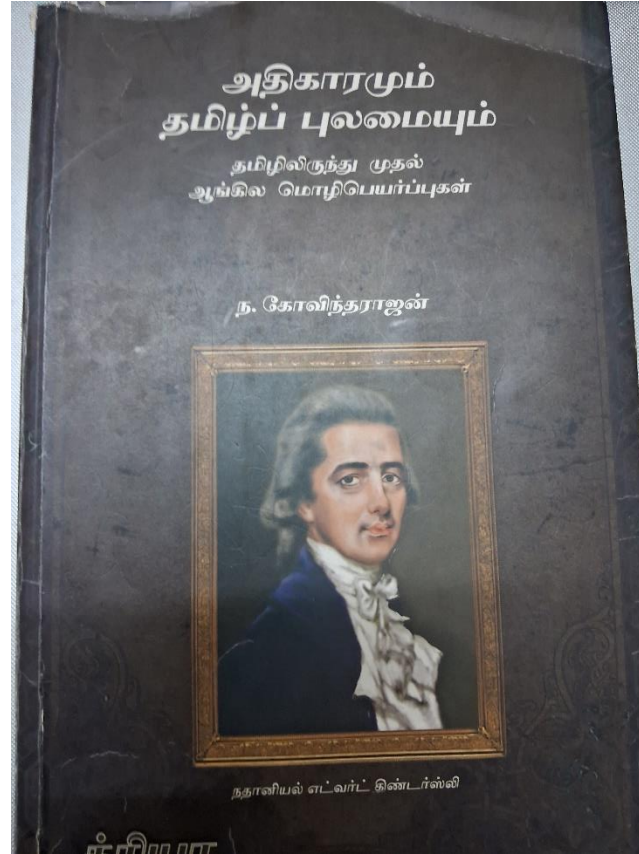


Book Review:

Adhikaramum Tamil Pulamaiyum by N. Govindarajan

Dr. S. Sridevi

Professor of English and Principal
Chevalier T. Thomas Elizabeth College for Women
Chennai 600011, Tamil Nadu, India
sridevisaral@gmail.com



Adhikaramum Tamil Pulamaiyum by N. Govindarajan has been published in February 2016 by Cre-A publishers, Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai, Tamilnadu. It introduces the reader to the

massive work done by the British officials by writing down the Indian legal system and culture, as they understood from their Persian and Sanskrit texts. Govindarajan has written the life story of Kindersley, analyses the selected translations Kindersely has done on *Thirukkural* and Nala story. There is an extensive discussion on the way languages were operated and manipulated by the British and a little bit of disappointment that Tamil texts were not studied by British officials in detail in that period, hinting at the partial view of Orientalism that perceived only a part of India and its religions.

Historical research on contemporary India cannot be undertaken without delving into the mercantile, political, legal and cultural interventions by East India Company. Nathaniel Edward Kindersley (1763 – 1831) was an English civil service officer to the Company, known for being the first translator of selected verses of Thirukkural into English in 1794. One of the Kural verses was quoted in a novel published in England in 1796: *Translations of the Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* by Elizabeth Hamilton (1756-1819). This quotation was taken from *Specimens of Hindoo Literature* written by Kindersley in 1794, wrote Hamilton.

Kindersley joined East India Company in 1779; he was appointed as the collector of South Arcot in 1792; his book had translations of a few chapters from Thirukkural and the story of Nalan, the King. Govindarajan in his book questions why there have been no discussions on the contribution of Kindersely in society. Scholars in administration began translating Indian texts into English during the eighteenth century, and Kindersley's was also published at that period, and still it did not become a major subject for mainstream arguments and discussions. Most of the discussions on India were dealing with languages like Persian and Sanskrit only, and Tamil did not become a focal point of discussions.

The British emphasized on writing everything they encountered in India in the form of letters, reports, translations of texts and books. They created a written world. Writing helped East India Company to define itself and also define the land it was trading with. The company took all efforts to understand India and its officers used Persian and Sanskrit texts for the purpose. Hence, Kindersley's translation become significant as it was the only one that brought out south

Indian culture to the world map initially. The eighteenth century played a major role in intervening with India through its translations of Indian texts.

What was the course of British translations of Indian texts in British India? What were the contributions of Kindersely and Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819) who was in the Madras Presidency as an officer? How did a British officer choose a text for translation? What were the criteria?

In the process of choosing a text, the first criterion was locating a scholar who knew the regional language in a proficient manner. Secondly, the British official had to negotiate with him, initiating the project of translation as it was he who had to take up the work and involve the expert from the regional land who knew the text thoroughly with a command of the language with its nuances and grammar. During such collaborations the translator's respect for the subject expert will surely increase gradually. He starts talking about the greatness of the subject expert and his language command and the language itself and the meaning of the text. That is, the British officials developed a lot of respect of Persian and Sanskrit in the processes involved in translating these texts into English. They carried this respect back to their European friends and family. Selection of texts and connecting with the culture in the texts being translated are two processes that were involved in eighteenth century translations. This was a kind of collaboration.

In selection of texts, which language was opted by the translator? When we examine this aspect of the eighteenth century textual negotiations between Britain and India, we realize that Kindersley chose a very different path completely. Other officials were accepting and acknowledging one particular language as the main and authorized language of India; Kindersley took another language and its literature to the centre of academic discussions, though it did not gain momentum. If we analyse this nodal point, we would be able to locate the position he had in translations. He differed from the rest of Europeans in his choice of selection of a different language and texts.

Europeans chose Persian and Sanskrit scholars as subject experts to help in the process of translations. They rejected other works which did not involve similar processes. Alexander Dow,

another Orientalist and army officer in the East India Company who wrote *History of Hindostan* claimed that his book was better written, as he had interviewed and got authentic information from a Hindu who held an important position in his office. We have to remember that Dow came to India before William Jones. Dow recommended that such knowledge must be received only from Persian and Sanskrit scholars and not from other sections of the society. Orientalism relied only on Persian and Sanskrit scholarship.

William Jones was a scholar who knew many languages esp. Persian; still he chose Sanskrit texts for translation, though he did not know the language. The Sanskrit scholars did not want to teach him the language, as he was a foreigner, a *milecha*, an inferior. Anyway, he learnt Sanskrit in just three years from pundits. He fell in love with Sanskrit and its literature and myths. His translation of *Bhagavad Gita* acknowledged that it was translated from an ancient language. Jones rejected the translation of *Ramayana* by the Italian scholar Marco della Tomba (1726-1803), as inferior because it was translated from the Hindi version written by Tulsidas. Lord Wellesley (1760-1842) started a college in 1800 that taught Sanskrit, Persian, Marathi, Kannada, Bengali and Telugu, so that East India Company officials can master major Indian languages. It is at this point Kindersley decided to translate Tamil texts into English.

Govindarajan is very particular that we understand the political and linguistic background in which Kindersley chose to translate a Tamil text. His selection and collaboration processes deviated from the practices of mainstream Orientalism. Tamil texts emphasized on human values; Sanskrit texts taught monarchic legal systems. One has to investigate into the reasons for the popularity *Sakuntalam* gained in Europe, he argues. Kindersley knew Persian; in spite of this, he selected *Thirukkural* verses to be translated into English. He has identified *Thirukkural* as a secular text, value based in content. Similarly, instead of working on the scholarly preferred *Sakuntalam*, he has selected the local legend of the story of Nalan to be translated into English.

Govindarajan points out sadly that Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819), who wrote a detailed commentary on *Thirukkural*, did not mention Kindersley. Even Robert Caldwell (1814-1891) had not discussed Kindersley in detail except in his preface. Ellis came to Madras

Presidency in 1798, four years after the publication of Kindersley's book in 1794. Kindersley returned to England only in 1800. Govindarajan seeks for extensive research to find out the reasons for the rejection of Kindersley by Ellis.

Why did Orientalism miss out on Tamil texts? *Thirukkural* was conceived to be a Jain text and perhaps, Europeans were not so familiar with Jainism, as they were with Islam and Brahminism, Govindarajan suggests. Jains had reading sessions for people that were inclusive in nature, and both educated and uneducated people listened to reading sessions, Govindarajan comments. The Jain tradition integrated oral and written traditions, and Europeans were more comfortable with written traditions.

There is a quest in Govindarajan that re-locates the way we understand Orientalism which reflected European ideologies of writing on Indian culture, and selected works that shared similarity in processes. Just as Jones began a system of thought in the north, Ellis begins a new system of thought in the south. Alexander Duncan Campbell who wrote the grammar for Telugu has argued that the Dravidian languages have common features. Ellis argued how Dravidian languages were different from Sanskrit-Latin-Greek model. William Jones translated only a commentary of *Manusmriti*; Ellis translated *Thirukkural* directly, mastering Tamil thoroughly, in a superior manner than Kindersley who could not tackle the verse format of the couplet. The *Thirukkural* translation by Ellis was published in 1819. It did not have a preface. As a translation with a sound grasp of the couplet form and with a critical commentary mentioning other texts, Ellis' work is much superior to the work of Jones, and it is Ellis who emerged as a Tamil pundit, says Charles Gower.

Govindarajan's book plays a very important role in understanding Dravidian ideologies and the identity construction of the Deccan in India. The questions he has put forward have to be taken up by researchers who are proficient in both Tamil and English.

=====