Chapter 4

AUTHORS, PUBLISHERS AND PRINTERS

Our discussion of Tamil publishing thus far has centred on the material basis of literary production in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Forms of patronage and their subsequent decline, and the rise of the new genre, the novel, which helped in decisively cutting off patronage from publishing, with a traumatic transition in between the two phases, received our attention in the first three chapters. Now, we turn to the emergence of the categories/ agencies of the author and the publisher. It will be argued that these two agencies were new, and that they continued to be nebulous categories even in the post-transition period. This will be followed by a section on printers.

4.1 The Authors

In Chapter I we considered two kinds of literary producers: those who wrote thala puranams and other genres of traditional literature, and the new breed of scholar-editors who published texts from palm-leaf manuscripts. Apart from these literary producers, there were others, mostly teachers, who put together books for educational purposes: "grammatical primers and glossaries, annotated editions of readers, exercise books, keys and cram books for examinations." ¹

¹ Review and Analysis of books registered during 1892 prepared by the Registrar of Books, G.O.No. 184-5, Educational, 10 March 1893.
The following remark of U.V. Swaminatha Iyer throws light on the nature of this profitable vocation of textbook writing and publishing:

In those days, prescribing textbooks was a strange matter. Some part of a text that was only known by name would be prescribed. Somebody would fish out the manuscript from palm leaves and print it as it is. Tamil teachers would teach it in a chaotic fashion making whatever sense, or no sense, of the book.²

A number of Tamil teachers and scholars indulged in this business. Vai. Mu. Sadagoparamanujachariar was a leading author-publisher in this field. His Nanool went into a number of editions and probably sold thousands of copies. Sodasavadhanam Subbaraya Chettiar, a student of Meenatchisundaram Pillai, T.T. Kanakasundaram Pillai, Mu.Ra. Kandasamy Kavirayar and Pinnathoor Narayanasamy Iyer were some of the more prominent Tamil scholars in this category. The textbooks were of a generally poor standard, and as T.T. Kanakasundaram Pillai confessed about his notes for the matriculation examinations. "... as I wrote this with an urgency to be the first, before others get their Notes out ... there must be a lot of flaws".³

The sale of such textbooks was largely dependent on

contacts, and as U.V. Swaminatha Iyer remarks, Subbaraya Chettiar would often write to him and Vidwan Thiyagarasa Chettiar to recommend his books to their students. In fact, Swaminatha Iyer was inundated with such letters and specimen copies of textbooks.

These publications were generally profitable, involving little labour and quick turnover. As a result, "competition among printers and publishers of textbooks for schools [was] generally keen." It is said that even Meenatchisundaram Pillai was approached on many occasions with offers to get involved in this business. C.W. Damodaram Pillai ruefully commented that textbook writers and publishers made quick money, while he had lost a fortune in his efforts to publish the classics.

Together with traditional versifiers and scholar-editors, of whom we wrote at length in Chapter 1, these textbook publishers may be termed 'authors', but only in a very rudimentary sense in that they performed the authorial function of putting together a manuscript for publication: the author as a separate agency being the product of a modern sensibility and capitalist society was yet to emerge. Gnanabhanu was only making this distinction clear, when it

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6 Review and Analysis of books registered in 1896, G.O.No. 133-4, Educational, 5 March 1897.
8 Kalithogai, Madras, 1887, Preface.
condemned traditional scholars for reprinting old texts without suitable critical apparatus and appendixes as in the west. 9

Thus, these authors were not 'authors' in the modern sense of the word, the 'creators' of a 'original' text with ownership title to it which could be traded as a commodity. Coupled with this absence, publishing had also not emerged as a specialized activity. Consequently, the two acts, viz., producing the text and publishing it, were carried on by the same person even during the transitional phase as in the age of patronage.

The emergence of the institution of publisher/publishing house is considered in a subsequent section (4.2); for now, our attention in this section is focused on the author. During the age of patronage and even during the transition, the published texts took precedence over the 'author'. A number of long and detailed advertisements in contemporary journals merely list titles of the books and rarely do they identify the authors. 10 It was the rise of new genres like the novel, literary criticism, essays and the short story which conferred on the literary producer, the authority of an author.

In the transitional phase too, the author continued to function as a publisher. In 2.1, we saw that Subramaniya Bharati published most of his books, until this function was taken over by one of his close friends and admirers, though not on strict business lines. All through his long and productive career, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer

9 Gnanabhanu, February 1916.
10 See, for instance, advertisements in Vivekabodhini, December 1908; September 1916; Lakshmi, September 1923, and Sep. 1926; Ananda Bodhini, January 1917.
published books on his own. Only late in his life, did his son S. Kaliyanarama Iyer help him in discharging this function. A. Madhaviah, the early novelist, through his Author's Press and Publishing House, published his novels, short stories, translations and essays on his own. The case of Maraimalai Adigal and Thiru. Vi. Kaliyanasundara Mudaliar offer the most elaborate instances of the phenomenon of author-publishers in the late-transitional period and its immediate aftermath.

Even by 1902, Maraimalai Adigal, then a 26-year-old Tamil pandit at the Madras Christian College, established a printing press at a cost of Rs. 1,000, mainly to publish his books and the monthly review, the JnanaSagaram. The press, named after his mentor Somasundara Nayagar, folded up soon. In another ten years time, he was itching to open another press to streamline his publishing activities. In 1915, he wrote to V. Thiruvarangam Pillai, who was later to promote the Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society Ltd., that "a printing office is sorely needed to print all my works promptly for the public use." For the most part of his active life, Maraimalai Adigal published, and sometimes even physically printed, most of his numerous works.

Thiru. Vi. Ka., also published all his books himself, and they were even printed in his own press, the Sadhu Achukkanoodam, established with contributions from the Madras working class. He

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12 See the announcement in JnanaSagaram, 1 (6), 1905; also see Maraimalai Adigal's letter to U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, dated 13 June 1902, U.V.S. Papers and the entry dated 19-21 May 1902 in his diaries (henceforth MAD).
13 MAD, dated 17 September 1915.
was ably assisted by his brother Thiru. Vi. Ulaganatha Mudaliar in his publishing activities. Murugavel Puthagasalai, the name by which his ‘publishing house’ was known, was a separate entity only in name and it published only his books. Likewise, all of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai’s books were published by himself. He too seems to have toyed with the idea of establishing his own printing press.  

But, by the 1920s, with the considerable widening of the publishing sphere, and the consequent emergence of a modicum of specialization, the institution of author-publisher came under much stress. Maraimalai Adigal was to grumble:

By doing singly the works of an author, printer, publisher, proof-reader, foreman, clerk, steward, etc., I am left little time for dining, sleeping, resting and exercising.

Despite his colossal reputation, Maraimalai Adigal found the going difficult, and shifted his press from Pallavaram to Madras, under the supervision of his trusted manager, A. Kanagarayar. As even this proved difficult, he sold off his press some years before his death. Or, as another author-publisher confessed in a letter to an emerging publishing house:

I am not able to fix the rate of commission ... as I am

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15 MAD, 5 January 1934.
16 Maraimalai Adigal’s letter to A. Kanagarayar, dated 19 April 1933. Also MAD, 8 February 1933.
17 MAD, 5 & 7 July 1943.
absolutely new to this kind of business. You may take the usual rate of commission ...

Clearly, authors were finding it increasingly difficult to manage the many specialized functions of publishing along with writing.

By 1929, Amirthaguna Bodhini was commenting that authors who publish their own books spent the amounts received as and when copies are sold on household expenses, and were consequently left with little working capital to continue with publishing.

The 1920s then saw the emergence of publishers and publishing houses who specialized in the function of publishing (see 4.2). The assertion of Amirthaguna Bodhini that "Those who publish others books are called prachurakarthars or publishers", might not seem earth-shaking now, but must have meant something in 1932. Here we shall limit ourselves to the implications that this emergence of publishers had for authors.

With the erosion of the institution of author-publishers, the author had now to turn to the publisher for converting his manuscript into a book and turn it into a commodity in the market. In return for the loss of his control over the book, the author was to be given monetary compensation. But, as it turned out, the author was more often than not in a subordinate position vis-a-vis the publishers.

19 Amirthaguna Bodhini, 16 August 1929.
20 Ibid., 16 June 1932. Interestingly, the English word 'Publisher' has been transliterated into Tamil.
Even reputed scholars had to more or less cringe before publishers for getting their manuscripts accepted, not to speak of receiving royalties. Even a much-respected scholar like N.M. Venkatasami Nattar had to write in the following terms to his publishers, the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society Ltd., (henceforth Kazhagam, as it is commonly referred to): "... I know that my books do not sell well. I realize that even this meagre sale is the result of your efforts". 21

Even for the quick-selling panchangam, its author, E.M. Subramania Pillai had to keep arguing his case for enhanced and adequate royalty. 22 In another letter, he complained that he was being paid only Rs. 50 while other publishers were offering up to Rs. 300 or even Rs. 400. 23 Even when the Kazhagam reproduced details from the panchangam in its Thirukkural Diary, thereby cutting into the sale of the panchangam, E.M. Subramania Pillai could only grumble and not demand more remuneration. 24 The author was in such a disadvantageous position that the publisher could even make the implausible claim that a ready-seller like the panchangam 25 was making a loss as substantial amounts had to be spent on promotional

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23 Letter dated 18 September 1939, Ibid.
24 Letter from E.M. Subramania Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 22 October 1937, Ibid.
25 A kind of almanac or ephemeris.
expenditure and allowing discounts to book-sellers.  

Apart from the fact that royalties were seldom paid promptly or in full, the actual royalties were also very low. Often, it was calculated as a certain sum per printed forme, making a mockery of the authors' efforts. For instance, N.M. Venkatasamy Nattar was offered as little as Rs. 8 per forme for his acclaimed commentary of Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam. Interestingly, he had expected only Rs. 10 - an indication of the harsh reality that authors faced. Another letter of his poignantly describes his position.

... It is not proper to compare the commentaries of the Keelkanakku works [late-classical didactic texts] with other commentaries. If my intention was to make money by writing anything, I could have written any number of books. To elaborate on the nature of my undertaking and the labour it demands, and to ask for specific amounts as remuneration is not in my nature.

Authors had often to demand statements of accounts and publishers rarely obliged promptly. The following letter from

27 N.M. Venkatasami Nattar to Kazhagam, dated 21 September 1925, N.M. Venkatasami Nattar Papers.
28 N.M. Venkatasami Nattar to Kazhagam, dated 8 August 1926, Ibid.
29 Letter to Kazhagam, dated 8 August 1926, Ibid. For similar letters by Avvai S. Duraiswamy Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 3 April 1943, 22 December 1943, 29 March 1944, 4 April 1944 and 7 October 1944. See Avvai Duraisamy Pillai Papers.
30 See K. Subramania Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 20 August 1932.
31 See letters of V.P. Subramania Mudaliar to Kazhagam, dated 8 December 1920, 30 August 1941; 18 October 1940; 19 October 1939; 9 November 1940 and 18 December 1940, V.P. Subramania Mudaliar Papers.
V.P. Subramania Mudaliar reveals the exasperation of an author at the indifference of a publisher:

... I've asked you on a number of occasions for a statement of accounts. I waited for a few weeks after sending a letter through G. Subramania Pillai, the vakil from Vannarapettai, but to no avail. Please send the statement at the earliest. If you can not send it immediately, at least let me know when it may be possible to do so.

Please bear with me for repeatedly troubling you in this regard.32

By the 1930s, a widely prevalent impression was that authors always ended up getting a raw deal in their transactions with publishers.33

In this state of affairs, if authors were quick to take offence, it invariably led to the breaking down of the relationship, as for instance, happened in the case of the publication of Thiruvachaga Virivurai. Maraimalai Adigal, the author and V. Thiruvarangam Pillai, the publisher, disagreed over the terms and, as a result, the book was never published in full.34 Even the well-meaning efforts of S. Satchidanandam Pillai, who was keen on ensuring the publication

32 Letter to Kazhagam, dated 9 November 1940, ibid.
33 Amirthaguna Bodhini, 16 June 1932.
34 MAD, dated 20, 23 & 26 February 1920.
of Maraimalai Adigal's erudite commentary, failed.³⁵

Breach of contract in such instances was little more than a phrase, as authors and publishers rarely ever entered into formal agreements. In the course of research for this thesis, we were able to locate only a few written contracts in the archives of various publishing houses. Some contracts were located at the Christian Literature Society, which is explained by the nature of its organization and its accountability to the Church.³⁶ Even the phenomenally well-preserved South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society (Kazhagam) Archive does not possess any contracts signed with authors, indicating that they were usually unwritten agreements.

Without legal recourse for breach of contract, the breaking down of relationship between authors and publishers was marked by much acrimony and bad blood. On one such occasion, E.M. Gopalakrishna Konar, a leading publisher from Madurai, abused Tamil scholar-authors and called them unreliable and dishonest.

³⁵ Letter to V. Thiruvarangam Pillai dated 8 April 1921, S. Satchidanandam Pillai Papers.

The cordial relationship that existed between V. Saminatha Sarma and his publisher Aru. Chockalingam was indeed rare. For a moving account of the association between the two written by Aru. Chockalingam, see V. Saminatha Sarma, Aval Pirivu, Madras & Pudukkottai, 1957, Appendix.

³⁶ See, for instance, the contracts signed by the Christian Literature Society with J.T. Rajanayagam, author of 'Theory and Project Method in Tamil', dated 27 June 1930, and with T.A. Rajaruthnam Pillai, for 'Stories from Indian History in Tamil', dated 14 October 1924. Christian Literature Society Archive.
persons who were prone to betray.\textsuperscript{37}

Possibly, the only class of authors who commanded some respect from publishers were authors of textbooks. Textbooks sold fairly well and yielded quick profits, while general books had small print-runs and took years to sell. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri recollects how he was pestered by many publishers to write textbooks and notes when he was a teacher.\textsuperscript{38} Authors of some textbooks commanded as much as Rs.25 per printed form as remuneration.\textsuperscript{39} They were also the ones who could demand advance payment on submission of their manuscript.\textsuperscript{40} In Pudumaippithan’s short story, ‘Nisamum Ninaippum’, Professor Sivaramalingam is issued a cheque of Rs.500 for his yet to be published manuscript (which was likely to be prescribed as a textbook).\textsuperscript{41} Thus the prospect of a particular manuscript being accepted as a textbook was enough to tempt a publisher to take it up for publication. As M.S. Puranalingam Pillai wrote to Kazhagam:

\begin{quote}
I have ready with me in 5 formes D.C. 16 a book in MSS
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} R. Venkatachalam Pillai to V. Subbiah Pillai of Kazhagam, dated 19 January 1946, R. Venkatachalam Pillai Papers. E.M. Gopalakrishna Konar’s tirade seems to concern the publication of the Chilappathikaram commentary.

\textsuperscript{38} V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Meendum Vazhnthal ...?, Madras, 1954, p.2.

\textsuperscript{39} M.S. Puranalingam Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 21 January 1941, M.S. Puranalingam Pillai Papers.

\textsuperscript{40} M.S. Puranalingam Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 29 April 1928, Ibid.

entitled 'Islamism and Islamic Poets’ in Tamil, which may be approved and prescribed as text-book for Mohamedan schools. It is to be dedicated to Begum Amiruddin B.A. (Hons.), wife of the District Judge, for which she has given her consent.  

Late in his life, U. V. Swaminatha Iyer made considerable sums of money for granting permission to reprint his essays in textbooks. He charged a fee of Rs. 15 for an essay to be included in one edition of a textbook.  

Given the restricted growth of the book trade in colonial Tamilnadu, and the control over it by publishers, authors, with the exception of those catering to the textbook market, tended to get a raw deal. During our period, few authors made it big through writing alone. Only some popular novelists like Vaduvoor Duraiswamy Iyengar, J.R. Rangaraju and Vai. Mu. Kothainayaki Ammal seem to have had substantial incomes, and thus could boast of their own houses and printing presses. Even Arani Kuppusami Mudaliar, the combined sales of whose novels could have easily crossed the million mark, was never rich.  

It is in this context that the motif of the ever-poor author

43 See draft reply of U.V. Swaminatha Iyer to V.S. Swaminathan, a leading educational publisher based in Madurai, dated 9 September 1941, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer Papers. See also the letters from T.G. Gopaul Pillai, Educational Publisher, dated 2 October 1937 and from P.N. Appuswamy Iyer, on behalf of Oxford University Press, Madras dated 13 March 1942, Ibid.  
44 The money that Vaduvoor Duraiswamy Iyengar made through his novels, he lost by publishing a bulky volume of amateur anthropology, Long Missing links or the Marvellous Discoveries about the Aryans, Jesus Christ and Allah, Madras, 1931.  
45 See obituary in Ananda Bodhini, February 1925.
emerged and it recurs often in contemporary accounts, not to speak of even present-day writings. In an obituary on the death of Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan (1902-1944), the gifted short story writer of the Manikkodi group, K.S. Venkataramani, the Gandhian novelist, wrote:

In the last 35 years (1909-1944), I keep seeing one unchanging sight. Writers walk on cobble-stone roads without any footwear, while the 'shepherds' (the owners of 'renaissance' publishing houses) who claim to 'feed' the authors roam about in motor cars with resplendent diamond rings on their fingers.\(^{46}\)

He then goes on to say how Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan had to live in penury and had to translate Bengali fiction to eke out his livelihood. K.S. Venkataramani was no doubt exaggerating, especially on the affluence of publishers, but his observation on the plight of authors does illustrate the then prevalent perceptions about the condition of authors.

Chandilyan, who later became a best-selling pseudo-historical novelist, had this to say about his early writing career in the beginning of the 1930s. He had by then written a few stories in Ananda Vikatan and Swadesamitran, and on one occasion, he chanced to meet C.R. Srinivasan, the editor of Swadesamitran. When he introduced himself as a writer, C.R. Srinivasan, who could be expected to know the ways of the publishing world, quipped, "How can you make a living out of it?" and offered him a reporters's job in his daily.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) Bharatamani, May 1944.
No wonder, even Kalki, who was an exceptionally successful author and journalist, warned aspiring writers:

Brother, listen to my words. Take up some other occupation. But never pursue this wretched profession of writing. Show me just one person who has grown rich by writing books and essays. What does it matter to us if Bernard Shaw and [G.K.] Chesterton have become millionaires through writing.

Thus, writing was not only an unviable occupation, but also seen to be one. Authors had often to resort to allied professions like teaching and journalism. This predicament generated acute tension in the authors, and is the hallmark of much of the best works written during the 1930s and 1940s. The biographies of contemporary writers underscore this very dramatically. We have already referred to Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan. His more acclaimed fellow-traveller Subsequently, Pudumaippithan (1906-1948) is another case in point. Despite his phenomenal gifts as a writer (often compared to Bharati), he spent most of his life as a sub-editor in journals and newspapers like Ooliyan, Dinamani and Dinasari. Later he even dabbled in the film world to tide over his difficulties, but failed, and ultimately died of consumption, penniless. His acclaimed biography by his friend Ragunathan, begins dramatically with the lines, "Pudumaippithan's life is the tragic drama of a Tamil author. A warning for living writers." Pudumaippithan's life and work have been lionized in this

49 For Pudumaippithan's biography, see the admirable Raghunathan, Pudumaippithan Varalaru, Madras, 1951.
50 Ibid., Preface.
background. His stories themselves have contributed in no small measure to this, and as Sundara Ramasami observes, "In most of his [Pudumaippithan] short stories with an autobiographical 'I', the 'I's are usually authors (of course, Tamil authors!)"51

In one of Pudumaippithan’s stories, ‘Oru Nal Kazhindathu’, Murugadasar is a poor author who lives in a small tenement in Triplicane, Madras. His dream is to write a novel of epic proportions, but actually ends up writing advertisement copy on ‘Lipton’ tea and ‘Tapasa’ energizing tablets for an European-owned advertising agency. He is always short of money and even borrows as little a sum as 8 annas from a friend.52 In another of his stories, ‘Nisamum Ninaippum’, a leading short story writer is given short shrift by his publisher, who keeps postponing payment. When a cheque is ultimately issued, it bounces and the author finds himself literally on the streets as his landlord throws him out. The publisher then appears to bail him out by inviting him to stay in the publisher’s office, but not without a veiled suggestion that he read all the proof-sheets.53 Our facile summaries of these stories do not do justice to the nuanced writing of Pudumaippithan which brims with keen observation, wry humor and biting satire.

Thus, even by the end of our period, writing in itself was not an economically sustainable occupation, which could fully provide for even a modest living for Tamil authors. Unlike in the

51 Sundara Ramasami Katturaigal, Madras, 1984, p. 133.
53 Ibid., pp. 501-6. For more stories centred around the author, see ibid. ‘Karuchithaivu’ and ‘Kaditham’.
west, where, by the nineteenth century, the world of letters could sustain not only professional writers but also hacks, Tamil society could boast of neither.

4.2 \textit{The Publishers}

As we have indicated earlier, the publisher as a distinct agency did not emerge in the Tamil publishing world until well into the transitional phase. During the age of patronage, and even for a while after (Chapters 1 & 2) books were largely published by the authors themselves. The authors usually raised funds through patronage and subscription, and organized the activity of printing themselves. Given the extremely limited print-run of early books, coupled with the obligation to hand over substantial number of copies to the patrons and subscribers, distribution never posed a serious problem.\textsuperscript{54} Only with the decline of patronage and the system of subscriptions, and also with the emergence of the author, the rise of new genres, the expansion of the economy in the post-World War I period, was the need for a separate agency to coordinate publishing activities felt.

Some of the earliest publishers in this separate category were linked with the periodical press. Viveka Chintamani, the

\textsuperscript{54} Bharatidasan refers derisively that only 200 copies of such books used to be printed. \textit{Bharatidasan Kavithaigal}, Vol. II. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer printed only 500 copies of his editions. As for distribution, Ponnsuwamy Thevar used to distribute free many of the books that he had patronized. See Mu. Raghavaiyangar, \textit{Sentamil Valartha Thevargal}, Tiruchi & Madras, 1951, pp. 48-9. Mylai Seeni. Venkatasamy observes that many books during the nineteenth century had print runs of only 200 copies. See \textit{Pathonbatham Noottrandil Tamil Ilakkiyam}, Madras, 1962, p.120.
monthly review, also published tracts and books on 'useful knowledge'.\textsuperscript{55} Swadesamitran, the leading daily, also published a number of books on nationalist politics and social reform.\textsuperscript{56} Thiru Vi. Ka.'s Navasakti was part of an arrangement to publish his books through the 'Murugavel Puthakasalai' (the publishing house) and the 'Sadhu Achukkoodam' (the printing press). A. Madhaviah's literary review, Panchamirtam and his Author's Press and Publishing House were associated firms.\textsuperscript{57}

By the 1920s, independent publishing houses having no links with authors and journals in their ownership and organization, began to emerge. Publishing became an exclusive and specialized activity for these firms. But given the, as yet, narrow economy functioning under colonial aegis and the lack of a fully developed market, most of them functioned in the relatively lucrative business of educational publishing. General, or trade, books were not their predominant products. As a contemporary observer, P.J. Chester of the Oxford University Press, Madras remarked, there were "about 150" publishers registered with the Director of Public Instruction, Madras, while only about 2,000 to 3,000 books were being published annually.\textsuperscript{58} An Acting Director of Public Instruction also made a similar observation: "Many if not most Publishing firms established in the Madras Presidency are engaged in the keenest competition to

\textsuperscript{55} Viveka Chintamani. \\
\textsuperscript{56} On Swadesamitran's contribution, see, review of Congress Mahasabhai Charithiram in Amirthaguna Bodhini, 16 July 1929. \\
\textsuperscript{57} Panchamirtam, May 1924 (see advertisements). \\
\textsuperscript{58} Memoirs of the Madras Library Association, 1944, Madras, 1944, p.30.
secure the adoption of their books in schools.\textsuperscript{59}

Publishing educational books, which, according to P.J. Chester, amounted to half of the total book-production, was an easy and quick way to earn a fast buck as all that "seemed to [be] need [ed] was a school master to write, a printer, a few reams of paper and a Text-book Committee."\textsuperscript{60} It is not easy to miss the sarcasm at the end which is a comment on the rampant corruption in educational publishing. The procedure of prescribing textbooks was eminently suited for manipulation and shady deals. Given the easy money involved, "the most disreputable means" were employed.\textsuperscript{61} As even the Director of Public Instruction conceded, "The conditions in which publishers carry on their business compel them to resort to irregular and shady methods".\textsuperscript{62} The standard procedure adopted was as follows. The Director of Public Instruction had a Central Textbook Committee which periodically selected and approved textbooks submitted to them for school syllabuses. Approved books were periodically notified in the Gazette, which also contributed to the malaise. With no consolidated lists available, the only practical means to ascertain whether a book was approved or not was the claim made on the title page of the book with the inscription, "APPROVED BY THE TEXT BOOK COMMITTEE." On a random enquiry it was found that as many as 51 books prescribed in the elementary schools in one district alone, could not be verified whether they had been duly

\textsuperscript{59} G.O.No. 705, Law (Education), 8 April 1935.
\textsuperscript{60} Memoirs of the Madras Library Association, 1944, Madras, 1944, p.32.
\textsuperscript{61} G.O.No. 705, Law (Education), 8 April 1935.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. The following account of corruption in educational publishing is based on the detailed report submitted by Herbert Champion, Acting Director of Public Instruction in \textit{Ibid.}, unless otherwise stated.
approved or not.

In any case, from these lists of approved textbooks, the presidents and chairmen of local bodies prescribed books for use in schools under their control. It was an open secret that books were selected in return for favours rendered to members of the sanctioning local body. The following is an incident from a contemporary fictional piece set in a small school:

First teacher (to the Headmaster): You have not said what are the textbooks. The students keep asking about the books to be bought. What do we tell them?

Headmaster: why do you want to rake up that vexed issue now?

Another teacher (in anger): Why don’t you state the truth. The Chairman and the Commissioner have not yet struck a deal with the publisher.

First teacher: Oh! Can that be said openly?

Another teacher: Why not? Everybody knows of it and the whole affair stinks in the nostrils. 63

In this situation, as the Director of Public Instruction conceded, "in general, a school book has no chance of being selected on its merits alone". 64

In this state of affairs, publishers had a field day. Efforts

63 V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, op.cit., p. 82.
64 G.O. No. 705, Law (Education), 8 April 1935.
were made right from the beginning to ensure smooth business. T. Sivasailam Pillai, a Deputy Inspector of Schools, who had interests in the Kazhagam, advised its Secretary, V. Thiruvarangam Pillai:

In the September meeting of the Textbook Committee, [our books] should be approved ... see to it that the books reach the Committee on time. Ensure that books do not go to members who are not favourably disposed to you. When the books are sent for their opinion to members, give them your attention. Write to them. If this is taken care of and approval is obtained, we can then sell thousands of books every month. 65

Every district board wielded much influence, and its prescription meant sales in thousands. "If one Taluk Board prescribes it, it will mean 2,000 to 2,500 copies." 66 In this state of affairs, contacts were what mattered. The copious correspondence of T. Sivasailam Pillai with Kazhagam bears testimony to this. 67

Textbooks formed the staple of most publishers. S. Satchidanandam Pillai, who evinced keen interest in the activities of Kazhagam, advised it to concentrate on textbook publishing, so that

66 T. Sivasailam Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 10 June 1931, Ibid. Also see letter dated 23 October 1929.
67 See also S. Satchidanandam Pillai, a Deputy Inspector of Schools and Tamil scholar to Kazhagam, dated 16 July 1928, Satchidanandam Pillai Papers. No wonder this corruption came in for much criticism from all sides. One critic went so far as to say that all writers and publishers of awful textbooks ought to be properly "flogged with tamarind stems". Kudinool, 5 October 1938. For Maraimalai Adigal's criticism, see A Critical Study of Mullaippattu, Madras, 1903, p. iv; for the view of Desigavinayagam Pillai and T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar, see M. Arunachalam, Kumanyum Kasiyum, Thiruchittrambalam, 1959, pp. 120-1; also see Navasakti, 28 March 1928.
good profits could be earned, which could help the cause of Tamil and Saivism. 68 N.M. Venkatasami Nattar, badly in need of money in the summer of 1930, asked for money from Kazhagam very reluctantly as "schools are now closed [for vacation] and cash inflow will be at a low". 69

Though these instances indicate the centrality of textbook publishing to the day-to-day functioning of publishing houses, we do not have data to show the scale of educational publishing and its resultant profits. An educational officer's observation that publishers were "moving about in motor cars with flower garlands in their hands" 70 (no doubt to please the sanctioning authorities) goes to show their affluence. E.M. Gopalakrishna Kone, offers the most elaborate, if exceptional, case of a successful educational publisher. In 1935, his books were banned from prescription as textbooks when certain malpractices came to light. E.M. Gopalakrishna Kone, petitioned to the government that he would lose a turnover of nearly one lakh rupees, and that about 60 textbooks approved till then would remain idle, adding to the trouble of even authors, booksellers and students. He also claimed to pay an annual income tax of Rs. 5,000 and that his annual establishment costs were to the tune of Rs. 30,000. In a desperate bid to prove his

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68 Letter to Kazhagam, dated 24 April 1923, Satchidanandam Pillai Papers.
69 Letter to Kazhagam, dated 6 June 1930, N.M. Venkatasami Nattar Papers.
70 T. Sivasailam Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 2 June 1933. T. Sivasailam Pillai Papers.
standing he listed the positions that he held: member of the senate of the University of Madras, of the Madurai Municipal Council, of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and of the Madurai Tamil Sangam. Further he wielded enough clout to be able to raise a question in the Madras Legislative Council on the ban.

But then E.M. Gopalakrishna Kone was a leader in the field and few, if any, could match the scale of his operations and his clout. The above details may at best be seem as indicative of the textbook market.

This excessive reliance on textbook-publishing reveals the weakness of the Tamil publishing trade even in the 1920s and 1930s. The market for general books still appeared to be narrow, despite the emergence of new genres like novels, essays and literary criticism. In the 1920s, political movements, especially the nationalist, helped in widening the market and the publishing trade a little.

We have already referred to the publications of Swadesamitran. G.A. Natesan & Co., was a leading nationalist

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71 G.O.No. 705, Law (Educational), 8 April 1935.
72 Question No. 651, posed by V.T. Arasu. G.O. No. 2089, Educational & Confidential, 1 October 1934.
73 Maraimalai Adigal refers to him as "the rich book-seller from Madura". MAD, 22 November 1945.
publisher of the times, but virtually all of his 500-odd titles were in English.\textsuperscript{74} S. Ganesan, through his ‘Suthanthira Sangu Prachuralayam’, published a number of cheaply-priced Tamil books on Gandhian politics.\textsuperscript{75} The son of a retired police head constable, S. Ganesan had started his life as a "petty bookseller" and "khaddar (khadi) hawker", before he opened a press in 1925 and did excellent work publishing nationalist books\textsuperscript{76}. K.S. Venkataramani had a publishing house called Svetharanya Ashramam, specializing in books inspired by the Gandhian constructive programme.\textsuperscript{77} M.S. Subramania Iyer, under the name Suyarajya Berigai published scores of nationalist books. On the whole, these nationalist publishers succeeded in publishing and distributing their books through a wide, if temporary, network\textsuperscript{78}.

The Dravidian movement, though a late starter, published a number of radical books including translations of Russell, Ingersoll and Bhagat Singh and the iconoclastic writings of Periyar E.V. Ramasami. Apart from the Kudi Arasu Pathippagam, the movement also promoted the Pagutharivu Noorpathippu Kazhagam to help in its propaganda.\textsuperscript{79} Though these were not run on strict business lines, the

\textsuperscript{74} B. Natesan, In the Service of the Nation, A Golden Jubilee Retrospect, Madras, 1948. See also Panchamirtam January 1925 on the 25th Anniversary of G.A. Natesan & Co.\textsuperscript{75} See the reviews in Panchamirtam, June 1924 and Bharati, June 1931.\textsuperscript{76} For the history sheet of S. Ganesan, see G.O. No. 316, Judicial & Confidential, 26 February 1930 and U.S.S. File No. 703 dated 25 August 1930.\textsuperscript{77} See advertisements in Bharatamani, especially issue of 1 January 1939.\textsuperscript{78} For criticism of nationalist book-publishing as profiteering, see Maruppukku Maruppu, Erode, 1935, especially the essay by Neelavathi. For criticism on the publication of Bharati’s works, see Manikkodi, 15 October 1937 and 15 November 1937, columns by Pudumappithan and P.G. Sunderarajan.\textsuperscript{79} Kudi Arasu, 8 January 1933 & 12 February 1933.
books published were very nominally priced and reached a wide public. Periyar himself admitted, "All my publications are very, very cheap. (But) there is no systematic sale. Most of them are distributed free. Therefore, it is difficult to conform to set business norms". By the time the Communist party ventured into publishing through its Janasakti Prachuram, World War II had begun, which falls outside the chronological limits of our present study.

The publishing ventures of the political movements no doubt helped in the widening of the publishing sphere, but they were not sustained attempts. As a result, these publishing houses gradually wound up when the political urgency behind their ventures evaporated. Apart from these publishing houses, there were others which contributed to the expansion of publishing activity. The cost-price editions of Saivite religious texts admirably edited and neatly produced by the Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam deserves mention here. So successful was this venture that Kazhagam felt jittery, as it had until then a virtual monopoly over quality editions of the Saivite texts. Alliance & Co., which had started as a small book-selling firm by V. Kuppuswami Iyer (1880-1949) grew in size

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81 See Siddhantam, June 1945 for a complete list of publications with details of the print-run. Also see preface to Sundaramurty Swamigal Thevaram, Madras, 1929; write-ups in Navasakti, 17 April 1929 & 31 June 1929.
82 See the statement by the Secretary of the Saiva Siddhanta Mahasamajam in Siddhantam, March 1936.
and stature in the 1920s and 1930s by publishing a series of fictional works of the new band of ‘renaissance’ writers and translations of Bengali fiction.  

By the mid-1930s a number of such firms had emerged. But interestingly, most of these publishing houses were sole-proprietory firms and lacked even a semblance of corporate organization. An incident narrated by Kalki’s biographer puts this point humorously. One day, in 1927, Kalki landed at his home with copies of his first book, Sarathaiyin Thanthiram. He proudly displayed a copy to his wife who flipped through it and asked where ‘Saraswati Prachuralayam’ (Saraswati Publishing House) was located. Kalki quipped that "our home is the publishing house".

Given the narrowness of the Tamil book trade and the low capital outlay and limited turnover, corporate organization must have hardly been a necessity. The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society Ltd., was the first of its kind in Tamilnadu. Founded by the brothers Pillai - V. Thiruvarangam and V. Subbiah - the company made a name for itself by publishing Tamil and Saivite

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84 In 1933, during the Tamilanbar Mahanadu organized by the Madras Library Association, scores of publishers for the first time, participated in an elaborate exhibition. See Tamil Anbar Mahanadu, Tamil Puthaka Katchi Arikkai, Madras 1934.

### Table 4.1

**Stock-in-Trade and Profits of South India Saiva Siddhanta Works**  
*Publishing Society Ltd., 1920-1939*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Stock-in-trade (at cost price)</th>
<th>Profits</th>
<th>Annual dividend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>(-)1516-8-1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>4964-10-7</td>
<td>696-9-11</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>9689-5-6</td>
<td>901-13-2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>14,030-1-9</td>
<td>1667-1-7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>16,690-15-6</td>
<td>1875-7-4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>17,595-2-0</td>
<td>1890-9-6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>25,484-2-9</td>
<td>2675-10-4</td>
<td>4 1/2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>35,063-0-9</td>
<td>1951-5-1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>37,542-8-11</td>
<td>2546-5-1</td>
<td>3 1/2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>36,525-3-0</td>
<td>7093-14-1</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>38,144-3-9</td>
<td>2358-6-4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>39,398-9-8</td>
<td>2316-14-9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>39,493-11-3</td>
<td>2275-8-1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>40,285-9-9</td>
<td>4486-13-3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>42,189-5-10</td>
<td>3918-7-11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>42,391-6-3</td>
<td>4029-13-6</td>
<td>3 1/8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>41,057-7-5</td>
<td>4560-8-6</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>37,679-8-8</td>
<td>5647-10-1</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>38,203-8-6</td>
<td>5647-14-8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from the annual statements of accounts. Percentage of dividends refer to only half of the actual dividend. The other half was given to the South India Saiva Siddhanta Sangam.
classics. Its authorized capital was only Rs. 50,000 divided into 5,000 shares of Rs. 10 each.\textsuperscript{86} Despite its status and importance as a leading publisher of Tamil books, its stock-in-trade and profit (see Table 4.1), shows the limitations of the Tamil publishing trade.

The table shows the limited scale of operations of Tamil publishing firms, with stock-in-trade never touching the Rs. 50,000 mark and annual profits rarely crossing Rs. 5,000.\textsuperscript{87} Further, despite being nominally a corporate organization, the company was run on lines that were far from being capitalist. The company's members were restricted by its constitution to only saivites, and non-saivites were barred from holding shares.\textsuperscript{88} Sivasailam Pillai, for instance, who evinced keen interest in the growth of the company, often criticized Kazhagam for functioning in "unbusiness-like ways".\textsuperscript{89} In one of his letters, he wrote in frustration:

\textbf{Alas!! What a pity!! The Imperial Bank which deals in crores of rupees responds positively by return of post and only then does it speak of right procedure for the future ... But your office acts in an unbusiness-like, slow and (please excuse me) not intelligent ways.}\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{86} For details about the company, see the biographies of the brothers by Era. Elankumaran, Thiruvaranganar Varalaru, Madras, 1982 and Thamarai Chelvar Va. Subbiah Pillai Varalaru, Madras, 1981. Also see Kazhagathan Ayirathettavathu Veliyettu Vizha Malar, Madras, 1961.

\textsuperscript{87} Similarly, the total stock-in-trade (at market price and not at cost price) of Ripon Pusthagasalai, a major bookseller and publisher, in July 1929 was only Rs. 92,897-10-4. See their printed stock register and Catalogue, July 1929.

\textsuperscript{88} Letter from T. Sivasailam Pillai to Kazhagam, dated 16 April 1929, T. Sivasailam Pillai Papers.

\textsuperscript{89} Letters to Kazhagam dated 2 June 1933; 5 June 1929; 5 March 1929 and 16 February 1929, Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Letter to Kazhagam, dated 2 June 1933, Ibid.
The comparison with a capitalist organization like the Imperial Bank is most telling. Towards the late 1930s things began to change. Publishers began to conceive of a widened book market. K.S. Venkataramani dreamed of publishing houses like Penguin and Pelican. The publishers of Manikkodi promoted the Navayugam Prachuralayam Ltd., as a public limited company in 1937 with an authorized capital of Rs. 20,000 divided into 2,000 shares. The prospectus expressed the hope that 200-page books priced at 8 annas a copy would easily sell at least 5,000 copies. The promotion of the company was evidently motivated by the need for corporate organization in the publishing business. As an editorial in the Manikkodi remarked, "That corporate organization is a desideratum is a lesson we have learnt from experience". An earlier write-up in Manikkodi, referred to the success of one of Rajaji's books in the following terms:

Sri Chakravarti Rajagopalachari's Kannan Kattiya Vazhi has seen a second printing within a year of its first publication. This gives the lie to those who argue that Tamil publishing cannot be run on business lines. If anybody repeats this contention now, they can only be termed as

91 Bharatamani, 22 October 1939.
92 See Prospectus of the Company in Manikkodi, 31 January 1937.
93 Ibid., 15 October 1937.
those who can not use their eyes. Everything depends on how books are published. If interesting material is offered at a price easily affordable to Tamil readers, need one worry about successful business.  

Navayuga Prachuralayam’s publications met with initial success. Dinamani also joined the fray during the War with its publications. But all those ventures proved to be short-lived. As a publisher in Pudumaippithan’s short story remarks, "The business of publishing is fit only for Kepmaris" (a co-called criminal tribe popularly associated with unscrupulousness; also a word of abuse). Tamil publishing tended never to take off into corporate organization. Even during World War II, when the Tamil book trade expanded and a part of Chettiar capital fleeing from south-east Asia moved into book-publishing, publishing houses remained under sole-proprietors or at best functioned as partnership firms.

Thus, only after World War I, publishing firms with the exclusive function of publishing books began to emerge in Tamilnadu. They were run by businessmen, as distinct from writers who indulged in publishing books also, as it usually happened before the outbreak of the War. But, given the narrow economy, these publishing firms could not sustain themselves on publishing trade

94 Ibid., 25 April, 1937
95 See editorials in Ibid., 15 February 1937 and 5 November 1937.
96 For a survey of Dinamani publications, see Bharatamani, April 1945. For an allegorical criticism, see Raghunathan’s 1947-short story ‘Gnanamani Pathippagam’, Raghunathan Kathaigal, Madurai, 1980.
98 Even now there are hardly any limited companies in the Tamil book trade.
(general) books alone, which is shown by their excessive reliance on textbook publishing with its more or less assured sales and guaranteed profits. As the turnover was also generally low, rarely ever were they organized on corporate lines. Consequently, Tamil publishing was at best a business or trade, and never really qualified to be an industry.

4.3 Printers

With the relaxing of restrictions on Indian ownership in 1835, a number of printing presses owned by Indians were established. By 1863, there were at least ten "Native Presses" printing in Tamil, which furnished returns of their publications. According to John Murdoch there were several more of such presses. In the beginning they possessed only wooden printing presses, but later many of them acquired iron presses.99 Some Tamil scholars who owned printing presses in the age of patronage were Ramanuja Kavirayar, Kalathur Vedagiri Mudaliar, Arumuga Navalar and Sabapathy Navalar. Mylai Seeni. Venkatasamy lists about 75 printing presses which printed Tamil books during the nineteenth century.100 The Madras State Bibliography's list is more comprehensive than Mylai Seeni. Venkatasamy's with over 180 presses.101 These lists attest to increasing printing activity. By even 1895, printing presses had become a landmark, and even a chapbook of the times points to

Table 4.2

Printing Presses in Tamilnadu, 1904-1912

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1905</th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1908</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N. Arcot</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coimbatore</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanjore</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Arcot</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinnevelly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nilgiris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingleput</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichi</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramnad</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:
1904-05: G.O. No. 414, Public, 8 June 1905
1905-06: G.O. No. 465, Public, 21 June 1906
1906-07: G.O. No. 406, Public, 29 May 1907
1908-09: G.O. No. 398, Public, 7 June 1909
a few printing presses. The chapbook, a Valinadai Chindu structured as a man showing around the city to his wife, points to the beautiful press (Kalarathnakara Achukkoodam) of Pushparatha Chettiar and the Vidyatarangini Achukkoodam of Ratna Nayakar. 102

By the early twentieth century, there was a further increase in the number of printing presses operating in Tamilnadu (See Table 4.2). The table indicates the fairly wide distribution of printing presses, but the numbers are quite misleading. Not all these presses were involved in printing Tamil books. For instance, a 1915-compendium of Southern India, provides inter alia fairly detailed write-ups on some major printing presses. These printing presses, some of them employing as many as 200 employees each, were well-equipped with machinery and plant, but were only involved in general and fine art commercial printing. They catered to the needs of colonial establishments like Bank of Madras, Madras & Southern Mahratta Railway Company and had nothing to do with the Tamil book-publishing business. 103 Handling the printing requirements of large commercial establishments was the only profitable and viable way of running large printing houses. The Tamil publishing world could never hope to sustain such gigantic operations.

Apart from such large presses, there were a number of

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102 Chennai Kandaswamy Vedarpani Mahorchava Valinadai Patham, Madras, 1895.
other printing presses very small in size which did odd job-work like printing invitation cards, bill books, etc., for individuals and petty firms. The District Magistrate of North Arcot referring to the 35 presses in his district in 1921, commented: "All of them are petty ones. They were mostly engaged in doing job work". Of the presses in Nilgiris, the District Magistrate commented that they all "do only miscellaneous job work". Apart from presses in Madras city and to some extent in Madurai and Tanjore, virtually all the presses in the districts were such petty presses handling only miscellaneous job work. Jayakanthans poignant short story 'Treadle' is set in one such press, which has only one employee who does all the jobs including composing, printing on the machine, etc.

The middle-level presses were the ones which catered to the needs of Tamil publishing and we have no means of estimating their numbers. In the age of patronage and the subsequent transitional phase, printers sold books also, especially those printed at their own presses. O. Pushparatha Chettiar of the Kalarathnakaram Press was one such leading publisher. The Madras Ripon Press of Sadhu Rathinam Chettiar was a press which indulged in publishing also.

104 G.O. No. 381, Public & Confidential, 17 June 1921.
105 Ibid.
107 John Murdoch, op.cit., p. lxi.
108 See obituary of Sadhu Rathina Chettiar in Viveka Chintamani, December 1900. For an elegy on his death, see V.G. SuriyanarayanââSastrî, Pavalar Virundu, Madurai, 1957, pp. 54-5.
As long as printers also combined the functions of printing, publishing and bookselling, they were open to suspicion. As Subbaraya Chettiar commented "... if it is a good book, it is customary for printing houses to print some extra copies for themselves, apart from charging actual costs." Technologically speaking, the printing presses serving the needs of Tamil publishing functioned with modest treadle or cylinder machines run on manual power. Maraimalai Adigal’s T.M. Press had only a Demy Folio Platen machine. So did the Sivanesan Press. As late as 1957, Sakti Vai. Govindan, the renowned publisher, spoke of manually operated cylinder machines in relation to Tamil publishing. Power presses, not to speak of linotype and monotype, were quite unfamiliar to the world of Tamil publishing.

We get only fragmentary details about how these presses worked, the kind of labour recruited and the working conditions. Often only poor people with no other means of employment joined the presses, especially at a tender age. T.M. Rajapather, followed in

110 MAD, 19&20 Sep.1916. Also see Cashbook of T.M.Press.
112 Saraswati, March 1957.
he footsteps of his father T.V. Manicka Mudaliar, and joined as an apprentice in a press when he was hardly 11 years, due to pressing family commitments. The radical novelist, Vindhan, who, like Rajapather, lived in the working class locality of Pulianthope in Madras, also joined a press while yet in his teens due to similar domestic necessities, and earned a daily wage of 6 annas. Thiru. Vi. Kaliyanasundara Mudaliar’s elder brother Ulagantha Mudaliar was forced to quit studies and similarly take up a job in a press. Similar was the case of M.P. Sivagnanam, who later became a prominent politician and M.V. Venugopala Pillai, the Tamil scholar. A.ubramaniya Nayagar was a compositor before he made enough money by dealing in German silver articles to run the caste-journal, ‘anniya Kula Mitran.

We come to know of the experience of printingmen only through these exceptional persons who later rose to prominence in their fields. Not every press worker was lucky enough to escape the rudgery and poverty of employment in a press. The little boys who joined as apprentices were hardly ever paid during the course of their

4 M. Paramasivam, Makkal Ezhuthalar Vindhan, Madras, 1983, pp. 4-6.
5 Thiru Vi. Kaliyanasundara Mudaliar, Vazhkkaikurippugal, Madras, 1982, p. 765. For further biographical details see his 60th birthday souvenir, Thiru. Vi. Ulaganatha Mudaliar Manivizha Malar, 1941; For his obituaries, see Siddhantam, July 1945 and Bharatarnam, July 1945.
training. As mentioned earlier, they came from poor families. For instance, two of the boys in Maraimalai Adigal's T.M. Press were the sons of his servant maid and gardener.118 These little apprentice boys had a tough time working for as many as 9 hours a day.119 As Thiru. Vi. Ka., who ran a press himself, wrote:

Most of the printing shop-owners kill their apprentice-boys without killing them. They knock the heads of these children [with their knuckles]; slap their cheeks and beat them and kick them. Sometimes they catch hold of their tufts and threaten them with a scowling face and blood-shot eyes. Only the good Lord in Heaven knows the plight of these children.120

If this was the plight of the apprentices, adult workers fared little better. In most of the presses, workers had to stand the whole day while composing and printing. This was physically taxing especially as the work also needed mental skills like concentration, attention and patience.121 As Thiru. Vi. Ka. observed, many of the workmen cursed their parents for pushing them into this wretched trade at an young age.122

In addition to this, wages were extremely low, in keeping

118 Maraimalai Adigal's Diary, entries dated 1 February 1930 & 9 September 1932. For more references to apprentices, see entries dated 19 May 1924; 11 February 1925; 30 September 1925 and 25 January 1928.

119 Maraimalai Adigal’s Diary, entry dated 26 April 1924.

120 Desabaktan, 16 February 1918, reprinted in his Desabaktamirtham, Madras, 1919, p. 250.


with the general nature of the Tamil book trade. For instance, Maraimalai Adigal’s pressmen were paid only between Rs. 10 and Rs. 15 per month. During the 1920s, even his manager, Thiru. Vi. Ulaganatha Mudaliar, was paid only Rs.20 and his successor J.S. Kannappar, Rs. 15 per month.123

Added to the poor working conditions and meagre pay, their living conditions were hardly any better. Even the Government Press workers, who earned relatively more, lived often as "subtenants, mostly in slum areas". They lived huddled in single rooms with very poor sanitary conditions. "Rice water twice a day is prosperity for them".124

No wonder press workers kept indifferent health. "Lead poisoning is the common disease to which compositors and type casters often fall victims."125 A contemporary printers’ guide written by the Superintendent of the Government Press, Madras advised the workers to wash their hands properly, and never to take food in a room where there was any lead or lead working.126 Adequate time and soap to clean their hands was a common demand of workers.127 A contemporary medical survey of a large printing press in Madras city found tuberculosis to be rampant.128

123 Cashbook of T.M. Press, Maraimalai Adigal Papers.
125 C. Basudev, ibid.
127 See, for instance, G.O.No. 1849, Education & Public Health, 3 August 1938.
Given the poor wages and the bad working and living conditions, the pressmen often proved to be inefficient and indifferent. This was reflected in the quality of work produced, especially the proofs. As Maraimalai Adigal remarked, "The matter composed by my dull-headed pressman was so full of mistakes that I was tired of correcting them". A contemporary style-book put it more elaborately,

The proofs ... swarm with mistakes for which you can see no reason; ... spelling and punctuation are marvels of misdirected ingenuity ... you spend many weary hours correcting these proofs, and, when they come back to you again, many of your marks have not been attended to, and often fresh errors have been made. Again you correct and again unsatisfactory proofs are returned to you; till at last, out of sheer weariness the 'strike' order is given.

That workers gave unnecessary trouble and absented themselves without leave, especially on occasions when urgent work needed to be done, was a common complaint of press owners. Maraimalai Adigal often grumbled that he had to train novices and bear with sloppy workers.

129 MAD 28 February 1911.

130 W.H. Warren, Author and Printer, Madras, 1925, p.3. For an interesting article on the comedy of typographic errors, see K.A.P. Viswanatha Pillai, ‘Kavanippeergala’, Sivanesan, 21 Panguni, Pirabava (March 1928); also ‘Achup pey’, Sakthi, March 1946. There is a lot of oral lore about typographic errors, which are unprintable!
I have had to stand beside the pressman for the last two weeks and teach him press-work. He has no education at all and he is unable to grasp anything. ...  

Maraimalai Adigal’s diaries are full of angry remarks born out of frustration working with such workmen.\(^{132}\) In sheer exasperation, he even referred to them as ‘wretches’ and ‘rascals’.\(^{133}\) Workmen were also proverbially known for stealing types.\(^{134}\) Perhaps they gained but little in terms of money. But, together with little acts of disobedience, sloppy work and abstention without leave, it can be seen as a form of everyday resistance to their degrading and unremunerative occupation.

The printing men who catered to the Tamil book trade did not gain much even in the wave of unionization that swept the Madras working class in the inter-war period. Only workers in the bigger printing establishments like the Hoe & Co. and the Dinamani Press were organized and were able to make some demands and redress at least some of their grievances.\(^{135}\)

Given this condition of the press workers in the smaller printing houses that catered to the needs of Tamil Publishing, printers were infamous for their unreliability. Apart from certain acclaimed

\(^{131}\) Letter to V. Thiruvaram Pillai, dated 29 December 1919. Also see letter dated 23 April 1932. Maraimalai Adigal Papers.

\(^{132}\) See entries dated 3 May 1917; 25 April 1917; 20 October 1917; 26 December 1917; 5 January 1918 and 18 March 1918.

\(^{133}\) Maraimalai Adigal Diaries, entries dated 23 August 1919 & 5 October 1917.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., entry dated 28 March 1943; also G.O. No.834, Education & Public Health, 17 April 1939.

presses like Sadhu Achukkoodam, Liberty Achukkoodam and Kabir Printing Press, most other presses were notorious for not keeping to deadlines, and for shoddy work.

4.4 **Concluding Remarks**

We find, in the world of Tamil publishing, the delayed emergence of the categories of authors, publishers and printers. Only after World War I, do these emerge, and even then they were not really distinct and specialized, organically growing out of larger social and economic development. Authors as a group emerged by the 1920s but they were neither full-fledged professional writers nor hacks who could eke out a livelihood. From being their own publishers, they were given a raw deal when the institution of publishing houses emerged during the same post-World War I period.

As for the publishing houses, they too were small with limited turnover and depended largely on textbook publishing with its assured sales and steady profits. Specialized publishing did not exist. Moreover rarely, if ever, were publishing houses organized and run on corporate lines. Similarly, printers catering to Tamil publishing were small firms with modest technological equipment and poorly paid workers, due to the limited growth of the Tamil book trade. On the whole, even after the outbreak of World War II (or, for that matter, even now) Tamil publishing did not become an industry. At best it qualified to be a trade or business, which it was not at the turn of the century.

Why book-publishing in Tamilnadu did not emerge as an industry can perhaps be explained only in the context of a stunted social and economic transformation effected by colonialism, which
hampered the organic growth of capitalism and its attendant developments like the growth of market. Publishing, given its cultural moorings, even more than other forms of economic enterprise, could never fully develop.