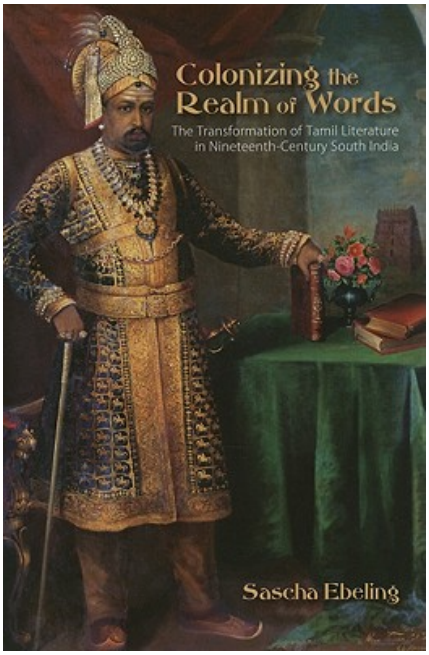
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Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India



About the Book

Details the transformation of Tamil literary culture that came with colonialism and the encounter with Western modernity.

A true tour de force, this book documents the transformation of one Indian literature, Tamil, under the impact of colonialism and Western modernity. While Tamil is a living language, it is also India's second oldest classical language next to Sanskrit, and has a literary history that goes back over two thousand years. On the basis of extensive archival research, Sascha Ebeling tackles a host of issues pertinent to Tamil elite literary production and consumption during the nineteenth century. These include the functioning and decline of traditional systems in which poet-scholars were patronized by religious institutions, landowners, and local kings; the anatomy of changes in textual practices, genres, styles, poetics, themes, tastes, and audiences; and the role of literature in the politics of social reform, gender, and incipient nationalism. The work concludes with a discussion of the most striking literary development of the time—the emergence of the Tamil novel.

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About the Author

Sascha Ebeling is Assistant Professor of South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago.

Review

"*Colonizing the Realm of Words* is a major contribution to the study of Tamil literature … The book gives a wonderful, detailed picture of the biographies, writings and contexts of some of the most important authors in Tamil of the nineteenth century." — *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception*

"…[Ebeling] provides a detailed philological study of the Tamil texts, especially the poetics of Minatcicundaram Pillai and the Pulavars and the emergence of the Tamil novel. The transliterated Tamil texts following the epilogue make this book valuable indeed." — *CHOICE*

"This is a pathbreaking study of textual materials that have not been examined before in an English-language publication. It fills a major gap in our understanding of nineteenth-century literary culture in South India specifically and in India generally." —Srilata Raman, author of *Self-Surrender* (Prapatti)*to God in ?r?vai??avism: Tamil Cats and Sanskrit Monkeys*

"This book is impeccably grounded in philological expertise, and the author displays mastery of the language and the complex texts that he discusses. The entire book is conceived with great elegance." — Indira Viswanathan Peterson, coeditor of *Tamil Geographies: Cultural Constructions of Space and Place in South India*

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