Chapter 6

THE COLONIAL STATE AND THE BOOK

No history of the book could be complete without an account of the role of the state. In this chapter, we shall seek to explore the colonial state's policy and its policing of the book. Firstly, we shall describe the administrative structure that was built to surveil the book, and the various enabling legislations. This will be followed by an account of the documents and data that were generated through the administering of the regulating Acts. The mechanisms of control devised by the state will then be delineated, which will be followed by two small sections on the state as patron and ensurer of copyright. The actual policing of the book will then be studied in two domains: the moral and the political. The former will concern the attempts of the state to control the publication of erotic and prurient literature, while the political will be dealt under three rubrics: the literature of the nationalist, the Self-respect and the communist movements. A few remarks on the nature of the state’s role in the evolution of Tamil book-publishing will sum up the chapter.

6.1 The Acts and Administration

Though the restrictions on native ownership of printing presses and their publishing activity were removed by Metcalfe's Regulation of 1835, and there was considerable growth in the output
of the Tamil presses, the colonial government did not have any systematic way of keeping track of publishing activity.\(^1\) During the 1857 Revolt, it seems to have been mandatory for every publication to bear the name and address of the printer,\(^2\) which must have exercised a modicum of control. Given the fact that the impact of 1857 was not even marginal in south India, this regulation did not have any perceptible effect in the generation of records and the consequent creation of knowledge about Tamil books.

Not surprisingly, the first systematic effort to compile data on Tamil books was made by John Murdoch,\(^3\) a protestant missionary and the first head of the Christian Literature Society. In 1865, he compiled and published the \textit{Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books with Introductory Notices}, the first detailed catalogue of Tamil books, which also provides very useful accounts of the nature of book-publishing, printing, typography and distribution during the age of patronage. As such it has formed the basic source for writings on nineteenth-century Tamil publishing. In this catalogue he appended a detailed note on the duty of the government with respect to vernacular literature, which was also sent to the government separately.\(^4\)

In this note, no doubt speaking from his experience of preparing the \textit{Classified Catalogue}, Murdoch deplored the lack of

\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{john-murdoch-1865a} John Murdoch, \textit{Classified Catalogue of Tamil Printed Books with Introductory Notices}, Madras, 1865 (reprint 1968).
\item \cite{john-murdoch-1865b} John Murdoch, 'Duty of Government with respect to Vernacular Literature in India', Nos. 45-48, Educational, 19 March 1867; also reprinted in John Murdoch, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. lxii-1xxii.
\item For details of Murdoch's life, see Henry Morris, \textit{The Life of John Murdoch}, London, 1906.
\item See Nos. 45-48, Educational, 19 March 1867.
\end{itemize}
adequate and reliable statistics on literary output in the vernacular languages. His complaint revolved around two issues: the voluntary returns filed by the native presses were incomplete, as the managers were either suspicious about the intentions of the government or looked upon it as causing useless trouble; secondly, what little information was collected was not, in most cases, accessible to the public. To rectify this, Murdoch called for a catalogue of existing books, and then "require, by law, annual returns from all presses" about every sheet that was printed, on pain of penalty. Out of these returns, Murdoch suggested, regular annual returns should be printed.⁵

For Murdoch, three considerations weighed in his mind. Firstly, he felt the patronizing need that, "the interest of literature" would be served if "the antiquaries and historians of India, in future generations, should have the means of inspecting the earliest efforts of the Press and of recording its gradual progress." He also felt the need to keep a check on the "vile character" of books with regard to morals and sexual norms. Lastly, coming to political matters, "it was doubtless incumbent to watch any premonitory symptoms of an impending outburst."⁶

J. Talboys Wheeler, a bureaucrat and the official historian of Madras, in his 'Memorandum on the Registration of Vernacular Publications',⁷ while broadly reflecting similar concerns as those voiced by Murdoch, nevertheless felt that mandatory

⁵ Murdoch, op.cit., lxxii-lxii; also, Nos. 45-48, Educational, 19 March 1867.
⁷ Nos. 45-48, Educational, 19 March 1867.
registration of publications would be unsuccessful. Instead, he suggested the purchase of three copies of every book and the publication of its title in the official gazette. Wheeler also felt that "the object of the Government should . . . be more literary or educational, than political."

Out of the deliberations that the memoranda of Murdoch and Wheeler evoked, was born the Press and Registration of Books Act (XXV of) 1867. This Imperial Act provided for the compulsory submission of three copies of every book, printed or lithographed, to the government along with a statement providing the following details: title of the book; the language; name of author, translator or editor; the subject; place of printing and of publication; name or firm of printer and of publisher; date of issue from the press; number of pages; the size of the book; the number of the edition; the number of copies printed; the sale-price; and the name and address of copyright-owner. 8

A new office of the Registrar of Books was created to receive the books forwarded by the District Registrar of Assurances, who were the local officers in charge of accepting submissions made by the printers. Initially, the Director of Public Instruction held additional charge as the Registrar of Books, but owing to his persistent complaint that his duties were already tremendous, he was relieved of the additional charge. 9 The Registrar of Books was a part-time office held by an officer of the government, usually of the

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8 Nos. 54-55, Educational, 24 September 1867.
9 ibid.
Education department, either in addition to his duties or after his retirement. His essential qualification was the ability to read and write at least three vernacular languages of the Madras Presidency.

The duties of the Registrar consisted of supervising the work of a clerk who made entries in a tabular form from the returns furnished by the printers. Then, he had to examine the books submitted for registration, and form an estimate of the value regarding matter and style, and to keep an eye on possible immoral or seditious ideas expressed in them. Considering the variety of languages (about fourteen) in which books were published in the Madras Presidency, the Registrar's was no easy task. Out of such examination, the Registrar was expected to prepare quarterly catalogues of books, and, at the end of the year, an annual report consisting of statistical tables analysing book-production and a review of it.

To assist him in these tasks, the Registrar had a meagre staff of one head clerk (who also doubled up as 'librarian' of the huge collection of books accumulated through mandatory submission under the 1867 Act), three clerks, one typist, one attender and three peons. This workforce remained stagnant from 1911 to 1935. Given the fact that the post of Registrar was held by a pensioner, or as an additional charge (The first Registrar V. Krishnamachari was 74

10 G.O.No.737, Public, 1 September 1928.
11 Nos. 3-5, Educational, 2 August 1875. For more on these reports and catalogues, see below, sec. 6.3.
12 G.O.No. 322, Public (General), 23 February 1935.
when he died in harness in 1907; his successor V. Rangachariar was Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology at Presidency College, Madras,\textsuperscript{13} Pranatharthihara Iyer, a retired Inspector of Schools, was 76 when he was forced to retire in 1934\textsuperscript{14}) the work of administering the Act no doubt suffered. More often than not, there was delay in the submission of quarterly catalogues and annual reports. When explanation was sought for such delays, the Registrar would often give a list of his preoccupations. For instance, V. Krishnamachari once explained that, as Secretary of a Committee to examine school books, he had to examine, page by page, 120 books and record his remarks, apart from being a member of another committee to revise the Madras Municipal Act.\textsuperscript{15} As the Director of Public Instruction (under whom the Registrar functioned) once complained, "There was a time when it was very difficult to get the late Rangachariar [the Registrar of Books] to keep the quarterly lists upto date."\textsuperscript{16}

With the changing political situation, and the gathering force of the national movement, additional work was put on the Registrar of Books. The Indian Press Act of 1910, fashioned by the colonial state in the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement to check the growth of nationalist literature, was largely monitored by the Registrar. He was "expected to get a foretaste of the objectionable

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} G.O.No. 135, Home (Education), 6 February 1917.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} G.O.No. 306, Public (General), 24 March 1934.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Nos. 33-34, Educational, 12 March 1874.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} G.O.No. 135, Home (Education), 6 February 1917.
\end{itemize}
publications" and report to the Commissioner of Police.\(^{17}\) And, as the then Registrar M. Rangachariar himself remarked, the Act made him "also a kind of confidential censor of books".\(^{18}\) With the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931 to counter the Civil Disobedience Movement, the duties of the Registrar continued to mount.

In the wake of the Depression of the early 1930s, and the consequent need to cut down on fiscal expenditure, when the Retrenchment Committee suggested the abolition of the post of the Registrar of Books, the government, perhaps despite its wish, could not accept the recommendation as it felt, "The duties which the Registrar has to carry out are statutory and they cannot therefore be suspended."\(^{19}\) Similarly, it accepted the views of the Registrar regarding the staff of his office, and turned down the Retrenchment Committee’s proposal of reduction, against the persuasive arguments of the Finance department.\(^{20}\) Of course, the colonial government juggled with other alternatives, reconciling both financial aspects and political interest, and combined the office of the Senior Translator to Government with that of the Registrar of Books, as it was felt that their functions were not dissimilar.\(^{21}\)

It is in this context of aged, part-time officers holding charge as Registrars, enormous workload, and limited staff that the

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17 G.O.No. 314-5, Judicial, Confidential, 13 July 1910.
18 ibid. See below, sec. 6.6.2.1 for more on the functioning of the Indian Press Act, 1910.
19 G.O.No.426, Public, Confidential, 14 March 1932.
20 G.O.No. 322, Public (General), 23 February 1935.
21 G.O.No. 1764, Public (General), 28 October 1935; G.O. No. 1180, Education & Public Health, 2 June 1936.
information collected under the various Acts, especially the Regulation of Books Act 1867, can be estimated and the nature of control exercised by the colonial state over book-publishing studied.

6.2 **Annual Reports and the Quarterly Catalogues**

As indicated above, the Registrar of Books prepared quarterly catalogues of books, and then, based on these catalogues wrote an annual review with rudimentary statistical analysis. The quarterly catalogues were prepared based on the returns filed by the printers giving various details about the books and their producers. In an additional column, for remarks, the Registrar was expected to make some critical comments.

The annual review classified the books under various heads, ranging from biography, history, law, literature, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, religion, natural sciences, moral sciences and travel. Books were also classified language-wise, and whether they were educational or not. The Registrar also commented on the general tone of the literary output during the year, with especial regard to its moral and political content.

Gradually the report became stereotypical, with near identical comments being repeated year after year. The statistical tables too bordered on the absurd, when elaborate subject-wise classification was made for languages in which hardly a handful of books were published.\(^{22}\) There were even stranger things like when

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\(^{22}\) See, for instance, the Review & Analysis, 1885, Nos. 296-7, Educational, 17 May 1886.
'Miscellaneous' took up as much as 20-30 per cent of the total, while the rubrics like travel, biography and history showed next to nothing.\(^{23}\)

The Government of India, which received these reports forwarded by the Government of Madras, often pulled up the provincial governments for the poor quality of the reports. As the Assistant Secretary, Home Department (Books) of the Imperial government commented,

these reports consist almost entirely of descriptions of books taken from quarterly lists published in local gazettes, of short summaries dealing chiefly with figures, and a number of tables showing the languages in which they are written.\(^{24}\)

He laid the blame on those who prepared the review for its poor quality who "from want of general information (especially as regards foreign literature) have little or no sense of the proportionate value of the books."\(^{25}\) In short, he wanted nothing less than the review of continental literature published in the Athenaeum!

The Government of Madras, no less condescending, remarked that "the vernacular literature of this Presidency differs widely from the continental literature reviewed in the Athenaeum

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23 See, for instance, the Review & Analysis, 1878, Nos. 5-7, Educational, 2 June 1879.
24 G.O.No. 398-9, Educational, 28 August 1900.
25 ibid.
being, by comparison, uninteresting and wanting in originality."²⁶
But keeping in view the Imperial government’s requirements, the
Government of Madras entrusted the task of writing the annual review
to the Director of Public Instruction, who, being an Englishman,
could, with his "critical training", be expected to have a sense of "the
proportionate value of things"!²⁷

But, given the multiplicity of languages in which books
were published in the Madras Presidency, a new arrangement was
worked out. The Registrar of Books was now to submit weekly, to the
Director of Public Instruction, books that he considered worthy of
special enquiry. These were to be forwarded to competent reviewers
for their comments, which would be taken note of while preparing the
quarterly catalogues and the annual review.²⁸ Under this new scheme,
the annual review appeared under the name of the Director of Public
Instruction, without any noticeable change in the quality of the
reviews as they were virtually prepared by the Registrar as before.
But the Government of India appreciated them and said "they are far
superior to those prepared in other provinces."²⁹

With the phenomenal increase in the volume of book
production over the years, and the monotony of the annual reviews,
the quarterly catalogues and annual reviews were seen by the colonial
state to give in diminishing returns. In 1924, the Government of India

²⁶ ibid.
²⁷ ibid.
²⁸ ibid; G.O.No. 612, Educational, 28 November 1900; G.O. No. 644, Educational, 12
December 1900.
²⁹ G.O.No. 426, Educational, 28 July 1904.
abolished the publishing of the quarterly catalogues in the gazettes as it involved "unnecessary expenditure and serves no useful purpose." 30

By the early 1920s, the annual reviews had long outlived their usefulness. As an official of the Public department, Government of Madras remarked in exasperation, when he came to know that the Registrar of Books submitted two reports, one for the calendar year and one for the official year,

What report goes to the Government of India on this subject now? and for what period? and how is the material for it derived? If the report for the calendar year is prepared by the DPI from material supplied by the Regr. of Books, why should this report of the Regr. be abolished? and what is the object of the report for the official year any way, 31

nobody seems to have been clear about what the reports of the Registrar were for. They clearly lacked direction and purpose, and, as the Deputy Secretary of Education and Health (Books) of the Government of India confessed, the statistics were just used to put in some figures in the 'Moral and Material Progress Reports of India.' 32

By 1923 the annual reviews were abolished, though bare statistical tables continued to be prepared. 33

This, then, was the kind of knowledge created by

30 G.O.No. 25, Public, 10 January 1924.
31 G.O.No. 419, Public, 4 July 1921.
32 G.O.No.152, Public, 27 February 1923.
33 ibid.
colonialism as it went about the task of benevolent policing in the
domain of book production. The annual reviews were prepared by
over-worked, superannuated Registrars with the assistance of an
inadequate staff. The statistical tables produced were of dubious
quality. Moreover, the categories used to classify books were
basically Eurocentric which hindered more than help understand the
output of the Tamil presses. In general it may be said that the colonial
state's system of acquiring and processing data lacked direction,
which was further undermined by the disqualifications of the
personnel. This, read in conjunction with the weak and inadequate
mechanisms of control used by the state to police the book, which we
shall delineate below, highlight the limitations of the colonial state.

6.3 **Mechanisms of Control**

The colonial state's mechanisms of control were far short
of being adequate. The Registration of Books Act 1867, which was
the lone regulating Act, until the Press Acts of 1910 and 1931 were
passed, lacked sufficient teeth to enforce its provisions. This
inadequacy came to light only in the wake of the Swadeshi movement,
decades after the Act was passed. As the Registrar of Books
remarked, "many printers seem to consider their compliance with the
provisions of the Act with regard to delivery of books to be more a
matter of favour than of duty enjoined by a specific enactment of an
Imperial Act."\(^{34}\) For instance, the Registrar once found a printer
submitting 53 books and pamphlets with the statement saying that
they were all published in the preceding two months, but could do

\(^{34}\) G.O.No. 258, Educational, 30 April 1909.
The office of the Registrar was so weak that sometimes he could not even compel the publisher to countersign the statutory memorandum signed by the printer. He had to address the government on this issue, and ultimately had to leave the publisher to his way as it was ultra vires of the powers of the Registrar to compel the publisher to countersign.36

Given this state of affairs, evasion of the provisions of the Act was widespread. As the Registrar observed, not a single District Registrar of Assurances, who was the man on the spot, had brought to his notice any evasion in the 17 years since the amendment of the Act in 1890.37 Many of the District Registrars were found to have "no knowledge even of printers in the district", and consequently could "exercise no check whatever, over them".38 As E.F. Thomas of the Educational department candidly put it, "The District Registrar as a receiver and forwarder of books, is a confessed failure."39

The police were also not in a position to arrest evasion and assist the Registrar as these offences were non-cognizable, and,

35 ibid.
36 G.O.No. 222, Educational, 9 March 1912.
37 G.O.No. 258, Educational, 30 April 1909.
39 Notes in ibid.
consequently, the police were in the same position as the District Registrars of Assurances and Registrar of Books. Moreover, even on the rare occasions when evasions were detected, the judicial process was protracted, and the penalty meagre. For instance, K.S. Kadirvelu Nadar, proprietor of Vijaya Vikatan Press, Royapuram, Madras was fined only Rs. 10-8-0 by the Chief Presidency Magistrate for failure to deliver copies of some books that had been printed.

The Government of Madras was no doubt perturbed by the "slack state of things". It asked the various District Magistrates to suggest ways to work the Act in a "more satisfactory manner." The District Magistrates were more or less unanimous in the view that there was widespread evasion. The observations of the Acting District Magistrate of Tiruchy typified their response:

I have not had the time to discover any actual cases of default but it certainly does seem probable that books are not properly reported; especially as, without some system of check, no punishment is likely to follow. I am also told that this is the case, though I have not been able to discover definite instances.

Given the political situation in the immediate aftermath of the Swadeshi movement, the District Magistrates generally agreed that the police should be involved in the surveillance and control of

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40 Report of Commissioner of Police, Madras in ibid.
41 G.O.No. 1212, Judicial, Confidential, 10 May 1916.
42 G.O.No. 258, Educational, 30 April 1909.
publications. The District Magistrate of Tanjore went a step further and advocated the exercise of political censorship, and added that the "District Magistrate is excellently fitted by virtue of his other functions and responsibilities, to supervise such a censorship". While many other District Magistrates shared this view, the matter of inadequate staff to handle the new responsibilities was raised.

In the light of the views expressed by the District Magistrates, the government toyed with the idea of regular inspection of presses by the Magistracy and police. It further contemplated the organization of Official Translators under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to translate political literature for purposes of surveillance. In an attempt to tighten the system, it also sought to coordinate the various arms of its regulatory agencies. The District Magistrates were asked to provide the Registrars of Assurances with up-to-date lists of printing presses, which would enable them to keep track of their activity.

It is quite likely that, for the first time in Madras Presidency, the CID was used for policing the book. The Madras Secret Police Abstracts of Intelligence show that CID men kept track of nationalist and 'seditious' literature. How effective the CID was,
it is not certain. But given the small, untrained workforce\textsuperscript{47} that it had, its effectiveness must have been quite limited. Perhaps, they did instill a sense of caution, among the Swadeshi leaders at least, of being shadowed by CID men. In any case, the CID was extremely unpopular, and among the nationalists, was not well-known for its sleuthing abilities. As the \textit{Indian Express} remarked, when the Madras Provincial Cooperative Union Library was raided and all books on Russia seized, "If we must have a Criminal Intelligence Department, it is time that a little more emphasis is laid upon intelligence."\textsuperscript{48}

It was only with the passing of the Indian Press Act in early 1910, more systematic attempts were made to exercise control over political literature. The Government of India was generally unhappy with the existing mechanisms of control.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, through the Press Act, it required all presses to deposit security (unless waived by the local magistrate), and also authorized provincial governments to forfeit any printed material containing prohibited matter. The mode of enforcing the Act emphasized the need for prompt examination of printed materials to detect objectionable matter.\textsuperscript{50}

But this Act meant little to the Tamil publishing world.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{47} G.O.No. 205, Judicial, 4 February 1910; David Arnold who has written an admirable work on the colonial police in Madras, makes no mention of its role in surveilling the book trade. See \textit{Police Power and Colonial Rule}, Delhi, 1986.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Clipping from \textit{Indian Express}, 10 February 1937 in G.O. No. 414, Public (General), Confidential, 26 February 1937.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Letter No. 1272, Judicial, Confidential, 25 August 1910.
\item \textsuperscript{50} G.O.No. 314-5, Judicial, Confidential, 28 February 1910.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In 1910 and 1911, less than eight publications were banned under the Act, while no further forfeiture orders were issued until the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements. Perhaps, the Act's biggest success was the virtual silencing of Subramania Bharati, who was forced into exile and deprived of means to publish his works. Between 1910 and 1914, though 43 presses were asked to furnish security under section 3 of the Act, even such demands were not always backed by political compulsions or perceived threats to the state, but only betrayed the class and colonial prejudices of the officials. For instance, one T.Kanniah Nayudu was ordered to pay a security of Rs. 1,000 "as his educational qualifications were limited to a meagre knowledge of Tamil and he was considered unfit to be a keeper of a press." Similar was the fate of one Parthasarathi Mudaliar, who was a compositor and wanted to start a small press. K. Muhammed Ibrahim was asked to furnish security "as he was a cooly with no property and possessed only a meagre knowledge of Tamil." Security was demanded from Saiyid Ali Sahib not only for the usual reason that he was "unfit to manage a press" but also that the proposed location of his press was "a dwelling house occupied by his gosha women to which access could not be freely obtained." In fact, one C.A. Natesa Mudali was asked to deposit security as he had earlier

51 G.O.No. 1681-2, Judicial, Confidential, 19 July 1915.
52 G.O.No. 190-1, Judicial, Confidential, 27 January 1914.
53 G.O.No. 1068, Judicial, Confidential, 14 May 1915.
54 ibid.
55 G.O.No. 1212, Judicial, Confidential, 10 May 1916.
56 ibid.
been convicted for publishing obscene books, in contravention of the provisions of the Act which provided only for the control of seditious literature.

Ultimately, so marginal was the operation of the Act in Madras Presidency, that an official of the Judicial department remarked that "there is little to comment on in these reports [on the working of the Indian Press Act, 1910] . . . and the reports show that the Act has been applied with leniency as well as with discretion." 

What is important to our present concern is the fact that no new administrative mechanism was evolved to surveil the book trade. The usual methods of surveillance were adopted, and it is evident that the Government of Madras itself was well aware of this state of affairs. When, in 1920, the Government of India decided to discontinue certain precautions regarding the detention of objectionable literature imported into India, a Public department official jotted down the following crisp note on a detailed draft put up on implementing the Government of India decision:

Practically the only action taken on [the] letter...from the GOI was to tell certain officers to be extra watchful. They have probably forgotten all about it now, so no action is required.

57 ibid.
58 ibid.
59 G.O.No. 86, Public, 12 February 1920.
Even after the passing of the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act 1931, which reestablished a system of security demands and enhanced the state's powers to forfeit publications, the weak administrative structure remained. As late as 1931, the Commissioner of Police complained that he had little opportunity to acquire a number of objectionable books as they were all being sent to the Registrar of Books only. He stated that he had to rely on informal sources to acquire some of them, which he then passed on to the CID for action. It was only after this complaint that the Registrar was ordered to bring seditious publications to the notice of the police.

From 1934 on, the government laid down new procedures to strengthen its control of literature. Pressed by the need to take prompt action, it ordered the Registrar to bring seditious literature to its direct notice, instead of the concerned District Magistrates or the Police Commissioner as was earlier the case. This was in addition to the CID's work of forwarding to the government, books suspected of containing seditious matter.

Such tinkering with the mechanisms of control only go to underscore its weakness. An interesting incident further throws this weakness into sharp relief. In 1907, Swadesa Chindu, was published

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60 The Press Act of 1910 was repealed in 1922 by the Press Laws Repeal or Amendment Act XIV of 1922, though the power to order confiscation was retained. See G.O.No. 51, Public, Confidential, 14 June 1922.

61 G.O.No. 1116, Public (General), Confidential, 28 October 1931.

62 G.O.No. 1280, Public (General), Confidential, 17 December 1931.

63 G.O.No. 1198, Public (General), Confidential, 29 November 1934.
from a small press in Komaleswaranpettai, Madras. This chapbook on the Swadeshi movement, did not come to the notice of the government until the Inspector of Customs at the Danushkodi port confiscated a copy of it from a Jaffna passenger on his way to Chidambaram. And the 'ephemeral' chapbook was banned in 1932, a quarter of a century after its publication!\textsuperscript{64}

The weakness of the colonial mechanisms of control over the publishing scene is also reflected in the nature of data that we get from the government records. The abilities of the official Translators on whom the government largely relied to form an estimate of objectionable works, were especially limited. P.S. Sivasamy Iyer's parenthetical remark, "The opinion of the Translator, however good a scholar he may be (which is perhaps more than what can be said of Translators generally)..."\textsuperscript{65} testifies to this. Likewise, the Registrar of Books commenting on a Tamil translation of Mahadev Desai's \textit{Bardoli Satyagraha} by Va. Ra., a leading man of letters, described the translator as "one Va. Ra."\textsuperscript{66} Consequently, the records generated by the colonial state provides little in terms of hard data about the publishing world. Historians of the book in India are not fortunate as Robert Darnton to lay hands on the eighteenth-century files of 500 French authors maintained by a police inspector of the ancien regime.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} G.O.No. 958-9, Public (General), 11 July 1932.
\textsuperscript{65} G.O.No. 1344, Judicial, Confidential, 3 July 1913.
\textsuperscript{66} G.O.No. 1521, Public, 17 September 1935.
\textsuperscript{67} See Robert Darnton, \textit{The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History}, Harmondsworth, 1984, Chap. IV, "A police inspector sorts his files."
The weakness of the colonial state machinery, with special reference to its attempts to police the book, which we have delineated thus far, runs against the nationalist romanticization of the repression let loose by an all-pervasive and panopticon colonial state. The presence of the colonial state was far from being ubiquitous and perhaps approximated to 'the limited Raj' that Anand Yang conceptualizes in his study of agrarian relations in colonial north Bihar.68

6.4 **State Patronage of Books**

In two other areas, viz., patronage and copyright, the colonial state played a marginal role vis-a-vis book-publishing even when compared to its incomplete policing of seditious publications.

The state extended a limited amount of patronage to, in its view, deserving authors and publications. In one exceptional case of government assistance, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer was awarded a grant of Rs. 1,000 to pursue his publication programme.69 But such monetary grants were rare, the usual mode of assistance being the purchase of some copies of books deserving support. In Chapter 2 above, we saw the case of M.V. Ramanujachari's Mahabharatam translation receiving succour from the government due, not in the least, to his persistent efforts.70

69  G.O.No. 600, Educational, 6 September 1905. Also see Chapter 2.
70  See G.O. No. 393, Educational, 14 April 1915; G.O. No. 835, Educational, 3 August 1915 and G.O. No. 543, 12 May 1914. Also see, sec.2.2 above.
But, such support was not only few and far between, but also never really substantial. Apart from this, the scheme of assistance was also not systematized. As late as 1918 (towards the fag end of the age of patronage), the Government of Madras confessed that,

No general rules regulating the extension of Government patronage to authors of books have been prescribed. Each application for patronage is dealt with on its own merits. The Government may patronize an author either by giving him an honorarium or by purchasing as many copies of the book as are required for the use of Government institutions and libraries... It has been held that Government patronage should be restricted to books which are worthy of production and the cost of production of which is out of all proportion to the probable sale. 71

6.5 Copyright

If the state did not have any general rules for the extension of patronage to books, the same could not be said on the issue of copyright. The Government of India passed a few Acts on copyright during the period under study. Act XX of 1847 provided for the award of damages for infringement of copyright. 72 The 1867 Registration of Books Act, under Section 18, provided for the payment of Rs. 2 which gave the regular registration the force of registration for copyright. 73 Consequently, the Registrar of Books, apart from preparing the usual quarterly catalogue of publications

71 G.O.No. 182, Home (Education), 13 February 1918.
72 Nos.114-5, Educational, 15 July 1882.
73 No.254, Educational, 7 August 1867.
also made ready a similar list of copyright registrations. His annual report was usually wound up with some dry statistics about registration of copyright and inane remarks about how the increase in the numbers reflected the growing awareness on the part of ‘native’ printers and publishers. This separate quarterly catalogue of copyright was later abolished at the instance of the Government of India, as it was considered superfluous. In its place, a new column for copyright was incorporated into the quarterly list of books registered.

But, this whole business of copyright registration was little more than a farce. As the government itself was aware,

The fact that copyright is registered does not "secure" copyright, which subsists equally before and after registration and need not necessarily be possessed by the person who registers proprietorship ...; the entry in the book of registry or in the catalogue does not do more than serve as prima facie proof... Confusion marked the functioning of the Registrar of Books as he occasionally met with objections when copyright was being registered. But more numerous were the cases wherein, during the course of registering books under the 1867 Act, he found the prevalent practice of inserting formulae like ‘copyright registered’ on the title page of the book when they had not been actually so

74 See, for instance, annual reports for 1886 & 1889 in Nos. 305-6, Educational, 21 June 1887 & Nos. 221-2, Educational, 17 March 1890.
75 G.O. No. 35-6, Educational, 23 January 1902.
76 G.O.No. 166, Educational, Confidential, 22 March 1902.
registered.\footnote{G.O.No. 111, Educational, 25 February 1909.} The Advocate General, P.S. Sivasamy Iyer reiterated the view that registration of copyright only provided \textit{prima facie} evidence of proprietorship which could be rebutted by other evidence. Regarding the wrongful insertion of 'copyright registered' on the title page, he opined that though it was morally objectionable, it was not punishable under the Indian Penal Code.\footnote{ibid.}

The Government of India passed a new Copyright Act in 1914,\footnote{G.O.No. 612, Educational, 26 May 1914.} which was modelled on the English Act.\footnote{G.O.No. 1150, Educational, 4 December 1913.} The Government of Madras played little part in the deliberations preceding the passing of the Act. As Murray Hammick of the Education department openly confessed when the draft law came to him for comments, "I don't desire to add anything. It is a subject on which I know very little."\footnote{G.O. No. 782, Educational, 26 August 1912.}

What ultimately emerges is that the issue of copyright was marginal to Tamil publishing. As J. Talboys Wheeler commented in his 'Memorandum on the Registration of Vernacular Publications',

\begin{quote}
In this country, it is scarcely necessary to say that conditions of publishing are altogether different: the sale is small, the price is small, and \textit{there} is little, if any, \textit{distinction between copyright and non-copyright}. Authors being in general satisfied with the glory of having their works printed.\footnote{Nos. 45-8, Educational, 19 March 1867. Emphasis added.}
\end{quote}
As we have argued earlier (Chapter 2), in a colonial economy and society, wherein the middle class had not fully emerged, and a literary market also had not developed, the book did not become a commodity. Consequently, copyright hardly ever was an issue. Even in the case of popular publishing (see section 5.3.2), where the books meant the very daily bread to its producers, they resorted to other means to hold on to the 'copyright.'

6.6 Policing the Book

In the light of the foregoing discussion on the various Acts of the colonial state and the mechanisms of control it evolved to surveil the publishing world, we shall now seek to explore the actual policing of books. This section will consist of two parts, wherein the colonial state’s handling of erotic and obscene works, and political literature will be dealt with separately.

6.6.1 Eroticism and Expurgation

The benevolent paternalism of the British Raj, impelled upon it, not only to enforce political control, but also police the morals of the colonized. In Madras Presidency the government’s attention turned towards the supposedly morally objectionable and

83 For a rare instance of copyright infringement being taken up judicially, see Ananda Bodhini, August 1917. N. Munisami Mudaliar successfully sued P.T. Masilamani Mudaliar, a printer for infringing his copyright in his annual almanac. The Presidency Magistrate, George Town, Madras awarded damages worth Rs. 20 or three days of simple imprisonment on default.
obscene works. It was customary to end the annual reports of the Registrar of Books with a comment on the "moral and political tone of the vernacular literary output."^84

That Christian missionary pressure was behind the state's "crusade against erotic works" is evident.^85 There was a consistent demand by the missionaries for the diffusion of secular and morally correct literature in India.^86 The most strident attack on government policy towards vernacular literature and education was launched by John Murdoch. Murdoch's attack centred on the government system of education which was "professedly based on principle of perfect religious neutrality."^87 His criticism of obscenity in literature was part of his overall critique of oriental culture which was seen to be pagan and anti-christian. As he put it,

Probably few Europeans in India are aware of the vile character of some of the productions of the Native Press. The lowest savages on the face of the earth have not utterly lost all feelings of decency - there is generally a shred of clothing, however small, on the body. But Indian authors, in some cases, seem to have sunk beneath this

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^84 See, for instance, annual reports for the years 1895 & 1896, G.O. No. 125-6, Educational, 5 March 1896 & G.O. No. 133-4, Educational, 5 March 1897.

^85 Note of H.A. Stuart, Member of Governor's Council in G.O.No. 874, Judicial, Confidential, 6 May 1913. Emphasis added.


^87 Nos. 47-50, Educational, 29 March 1871. Also see Bishop Caldwell's note in *ibid* for similar views.
level. In a Tamil poem, a portion of which was prescribed for examination by the Madras University, there is a glowing description of what cannot be named. . . . . The scenes which took place in the bridal chamber are related at length in another part of the poem above mentioned . . . . There are whole treatises of a still worse character. 88

Murdoch’s criticism was specially focused on textbooks, and he even authored a pamphlet, ‘The Idolatrous and Immoral Teachings of Some Government and University Text Books’. 89 In it, he advocated the expurgation of objectionable passages, and suggested making selections instead of prescribing the full text. He himself set an example, as head of the Christian Vernacular Education Society, by issuing a series of bowdlerized editions. 90

This moral concern was shared by the newly emerging English-educated Indian elite also. The Combaconum Athenoeum took serious exception to the prescription of Adi Parvam of Mahabharatam for the Matriculation examination. It called upon the government, "who occupy the place of father to the children concerned", to remedy this grievance. 91

88 Nos. 45-8, Educational, 19 March 1867.
89 For the text of this pamphlet, see Nos. 16-18, Educational, 10 December 1874.
90 For the list, see Murdoch, op.cit., pp.212-214.
91 For the relevant extract from Combaconum Athenoeum, August 1872, see No.3, Educational, 1 October 1872. For government action on this issue, see Nos. 6-7, Educational, 1 November 1872.
Similarly, C.W. Damodaram Pillai, the eminent scholar, also excised some words from his edition of the sangam classic Kalithogai, keeping students in mind.\(^{92}\) The new breed of teachers no doubt were embarrassed to teach such passages. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer recollects how he refrained from teaching an erotic passage from Praboda Chandrodhayam to his students and gave the excuse that no question would be asked in the university examination. Much to his consternation, the examiners set questions from that very passage.\(^{93}\)

Apart from the government action regarding 'immoral' passages in textbooks, the earliest reference we have of its intervention in the sphere of morality, is the case of Dambachari Vilasam. This was a play written by Kasi Viswanata Mudaliar, a retired tahsildar and Brahmo Samajist. It was centred around a profligate young man who comes to the city for studying, is seduced by a courtesan and is ruined. The book was first brought to the notice of the government by the Registrar of books, which sought to prosecute the actors and producers of the enacted play. The Senior Magistrate of the Town Police observed that "there was no office under the [Madras] Government in the position of a censor analogous to that of Lord Chamberlain", and dismissed the case with costs.\(^{94}\) The government, in spite of the Advocate General's advice, had

\(^{92}\) Kalithogai, Madras, 1887, Preface.

\(^{93}\) U.V.Swaminatha Iyer, Nallurai Kovai, 3rd volume, Madras, 1938 (reprint 1952), pp.40-43. Ultimately it turned out that the students answered the question well, as, out of curiosity, they had carefully read the untaught passage. For an instance of a student asking uncomfortable questions during the course of a class lecture on an erotic work, and how his teacher V.G.Suriyanarayana Sastri tackled it brilliantly, see Parthimal Kalaignar Nootrandu Malar, Madurai, 1970, p. 112.

\(^{94}\) No. 71, Educational, 28 February 1873. For full details of the case, also see No. 306, Educational, 1 November 1872; No. 5A-C, Educational, 5 February 1873.
proceeded with the case "to ascertain whether the law is so powerless for the repression of outrages against public decency as is supposed, in view of its amendment if necessary." 95

After this prosecution, we find a lull in the government's policing of morality in publications or at least, its actions went unreported. In the first decade of this century, we find occasional references to some action against obscenity in print. The government was particularly concerned about the practice of sending price-lists of cures for impotence and venereal diseases to students addressed en masse. It ordered the postal authorities to intercept and forward them to the CID, apart, of course, from seditious literature. 96 The state was also perturbed by "indelicate and indecent advertisements [which] lower the tone of the public press", and wrote confidentially to journals like Vikataratinam, Vaisiya Mitiran, Dravidabimani and Hindunesan, and persuaded them to desist from advertising aphrodisiacs and the like. 97

In fact, one official of the Education department actually took the trouble to cut out similar advertisements ("out of curiosity" as he put it), from respected dailies like Hindu and Madras Standard, and wondered if the government should patronize them by subscribing through its institutions like colleges and schools. 98 In some specific cases, certain books considered to be particularly

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95 ibid.
96 G.O.No. 1273, Judicial, Confidential, 25 August 1910.
97 G.O.No. 1804, Judicial, Confidential, 5 September 1913.
98 G.O.No. 186, Educational, Confidential, 29 March 1911.
obnoxious were seized by the CID and destroyed, and the booksellers and publishers, prosecuted. 99

It was not until the early 1910s that any serious debate on the question of what constituted obscenity and how to suppress it was raised. It all began when, in 1913, the government instituted prosecution against the publishers of some highly regarded Tamil literary works, viz., Kavadi Chindu and Viralividu Thoothu and Telugu literary works like Bilhaneeeyamu on the ground that they were obscene. 100 There was a spate of protests against the government's move. A public meeting of "Tamil Pandits and English educated men of standing, deeply interested in the study of Tamil literature" was conducted to condemn the prosecution. The meeting insisted that Kavadi Chindu was a religious work and had no intention of exciting sexual passions. The classical nature of Viralividu Thoothu was emphasized, and it was contended that the book exposed in unmistakable terms the evils and dangers of immoral life. A general demand was put forward that the prohibition of such books would spell disaster to Tamil literature. In short, the "ancient and literary" character of the works was underscored. 101

The Madurai Tamil Sangam submitted a similar memorial opposing the government's attempt to prohibit the books. It went one step further when it tried to legitimize the books by using theological arguments.

99 See, for instance, G.O.No. 208, Judicial, Confidential, 1 February 1911.
100 G.O.No. 348, Judicial, Confidential, 4 March 1912.
101 Memorandum submitted by S.Somasundaram Pillai, et. al. in G.O.No. 289, Judicial, Confidential, 11 February 1913.
One of the ancient methods of representing the human soul and Almighty Providence is by characterizing their relation as similar to that subsisting between a man and a woman drawn to each other by the force of reciprocal love and by viewing the birth, sufferings and sorrows of the mundane existence of the human beings as analogous to the painful consequences of separation between such lovers.\textsuperscript{102}

One P.Narayana Iyer of Madurai, in a personal communication to P.S. Sivasami Iyer, Member of the Executive Council, came down heavily on the police action: "If the standard of morality as understood by the ignorant police is to fix the standard of Tamil literature, I can simply say that our plight is a sad and contemptible one." He further expressed the fear that if the police were allowed to have their way even religious classics like Thevaram, Nalayira Divya Prabandam, Tiruvachagam and Tiruppugal would be banned.\textsuperscript{103}

Professor M. Rangachariar, and G. Venkataranga Rao, Chairman of the Telugu Board of Examiners, University of Madras, put forward the case for similar Telugu books. Given their proximity to the state and its discourse, they argued their case in terms more convincing to the state.

The standard of taste which determines the amount of openness in erotic description, which may be held to be appropriately permissible, is apt to vary from time to time

\textsuperscript{102} ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} ibid.
in every country, and is also affected by the idiosyncrasies of particular writers and also their patrons and clientele ... it cannot be conducive to the best interests of literary scholarship and the knowledge of the history of literary art to interfere with the integrity of artistic work produced by competent authors.  

In a very perceptive analysis, they further added that literary works should not be judged through translation in a foreign tongue (as the state was in fact doing): "... the very process of translation adds a touch of vulgarity or broadness to description." In an attempt to be more convincing they even argued their case by citing parallels from western literature. P. Narayana Iyer drew attention to the 'Song of Songs of Solomon' in the Bible. G. Venkataranga Rao and M. Rangachariar referred to the eroticism in the works of Calallus, Tribulus, Ovid, Chaucer, Marlowe and Shakespeare.

But, despite these vehement protests, the middle-class intellectuals shared many of the basic assumptions of their colonial masters. Their arguments were set within the discourse of Victorian morality with all its cultural and class prejudices.

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104 G.O.No. 348, Judicial, Confidential, 4 March 1912.
105 ibid.
106 G.O.No. 289, Judicial, Confidential, 11 February 1913.
107 G.O.No. 348, Judicial, Confidential, 4 March 1913. A.G.Cardew, the Chief Secretary, termed the attempts to draw parallels as "absolutely preposterous". See G.O.No.944, Public, Confidential, 2 August 1912.
Both the colonial rulers and the middle-class intellectuals shared a certain kind of contempt for the people of the lower orders of society. If J.N. Atkinson of the Public department remarked, "There is a material difference between publishing cheap editions [of obscene books] for sale to general public and the bringing out of a very limited edition at high price for the use of scholars," middle-class intellectuals too laboured the same point more stridently. As the scholars of the Madurai Tamil Sangam put it, the books in question were "written in an abstruse style and was intended to be read only by Tamil scholars and by others who have attained a high degree of proficiency in the knowledge of Tamil." The intellectuals who conducted the public meeting to condemn the prohibition of the books, made the defence of their privileged position even more elaborately:

\[\text{Such works were written for the benefit of particular sections of humanity and to suit the different ages and were not intended for the general public. The press did not then exist and books were not within the reach of the common public. They were written only to benefit the learned, the devoted and so very limited circles of men, whose minds these passages of rare occurrence cannot poison. It is very wrong to suppose that the minds of well-educated and pious men will be turned by such occasional passages,}\]

and then went on to add, brazenly betraying their contempt for the lower orders,

109 ibid. For similar views expressed by A.G. Cardew, see ibid.
110 G.O.No. 1344, Judicial, Confidential, 11 February 1913.
111 Clipping from Hindu, 31 July 1912 in ibid.
If the Police wish to protect the minds of the common people, the right books that they have to direct their efforts against are the low-priced Tamil novels that are daily coming out of the press. They have also to attack the many advertisements wherein most indecent pictures of the fair sex are made to meet the eye of the man in the street, for these are the things that poison the common minds.

Despite the shared assumptions, the chorus of the middle-class intellectuals surprised the colonial officials. Their arguments cut no ice with the bureaucrats: "We have had before us a very surprising spectacle of highly respectable Indian gentlemen solemnly writing to Government on the ground that they occur in classics..."\textsuperscript{112} as one of them put it. This stemmed from the colonial perception of vernacular literature which was defined by Orientalism. In the comments of the British officials in the Government Orders, we find "an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex". As Edward Said points out, this association is a "remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient... [which is] singularly unvaried."\textsuperscript{113}

The debate only served to reinforce the Orientalism of the colonial officials but a clearly laid-out procedure for handling obscene publications also emerged from it. Given the strident responses to using the police for these purposes, the government now entrusted the task to the CID. While the power to order prosecution of "all modern writing which are so obviously obscene as to call for

\textsuperscript{112} G.O.No. 1344, Judicial, Confidential, 3 July 1913.

immediate suppression" was given to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, CID and the Railways, similar power for taking action against classics was given to the Inspector General, who was expected to keep in mind the following considerations: works published not later than the seventeenth century should not be prosecuted unless it appeared from the circumstances of publication that the object was to appeal to pruriency and attract readers by presenting obscene ideas; facts like whether the language was archaic or not, whether the style was abstruse or clear, etc., were also to be taken account of. In the specific case of Kavadi Chindu and Viralividu Thoothu, while the former was not banned, only expurgated editions of the latter were permitted.

The broad policy and procedures set by the Government of Madras in 1913 stood the test of time. For instance, in 1927, the reputed Telugu publisher Vavilla Venkateswara Sastrulu got into trouble for selling unexpurgated versions of some classics. Given his standing and reputation, he rallied testimonials from a wide range of 'respectable men' like university syndicate members, professors and scholars and tried to get the government's orders revoked. Even a deputation of eminent persons waited on the Governor and presented a detailed memorandum with a scholarly analysis of 'Obscenity in Literature' discussing the various views on obscenity, drawing their

114 G.O.No. 1344, Judicial, Confidential, 3 July 1913.
115 ibid. For reviews of the expurgated edition of Viralividu Thoothu, see Kumaran, 21 June 1928; Swadesamitran, 25 May 1929. Many years later, in 1949, when the Tamil scholar Raya. Chockalingam republished the book, an expurgation order was issued, citing the 1913 G.O. See G.O.No. 3397, Public (General A), Confidential, 7 October 1949.
ammunition from English literature, British law, Indian treatises, etc. But the government declined to interfere considering the "definite principles" it had laid down in 1913.\(^{117}\)

Consequently there was little change in government policy towards obscenity and eroticism in books well up to the transfer of power in 1947. Orientalist stereotypes of the sensual East continued to predominate and police action continued to be taken on obscene and erotic works. At best Orientalist colonial officials could only be patronizing, as the following remarks of A.G. Cardew, Chief Secretary to Government of Madras, made on various occasions when certain books came up to him for action on grounds of obscenity, show:

The objectionable passages appear to be few and even these are quite mild for an Indian writer.\(^{118}\) .... A high degree of delicacy is not apparently expected in this country and an occasional reference to sexual intercourse even in rather broad terms, is possibly quite an everyday affair in native writings.\(^{119}\)

The *Tayykilavikal Talukku* seems to contain hints on etiquette for dancing girls. It does not seem to be very bad, as these native books go.\(^{120}\)

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117 G.O.No. 545, Public, Confidential, 18 June 1928.
118 G.O.No. 1535, Judicial, Confidential, 29 July 1913.
119 G.O.No. 1200, Judicial, Confidential, 18 June 1913.
120 G.O.No. 1198, Judicial, Confidential, 18 June 1913.
typified in the remark of H.A. Stuart, Member of the Governor's Executive Council, at the end of the 1913 debate: "I hope I shall not for a very long time be obliged to read such filth as this again." 121

6.6.2 The State and Political Literature

In section 6.6.1 we discussed the attitude of the state toward obscene and erotic literature. Now we turn to the crucial aspect of control over political literature. That the colonial state was extremely sensitive to any threat to its existence needs no reiteration. The state's concern over this domain of literature will be dealt with in three parts, each of which will deal with the publications of the nationalist, the self-respect and communist movements.

6.6.2.1 Nationalist Literature.

In section 6.3, we had elaborated on the mechanisms of control devised by the Government of Madras to police the book. We found that the state had very limited capabilities, and it was far from being all-pervasive or panopticon. Given this structural limitation, the state's control over political literature, especially nationalist literature, tended to be essentially reactive, impulsive responses to gathering political storms. The state's proscription orders clustered around times of intense political activity and then petered out as the state weathered the storm.

The Swadeshi movement was the first period of intense

121 G.O.No. 874, Judicial, Confidential, 6 May 1913.
political agitation with any semblance of mass mobilization. The government attempted to keep a close watch over seditious literature. Political leaders and writers like G. Subramania Iyer, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Bharati, Subramania Siva and V.V.S. Iyer were shadowed.\footnote{Madras Secret Police Abstracts of Intelligence, volumes for 1906, 1908, 1910 and 1913.} An attempt was also made to restrict the passage of seditious literature to students, who were for the first time being mobilized for such political movements, by ordering the postal authorities to handover postal articles addressed to students as a community.\footnote{G.O.No. 758, Educational, Confidential, 10 November 1908; G.O.No. 224A, Educational, Confidential, 16 April 1909.}

But, it was not until the Indian Press Act was passed in early 1910, did the government have legislative powers to enforce its writ.\footnote{For the various Press Acts as responses to active political agitations and movements, see N.Gerald Barrier, Banned : Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907-1947, Missouri, 1974.} Works like \textit{Sri Aurobindo Ghosh Charitiram},\footnote{G.O.No. 1059, Judicial, Confidential, 15 July 1910.} and V.V.S. Iyer's biography of Garibaldi \footnote{G.O.No. 1403, Judicial, Confidential, 15 September 1910.} were banned under the Act. The government was especially concerned about strongly worded pamphlets with marked religious overtones like \textit{Sadarana Varushathiya Vaikunda Ekadasiandru Sri Bhagawan Thiruvaimalarandaruliyurukkira Akgnai} (The Commandment of God on the day of Vaikunda Ekadesi in the year Sadarana),\footnote{G.O.No. 581, Judicial, Confidential, 30 March 1911.}
Especially in the aftermath of the assassination of Ashe, Collector of Tirunelveli, there was virtual panic in the government as it reacted impulsively. Subramania Bharati’s Kanavu (Dream) and Aril Oru Pangu (One-sixth) ‘a harmless love poem and a social reform novelette’ were banned for no better reason that they were either mentioned in the correspondence, or found in possession, of the accused in the Ashe Murder Case.

In another instance, J.F. Bryant, District Magistrate of Ramnad, made unreasonable demands for security deposits for the opening of new presses, under the 1910 Press Act. When a year later, he was called upon by the government to explain his action, he replied from Dorset, reminding the government of the "considerable excitement" prevailing at the time of the Ashe murder and drew attention to the circulation of "highly seditious matter". "Such being the conditions," he confessed, "it is possible that the provisions of the Act were somewhat rigorously enforced and the opening of new

128 G.O.No. 1036, Judicial, Confidential, 24 June 1911.
129 G.O.No. 1056, Judicial, Confidential, 27 June 1911.
131 G.O.No. 1588, Judicial, Confidential, 11 October 1911; also G.O.No. 1909-10, Judicial, Confidential, 6 December 1911.
presses were discouraged in certain places - even at the risk of punishing the innocent for the guilty."\(^{132}\)

Further, given the circulation of anti-British literature from the French enclave of Pondicherry, wherein Subramania Bharati, V.V.S. Iyer, Aurobindo and others had taken refuge, the government, apart from banning its entry into British India, also empowered the CID to detain letters and parcels suspected of containing seditious literature.\(^{133}\)

Despite all these measures, the Madras Government’s harvest of banned literature during the Swadeshi phase was meagre: 3 in 1910, 6 in 1911, 1 in 1912\(^{134}\) and nothing at all in the subsequent years until the Non-cooperation movement. The periods of lull were marked by routine annual reports on the working of the Act.

While a number of publications were banned during the Non-cooperation and Khilafat movements, it made little impact on the Tamil publishing scene, as most of the proscribed books were in Urdu, Hindustani and other non-Tamil languages.\(^\text{135}\) During this phase, apart from proscription of books and security demands on presses, the government also blacklisted a number of presses from government work, as it practically amounted to indirectly subsidizing

\(^{132}\) G.O.No. 1539, Judicial, Confidential, 27 September 1912.

\(^{133}\) G.O.No. 1211, Judicial, Confidential, 27 July 1911; G.O. No. 353, Judicial, Confidential, 24 February 1911; G.O. No. 953-4, Judicial, Confidential, 4 May 1915.

\(^{134}\) G.O.No. 1681-2, Judicial, Confidential,19 July 1915.

\(^{135}\) See History of Freedom Movement, volume nos. 83, 85 & 86, Tamil Nadu Archives.
them. Such black-listed presses sometimes numbered as many as a few scores. Even then, the government was quite lenient when it provided the caveat that its order should be carried out with "regard being had to local conditions." What effect this move to blacklist presses had on the publishing scene, is not clear though presses like the Sadhu Achukoodam of Thiru. Vi. Ka. were on the list. In all likelihood, the impact was minimal as many of the presses seem to have survived.

In any case, once the storm blew over, status quo ante was more or less established. As C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Law Member of the Governor's Council, remarked in 1926, "Now that the Non-cooperation movement is, to all intent and purposes dead, the bigger question may be considered as to whether it really serves any purpose to discriminate between our presses and anothers".

The next phase of feverish proscription took place during the Civil Disobedience movement. Hundreds of publications were scrutinized and scores of them were banned. The Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act, 1931 gave the government special powers to act, and it was put to effective use. The scores of Government Orders that were generated through this process of political control does not reveal any fresh outlook, but as a spin-off we get some fascinating details about the world of popular publishing (see Chapter

137 G.O.No. 142, Public, Confidential, 15 February 1922.
138 G.O.No. 153, Public, Confidential, 23 February 1926.
5). This domain of publishing came to the extended notice of the government, possibly for the first time, and consequently much valuable light was thrown on it. While in 1931 only five Tamil books were forfeited, in 1932 no less than 49 were proscribed, many of which were popular books.139

With Congress taking over office in 1937, there was a slight shift in government policy followed for many decades. Within months of assuming office, C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) as the Premier, revoked the ban on some mild nationalist agitprop. As he remarked about M.S. Subramania Iyer's books:

I know that this writer's books do not infringe the rule of violence and perhaps not even the strict bounds of the rule of sedition. They may be safely allowed and the ban removed.140

But Rajaji's scheme of de-proscription was selective and shrewd. Not only were the publications of the self-respect movement excluded (see below, 6.6.2.2), but with the Congress' eyes set on the Transfer of Power and its implications for stability, law and order, even some strong nationalist books were not spared. As Rajaji observed, they were

... written long ago when an active movement was going on. To put it in fresh circulation now by an order of cancellation of the old order would, in the opinion of the

139 G.O.No. 1591, Public (General), 17 July 1946; for a partial list for the year 1932, see Letter no. 1653, Public (General), 22 December 1932.
140 G.O.No. 2158, Public (General), Confidential, 12 November 1937.
Government, lead to misunderstanding of the law as to the limits of freedom of expression of opinion.\footnote{141}

Rajaji further suggested that the authors may "revise their book[s] carefully with due regard to existing circumstances and apply for orders" in respect of them.\footnote{142} Rajaji's actions are reminiscent of the poignant climax of Orwell's Animal Farm, where the excluded animals look from man to pig and pig to man and cannot distinguish between them. No wonder E.M.S. Namboodiripad complained to the Congress Working Committee in October 1937:

... genuine Congressmen would feel sorry that the representatives of the Congress who were hitherto speaking the language of independence and struggle have begun to speak the language of "Law and Order" of the old regime.\footnote{143}

\subsection*{6.6.2.2 Publications of the Self-respect movement}

Since its inception by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy in mid-1927, the self-respect movement launched a strident campaign against Brahminism, caste and religion. Viewing Brahminism as the primary contradiction of society, the thrust of its campaign was directed towards it. Consequently, agitation against the colonial state took the backseat, and given its links with the Justice Party, the self-respect movement was often characterized as pro-British.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item 141 ibid.
\item 142 ibid. For the Congress' policy during the interim government, see G.O.No. 1591, Public, Confidential, 17 July 1946.
\item 143 Quoted in David Arnold, \textit{op.cit.}, p.218.
\end{itemize}
Despite this, its publications drew no less attention from the state. While a number of its publications were scrutinized by the government, quite a few of them were banned on the ground that they "excited disaffection between the various classes of His Majesty's subjects". For instance, *Suyamariyathai Sangitha Rathinam* was banned on the ground that it contained an outrageous attack on brahmins. Similarly, some works attacking Christianity from a rationalist viewpoint were also proscribed. The ones that escaped proscription were also seen to contain objectionable passages, but as one official commented, "we cannot muzzle 'rational' criticism of religion unless it is clearly malicious."

Further, given the existence of a radical socialist faction (consisting of M. Singaravelu, P. Jeevanandam, Sathankulam A. Raghavan and others) within the self-respect movement, the government was wary of its literary output. For instance, when a publishing house named Karpagam Company began to issue a series of self-respect pamphlets, the first of which was penned by M. Singaravelu, the CID was asked to keep a watch over the other books in the series.

But the cause celebre of the day was the proscription of the Tamil translation of Bhagat Singh's "Why I am an Atheist" (Nan

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144 Letter no. 369, Home, 26 April 1936.
145 G.O.No. 58, Public (General), 10 January 1935.
146 For instance, *Pathirigalin Brahmachariya Latchanam*. See G.O.No. 418, Public (General), Confidential, 8 March 1935.
147 G.O.No. 1579, Public (General), Confidential, 28 September 1935.
148 G.O.No. 1456, Public (General), Confidential, 12 November 1932.
Naathigan - En?). Translated by P. Jeevanandam, who later emerged as the most prominent of the communist leaders of Tamilnadu, it was published (very cheaply, like all other self-respect books) by the Pagutharivu Noorpathippu Kazhagam (Rationalist Publishing House), an organ of the self-respect movement. The fear of the spectre of Bhagat Singh's fame still loomed large in the colonial mind, and the book was promptly banned. 149 529 copies of the book were seized from the Unmai Vilakkam Press, another organ of the movement, and subsequently destroyed. 150

The government did not stop there, but launched a prosecution against Jeevanandam, and E.V. Krishnasamy Naicker, the elder brother of Periyar and publisher of the book. The Chief Secretary, G.T.H. Bracken brushed aside the Advocate General's advice not to prosecute, with the brusque comment, "The Advocate General is hard to satisfy." 151 Another official explained the rationale behind the prosecution in the following terms:

... If this passage .... is not calculated to bring government into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against it, I am not able to see what else can ....

The object of the pamphlet may be to advocate Atheism but we are not so much concerned with the object as with the intent underlying the passage and the effect it is likely to produce on the minds of its readers .... 152

149 G.O.No. 1070, Public (General), Confidential, 22 October 1934.
151 G.O.No. 211, Public (General), Confidential, 2 February 1935.
152 ibid.
Ultimately, on the advice of Periyar, Jeevanandam and E.V. Krishnasamy tendered an apology and escaped imprisonment.

With the assumption of office by the Congress, the self-respect movement was in for worse times. In the context of the revocation of proscription on some publications (see section 6.6.2.1), Periyar wrote to the government asking for both revocation of proscription and the return of seized copies of his Kudiarasu Kalambagam. Rajaji, the Premier, wrote a crisp note on the file, which reveals his shrewdness.

This is a 'test application'. So the orders should give reasons for rejecting the application. The petitioner may be informed that copies of proscribed books are generally destroyed after 3 months and cannot be returned and that the book contains passages (seriously) provocative of great class hatred and highly offensive general allegations against whole classes of people and consequently the order cannot be reversed.

Similarly, especially in the context of the anti-Hindi agitation launched by the self-respect movement, Rajaji ordered that the publishers of self-respect books "attacking particular castes and communities" should be "orally" warned.

153 G.O. No. 999, Public (General), Confidential, 13 June 1935.
154 This term has been struck off by Rajaji, ibid.
155 Note by Rajaji, dated 13 October 1937, in ibid.
156 The word 'orally' has been inserted by Rajaji - an afterthought to conceal the extra-legal character of his instructions. Note dated 13 August 1938, G.O.No. 1417, Public (General), Confidential, 17 August 1938.
No wonder Periyar reacted viciously in his *Kudi Arasu*. In a characteristically hard-hitting editorial, he exposed the hollow claims of the Congress regarding freedom of expression and condemned the partisan handling of revocation orders by the Rajaji ministry. Periyar demonstrated how only Rajaji’s own castemen and some stooges profited from the government’s orders.157

Rigorous state control over the Dravidian movement’s publications continued to be exercised by the various Congress ministries from the mid-1940s through the 1950s, which is outside the scope of our present thesis.

6.6.2.3  *Communist Literature*

The spectre of communism haunted the colonial government, especially during the 1930s. Though the actual strength of the Communist party may not have warranted such paranoia, the government’s surveillance of communists and their activities bordered on the witch-hunt. When, in 1934, the Retrenchment Committee recommended the reduction in staff of the office of the Registrar of Books, the government not only accepted the Registrar’s plea against this on the grounds of burgeoning publishing activity, but also raised the bogey of communism. As an official of the Public department remarked:

.... as communist doctrines seem to be becoming increasingly popular there can be no relaxation at present in the

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157  *Kudi Arasu*, 24 October 1937, editorial.
strictness of scrutiny.\textsuperscript{158}

The Chief Secretary affirmed:

We have been tightening up our scrutiny of publications very definitely and insisting on special advance reports on communist literature generally.\textsuperscript{159}

Therefore, not surprisingly, the Government of Madras wholeheartedly welcomed the 'Communist Notification' of the Government of India, which prohibited the import of any literature emanating from the Comintern and its affiliates, and its reprints.\textsuperscript{160}

Though some communist publications were banned, some presses harassed and a few libraries searched,\textsuperscript{161} the harvest far from matched the paranoia.

6.7 \textit{Concluding Remarks}

Our discussion of the colonial state and its policing of books shows that the state was marginal, if not epiphenomenal, to the world of Tamil publishing. Despite being armed with wideranging legislative powers, its administrative structure and mechanisms of control were weak. As a consequence, the state was not a dominating presence over the Tamil publishing scene. The Registrar of Books, the officer on whom the state relied heavily for information of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{158} G.O.No. 322, Public (General), 23 February 1935.
  \item \textsuperscript{159} ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{160} G.O. No. 1227, Public (General), 24 September 1932.
  \item \textsuperscript{161} See G.O.No. 1619, Home, Confidential, 3 August 1936; G.O.No.414, Public (General), Confidential, 26 February 1937.
\end{itemize}
publications, produced reviews and statistics of dubious value. Hardly any worthwhile knowledge about Tamil publishing was generated (as the footnote references of the present thesis may suggest: only this chapter, on the role of the state, is based on governmental records). The state could exercise very little control over literary production. Consequently, for instance, the impact of censorship in revolutionary England cannot be compared to that in the Tamil context. As Christopher Hill argues, censorship was so powerful that it even enforced a sort of self-censorship on the part of authors.\textsuperscript{162} In Tamilnadu, though a number of books were banned, few literary producers were persecuted or prosecuted or even subjected to direct censorship. Perhaps, only Subramania Bharati was an exception: he was shadowed closely during his exile in Pondicherry, and had to consent to unofficial 'censorship' for a brief period.\textsuperscript{163} Though M.S. Subramania Iyer complained to the Premier Rajaji that the proscription of his books frightened the press-keepers and his readers,\textsuperscript{164} that does not seem to have prevented him from publishing dozens of books. Even in the case of obscene and erotic books, where the colonial government could claim a reasonable amount of success, for every such book banned or expurgated scores of others circulated freely.

\textsuperscript{162} C. Hill, 'Censorship and English Literature', in The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill, volume 1, Brighton, 1985.
\textsuperscript{164} G.O.No. 2158, Public (General), Confidential, 12 November 1937.