exclusivism, and social disparity. If we see this as a “modernization” of Hinduism, we also need to recognize that the criteria for this modernization were Protestant and European.

The specter of Protestant influence and interaction was therefore clear in the case of cosmopolitan Tamil publishing. However, print was also taken up outside of those elite settings, even if those non-elite contexts have not been considered closely by scholars. In her study of print culture in colonial Calcutta, Anindita Ghosh notes that scholarly studies of print in colonial India usually “focus on ‘high’ literature and perpetuate images of a Western-educated indigenous intelligentsia effecting modernization and reform.”²³ She points out that in the 1860s, the period when print commercialism exploded, the output of presses publishing popular literature easily surpassed that of the more “respectable” presses in Calcutta. Murdoch’s catalogue indicates that Tamils were also publishing inexpensive printed books for devotional purposes and to address the daily needs of their clientele. He lists among many such texts *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, octodecimo size, anonymous, and cost just three pie.²⁴ These cheap publications differed from canonical works in content, price, size, durability, and presumably prestige. Popular works were in pamphlet form, octodecimo, a few pages long, and inexpensive, while canonical works were invariably larger octavo printings, with lengths running into the hundreds of pages, and were relatively expensive, usually costing at least one rupee. The

audiences would likewise have varied, with the classics appealing to an educated public with the means to purchase these volumes.

Ghosh goes as far as to claim that publishing projects that aimed to reform, educate, and modernize Indian society were a failure, especially when compared to the commercial success of other sorts of literature. This is perhaps overstated, but I agree with her conclusion that the diversity of “Bengali readers as consumers of print engaged with it as subjects and agents, capable of affecting its impact, thickening the modernity narrative and exposing its internal tensions.”²⁵ That is, we must question a straightforward narrative that print served to modernize Hinduism along European lines. Print advanced other sorts of projects, such as the wide distribution of non-elite texts and messages in the popular literature on which Ghosh focused. I argue here that Ramalinga’s publication of *Tiruvārūṭṭā* presents yet another way that print was employed by Hindus. His work was in verse, not in prose, and it was an expensive three rupees, indicating that Ramalinga was neither pursuing a project of Protestant literalism nor an inexpensive work that would circulate widely in bazaars. Rather, he and his followers presented these poems as a new contribution to Shaiva canon, at a time when his poems and teachings were becoming controversial in Shaiva circles.

Ramalinga’s publication presents an instance of the use of print not only to spread messages more widely, but also as a technology for advancing claims for authority. Stuart Blackburn notes that from the time of publication of the Tamil classic *Tirukkural* 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.”²⁶ 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.”²⁷ 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 make its way into print, as editors, patrons, and publishers of Shaiva literature were redefining the Shaiva canon. Likewise, the publication of a new work with the specific features of the canonical works being published at the time signaled a claim for canonicity.²⁸ Print thereby enabled someone like Ramalinga, on the margins of Shaiva institutional power, to make a bid for the canonicity of his writings.

THE PRE-PUBLICATION HISTORY OF *TIRUVARUṬṬĀ*

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 three volumes with the title *Tiruvāruṭpā* [Poems of Divine Grace], which records his reflections on Shiva, devotion, contemporary religious practices, and social reform.²⁹ The first volume appeared in 1867, by which 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 *Tiruvāruṭpā* “as a reference system both for everyday activities and for giving shape to many larger vehicles of explanation.”³⁰ 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.”³¹ This is precisely how *Tiruvāruṭpā* 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, his followers ensured that its material form was identical to other canonical Shaiva works being published at the time.

One of Ramalinga’s primary devotees, Irakkam Irattina Mudaliyar, collected Ramalinga’s verses over a period of several years. We find details of these efforts in letters that Ramalinga wrote to Mudaliyar, which also provide a fascinating picture of the relationship between Ramalinga and one of his closest devotees.³² The dates of the letters range from 1858, just one year after Ramalinga’s departure from Chennai, to 1869, covering a period when Ramalinga was in Karunguli and 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, asks about friends in Chennai, makes financial requests, and reminds him to think often of Shiva. There are also several references to the collecting 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 *Tiruvāruṭpā*.

A. Balakrishna Pillai had access to these letters and made them public for the first time in his edition of *Tiruvāruṭpā*, 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 1860.³³ In the letter, Ramalinga instructs Mudaliyar to constantly meditate on the five syllables of Shiva (“nama civāya”) with a clear mind, citing verses from Auvaiyar’s *Nalvaḷi* 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 Mudaliyar would know the provenance of each.³⁴ The verse would appear later in the *Tiruvaruṭpā*, indicating that by this time Ramalinga was composing and keeping verses that he used to instruct his followers.³⁵

Ramalinga wrote down poems throughout his life. He wrote on palm leaves, paper, and in notebooks, his life bridging 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 in 1857.³⁶ 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 Tiruvotriyur, a temple just north of Chennai, was kept by his student Selvaraya Mudaliyar.³⁷ Later editions of *Tiruvaruṭpā* reproduced images of Ramalinga's handwritten verses. These verses show few signs of editing, indicating either that they were clean, final copies that Ramalinga wrote out after working through earlier versions, or that he was particularly skillful in composing verses orally before writing them down.³⁸ 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, and here he differed in a crucial way from Hindu reformers, who consistently emphasized the authority of the written word.

In a letter written on December 30, 1860, Ramalinga writes that he had "sung" 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 personally deliver them to Mudaliyar in Chennai.³⁹ 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, as his poems were dispersed among his closest students. For example, in this same letter Ramalinga tells Mudaliyar that Kumarasami Pillai and Shanmuga Pillai Reddiyar have about fifty of his poems.⁴⁰ 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:

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.⁴¹

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 have already been published, and he asks Irattina Mudaliyar not to be angry about this.⁴² Ramalinga's reference to earlier publication of his work is important, indicating that there were already some of his verses in print. His request that 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 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 *Tiruvāruṭpā*.

Velayuda Mudaliyar's "History of *Tiruvāruṭpā*," included at the end of the 1867 edition of *Tiruvāruṭpā*, gives more details of these earlier publications. Mudaliyar wrote that one of Ramalinga's followers by the name of Muttusami sung some of Ramalinga's verses in front of the image of Shiva at Tiruvotriyur. 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."⁴³ A few of Ramalinga's followers, including Velayuda Mudaliyar, Irattina Mudaliyar, and Selvaraya Mudaliyar, approached them and asked them to stop publishing those verses and even offered a little money. However, those "unnamed" people continued to publish them, 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.⁴⁴

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 *Tiruvāruṭpā*. 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 that is Common to All Scripture," including Pudukai 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.⁴⁵

Balakrishna Pillai, in his edition of *Tiruvārūṭpā* 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 1851.⁴⁶ These two poems are together forty-one verses of eight lines each, so it is likely they would have been published as a pamphlet. However, the poems' focus on Murugan and pre-1851 date does not accord with Velayuda Mudaliyar's narrative, which suggests that the illicitly published verses were addressed to Shiva at Tiruvotriyur and were published later than 1851. It may be that prior to the publication of *Tiruvārūṭpā* 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.

The concern of Ramalinga's followers was that these works contained mistakes, which Kandasami Pillai calls "accup piḷaikaḷ," printing errors, clarifying that these errors should not be attributed to Ramalinga himself. Just as important, they worried about the publication of his verses in small and likely cheap pamphlets. Such pamphlets would not have a long life span, and probably would have circulated at the bazaars and markets alongside other cheap publications. Murdoch notes that such 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."⁴⁷ 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 1872, in his history of Bengali literature, Ramgati Nyayaratna lamented 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."⁴⁸

Ramalinga's followers wanted to distinguish their publication from precisely those sorts of works. 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 from any earlier publications of Ramalinga's verses, benefiting 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, and indeed centuries.⁴⁹ Time has justified their approach: earlier, shorter collections have been lost and forgotten, while *Tiruvārūṭpā* continues to be held in high esteem and is widely available.

After his letter of December 30, 1860, Ramalinga did not explicitly mention the publication of his verses for nearly five years. In a letter that arrived in Chennai on November 19, 1865, he refers to a registered letter from Irattina Mudaliyar that he received on November 13. “The matter that you refer to in your letter is not of much importance to me. However, as is your wish, you and Selvaraya Mudaliyar may use only those verses which speak of Shiva in my heart.”⁵⁰ 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 shields him to some degree from the controversies that were to follow.⁵¹

By 1866, preparations for publication were in full swing. In a letter mailed from Chidambaram on February 14, 1866, Ramalinga appears to be more committed to the project, asking Irattina Mudaliyar to hold off on the publication of poems to Shiva at Tiruvotriyur, since he had composed a few additional poems that he would like to add. Similarly, in a letter written on March 28, 1866, Ramalinga tells Mudaliyar that since returning home to Karunguli, he has composed about two hundred poems 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 Mudaliyar apparently made: “I don’t give my permission that the work be brought out under the name ‘Ramalinga Swami’ [as author]. Why? Because it seems that this name is controversial, so it shouldn’t be used.”⁵² There appears to have been some controversy at this time in referring to Ramalinga as “Ramalinga Sami,” “Sami” or “Swami” being an appellation that designates spiritual authority and leadership. This controversy may have referred to Suppaiya Desikar’s publication of a volume of poems to Shiva, also in 1867, “with the permission of Ramalinga Swami, renowned for his wise speech.”⁵³ The eventual publication of *Tiruvāruṭpā* refers to Ramalinga as “Tiruvāruṭpirakāca Vallālār, Citamparam Irāmaliṅka Piḷḷai,” that is, “Ramalinga Pillai of Chidambaram, the generous one who is radiant with holy grace.”⁵⁴ 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 the publication of *Tiruvāruṭpā* sparked a controversy that was to continue for decades.

THE ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT OF *TIRUVARUṬPĀ*

Tiruvāruṭpā was published in large octavo format in February 1867 by Asiatic Press, 292 Lingee Chetty Street, Madras.⁵⁵ 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 *Tiruvāruṭpā*,” a composition of sixty-three

verses that eulogizes Ramalinga and his poems, 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 *Tiruvaruṭpā* could be purchased for three rupees directly from a few of Ramalinga's disciples, giving street addresses in Chennai; Vellore, about 105 kilometers west of Chennai; and Cuddalore, the largest town near Ramalinga's residence. Those who lived at some distance could order copies through the post.⁵⁶ The purchase of books by post in India was not unusual; Ulrike Stark similarly notes that the distribution of books by mail was common in North India by 1870.⁵⁷ The advertisement also states that Mayilai Cikkitti Chettiyar and Somasundara Chettiyar provided financial support for the publication.⁵⁸ The printing of Tamil classics 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 but rather was often an expensive enterprise.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ These are both part of the Shaiva devotional canon, esteemed company for *Tiruvaruṭpā*. Given the high price, it is doubtful that *Tiruvaruṭpā* 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, 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 access to religious authority, it did so not in its capability for efficient reproduction, but because it was the new, primary medium through which editors and authors advanced claims to textual authority.

At the bottom of the title page, in English, are the words "Registered Copyright." 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."⁶¹ It is unlikely that *Tiruvaruṭpā* 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.⁶² However, Murdoch noted in 1865 that "a considerable 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

திருச்சிற்றம்பலம்.

திருவருட்பிரகாசவள்ளலாரொன்றும்

சிதம்பரம்

இராமலிங்கபிள்ளை

அவர்கள்

திருவாய்மலர்நத்ருளிய

திருவருட்பா

முதற்புத்தகம்.

இஃது

சமரசவேதசன்மார்க்க சங்கத்தை யபிமானித்து

புதுவை-வேலுமுதலியார்

சிவநந்தபுரம்-செல்வராயமுதலியார்

இறுக்கம்-இரத்தினமுதலியார்

லெண்டிகோளின் படி.

இவ்வாசிரியர்மாணக்கரும்

சை சமரசவேதசன்மார்க்கசங்க

சித்வான்களிலொருவருமாகிய

தொழுஷர்-வேலாயுதமுதலியாரால்

அச்சிற்பதிப்பிக்கப்பட்டது.

கலியுகாதி(ஹ) சகசுஅ-ல்-நிகழும் - அகூய(ஹ)-மகரரவி.

ASIATIC PRESS, 292, LINGEE CHETTY STREET, MADRAS.

February 1867.

Registered Copy-right.



FIGURE 2. Title page of *Tiruvaruṭpā*, 1867. Credit: Photograph by author.

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.⁶³ Murdoch wrote that publishers told him that they could register books with the government for a fee of two rupees and suggested that some books may claim to be registered without being so.⁶⁴ Velayuda Mudaliyar wrote that *Tiruvārūṭpā* was being published in a way that “the government will know,” perhaps referring to some form of official registration.⁶⁵ With the competition over the publication of Ramalinga’s verses, and accusations of theft and unauthorized publication, labeling 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 Tolvuvur 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. He was therefore a more cosmopolitan figure than Ramalinga, later even becoming a Theosophist.⁶⁶ 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 prefaces in verse or prose.⁶⁷ Blackburn notes that pandits, increasingly associated with schools and colleges modeled on British institutions, had a hand in the publication of most of the approximately two hundred Tamil works published in Chennai in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ For example, *Tēvāram* and *Periya Purāṇam*, published just prior to *Tiruvārūṭpā*, were edited by Kanchi Sabhapati Mudaliyar.⁶⁹

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.”⁷⁰ 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 association with such powerful institutions, prompted Damodaram Pillai to call this period of Tamil literary history “The Age of Mutts [Monasteries].”⁷¹ Mudaliyar sought to establish Ramalinga’s scholarly credentials by describing the Society of the True Path as a source of institutional prestige, albeit one that clearly stood apart from the established centers of Shaiva institutional power.



FIGURE 3. Velayuda Mudaliyar. Credit: Photograph by author.

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 “Tirumuṛai,” the same term used to refer to the Shaiva canonical corpus.⁷² He explains the rationale for this division in his “History of *Tiruvārūṭpā*.”

Tiruvārūṭpā is divided into six distinct sections (*muṛai*), 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 (*aṛucamayam*), 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*).⁷³

I have translated “muṛai” here as “section,” which is roughly consistent with its use in the Shaiva *Tirumuṛai* canon, where it refers to the canon as a whole, and also to each of its twelve individual parts (e.g., the eleventh *Tirumuṛai*). *Tirumuṛai* also has the sense of a holy path or tradition, drawing on the broader meaning of “muṛai” as path or way.⁷⁴ 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 *Tiruvārūṭpā* illuminates the paths taught in the six established religious traditions, 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, Mudaliyar situates *Tiruvārūṭpā* within Shaivism by using the term “Tirumuṛai” to link *Tiruvārūṭpā* to the established Shaiva corpus.

One concern for the publication was the name for Ramalinga that the work would carry. We have seen that Ramalinga objected to the use of Ramalinga Swami, but it is not clear that the name that did appear on the title page, “Ramalinga Pillai of Chidambaram, the generous one who is radiant with holy grace,” was much of a gesture in the direction of humility.⁷⁵ While Ramalinga clearly had some input into such details, it was probably Velayuda Mudaliyar who gave Ramalinga this title.⁷⁶ 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, *Tiruvārūṭpā, 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 *Tiruvārūṭpā*.”

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 “*Aruṭpā*,” 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 *Aruṭpā* as speech with divine benevolence. The words of *Aruṭpā* are imbued with grace, grace that creates auspiciousness and brings clarity to clouded minds like mine.⁷⁷

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 pointed out later, the term *aruṭpā* sometimes referred to the most revered Shaiva literary works.⁷⁸ Navalar, and presumably others, took the title as a claim by Ramalinga that his writings were equal to those Shaiva classics.

Two *cirappu pāyiram*, or celebratory verses, were included in the volume.⁷⁹ The first was written by Chidambara Swamigal, of the Madurai Tirugnanasambanda Swamigal Monastery, "the renowned 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 *Tiruvaruṭpā*." "Revere the greatness and dignity of the path [*muṛai*] of the fine *Aruṭpā* 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 *Tiruvaruṭpā* reveal a *muṛai*, a path or tradition. The Shaiva path was often written of as the Shaiva *muṛai*, so the phrase "Aruṭpā muṛai" suggests a distinct, and novel, religious path embodied in *Tiruvaruṭpā*.⁸⁰ His use of *muṛai* here also invokes the *Tirumuṛai*, the Shaiva canon.

The mention of a lamp's flame fueled 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.⁸¹ Ramalinga, it seems, always had a lamp burning near him through 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 through 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 burned through the night. The story of the miraculous event spread quickly among Ramalinga's followers as a sign of his divine character.⁸² Ramalinga composed a verse recounting this event, which appears in the 1867 publication.⁸³

Such stories of miraculous events abound in literature on Ramalinga's life and were widely recognized when he was alive.⁸⁴ His reputation as a thaumaturge caught the attention of the urban elite, with the July 5, 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."⁸⁵ To his followers, Ramalinga was not only a poet whose words were filled with Shiva's grace, but he was 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 Purānam*, 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 Manikkavacakar.⁸⁶ Stories of Ramalinga's extraordinary abilities helped legitimate his place among the pantheon of Shaiva saints.

The other celebratory verse, 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, Ramalinga? The four Vedas, or the six *Mūrais* [of *Tiruvaruṭpā*]? In these ways you reapportioned yourself, ascetic [Shiva] who destroys illusion.⁸⁷

In addition to claiming the divinity of Ramalinga, Sundaram Pillai also equates *Tiruvaruṭpā* with the Vedas, asserting the canonical status of Ramalinga's writings. The two claims are related, as 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 these verses, but rather emphasized his sinful nature and Shiva's grace in granting him access and wisdom. However, he did give his permission for the publication of these benedictory verses in a letter to Pudukkottai Velu Mudaliyar. "The preface of our Sundaram Pillai is good. Go ahead and publish it. The preface of our Chidambaram Swamikal is also good, so publish that one too."⁸⁸

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 *Tiruvāruṭpā* run to more than four hundred 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 stressing his feelings of unworthiness. I discuss at length the content of the volume in the next chapter, so here a few verses that give the flavor of the work will suffice. First is a brief prefatory verse.⁸⁹ "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."⁹⁰ The first *Tirumuṟai* begins after this verse with a poem titled "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."⁹¹ Given that the editor Velayuda 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.⁹² Many verses are highly personal, recounting specific experiences of devotion and interaction with Shiva, lauding particular temples where he worshiped, especially Tiruvotriyur and Chidambaram, and lamenting his moral lapses and unworthiness. For example, in a poem titled "Aruḷiyal Viṇāval" (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?"⁹³

Ramalinga frequently recalls his encounters with Shiva throughout his life, beginning when he was a young child. In his poem "Tiruvāruṇmuṟaiyīṭu" (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?"⁹⁴ 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 even among 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."⁹⁵

Ramalinga's poetry was clearly influenced by the themes and content of Shaiva bhakti literature, especially the writings of the *nālvar*, the four most important poet-saints of Tamil Shaivism, and he even wrote poems addressed to these four.⁹⁶ In the 1867 verses, Ramalinga drew inspiration from the Shaiva literary past for content or genre, not from cosmopolitan or Western influences.⁹⁷ The poems are highly conventional, consisting of heart-felt 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 Shaivism. Ramalinga uses a range of meters and forms typical of classical Tamil literature and common in the *Tēvāram*, such as *nēricai*, *viruttam*, and *patikam*.⁹⁸ All poems except those to the *nālvar* focus on the worship of Shiva. We have seen that Ramalinga's letter of November 19, 1865, instructed Irattina Mudaliyar that "you and Selvaraya Mudaliyar may use only those verses which speak of Shiva in my heart."⁹⁹ The letter indicates 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 *Tirumuṟai*.¹⁰⁰ 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, Murugaṅ has so little place."¹⁰¹ Whatever the reason for Ramalinga's exclusion of verses to Murugan, the effect was to bring *Tiruvaruṭpā* more in line with the *Tēvāram* hymns. This conventional character of *Tiruvaruṭpā* 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 too much from the teachings of the established Shaiva canon. 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.¹⁰² These controversial verses only appeared in print in 1885 in the sixth *Tirumuṟai*, published in a third installment of *Tiruvaruṭpā* without the participation of Velayuda Mudaliyar or others who worked on the

publication of the first five *Tirumuṟai*.¹⁰³ Velayuda Mudaliyar, in his “*Tiruvāruṭpā Varalāru*,” indicated that in 1867 he already had in his possession poems that would be included in the sixth *Tirumuṟai*, and he explicitly stated that it was not yet time to publish these.¹⁰⁴ Subsequent to the publication of those polemical verses, Ramalinga’s oeuvre has most often been compared to the works of the Tamil *śiddhas*, the decidedly unorthodox, anti-establishment Shaiva poets whose works are not included in the Shaiva canon.¹⁰⁵ 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 *Tiruvāruṭpā*’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 *Tiruvāruṭpā* as an expensive volume highlights that the transformative power of print lay not only in being a cheap, efficient medium of reproduction. It 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 anyone who had the money to utilize it, provided a tool for religious groups on the margins of established religious centers 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.

If the content and literary style of the first volume of *Tiruvāruṭpā* was largely conventional, its publication was not. In contrast to contemporaneous publications of canonical Shaiva literature, *Tiruvāruṭpā* was produced by a group of individuals working outside traditional centers 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 skillful 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 rivaling that of the Shaiva devotional corpus, a work that would consolidate the legacy of Ramalinga. *Tiruvāruṭpā* came to occupy the center 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 composing 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 “Neñcarivuruttal,” which fills just fewer than fifty 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 markets and bazaars. Ramalinga and his followers certainly would not have rejected a wide readership, but they were willing to accept a reduced audience in order to present the work as a revered canonical work.

Was Ramalinga’s use of print somehow less modern than that of Hindu reformers? It is true that he did not directly engage missionaries or other Europeans through print as did Hindu reformers. His primary world of reference was that of Shaiva literary culture. However, this culture itself was not “traditional” as opposed to “modern,” as print, among other things, was helping to shape new notions of Shaiva canonicity. Neither Shaivism nor Ramalinga were fixed in a traditional past. Ramalinga and his followers demonstrated an awareness of the present and the new possibilities that it offered. They employed print as a new technology in a bid to transform established relationships of authority in Shaivism. They deftly exploited new ways of thinking about canon, and it was verse, not prose, that allowed them to advance their claims. If, in the hands of reformers, print was a tool to expand the audience for conservative messages of a fixed canon, Ramalinga employed print in the opposite way, to bring a message of ritual accessibility and equality into the Shaiva canon. The effect was that Ramalinga’s egalitarian message acquired an authority that would not have been possible without the availability of print. We cannot oppose a “traditional” Ramalinga to “modern” Hindu reformers, when those “modern” reformers sought authority in elite texts from the past, while Ramalinga viewed the present as a time with the potential to advance new claims to truth, revelation, and authority. Ramalinga’s use of print was as transformative, challenging, and “modern” as were reform efforts.