Chapter 1

THE AGE OF PATRONAGE

c.1850-c.1905

In 1835 Charles Metcalfe, the Governor-General of India, repealed the earlier press laws that had put restrictions on Indian ownership of printing presses. The years following this annulment saw many Indians launching printing presses. A number of Tamil books began to issue from such Indian-owned presses. It is only from this period, with the beginnings of active participation of local people in printing and publishing enterprise, that a social history of book-publishing in Tamilnadu becomes possible.

In this chapter we make an attempt to study the material basis of literary production in Tamilnadu in the second half of the nineteenth century. We shall show how certain forms of patronage which sustained literary production in early colonial Tamilnadu (pre-1850) persisted even when printing technology was being harnessed for literary production. Our emphasis will be on the class composition of this patronage and its subsequent changes resulting from changing socio-economic conditions. The nature of literary production, as well as the cultural importance and authority that literary production and patronage carried will also be touched upon. The chapter will end by tracing the decline of patronage in Tamil book-publishing. This delineation will be done by an analysis of three important aspects of patronage-publishing: the arangettram (premiere), the sirappu payiram (the prefatory poem) and the title page.
1.1 **Poets, Patrons and Forms of Patronage**

In Tamil society, elite literary production through the centuries (dating as far back as the pre-Christian era) had essentially been sustained by patronage: of tribal chieftains during the sangam period and of feudal lords and royalty in medieval times.¹ The forms of patronage that survived in the second half of the nineteenth century were those which had emerged and become ossified during the Nayakkar period. The Nayakkar kings and palayakkarars, who reigned in pre- and early colonial Tamilnadu, and the religious madams (monasteries) and zamins as expropriators of material surplus were the patrons of art and literature.²

1.1.1 **Poets and Patronage**

The study of the literary career of Meenatchisundaram Pillai (1815-1876), hailed as Mahavidwan and arguably the most celebrated Tamil scholar of his day, may serve as an entry point into studying the age of patronage. Born in 1815 in Tiruchirapalli, he had early education under his father’s supervision and was later tutored by some traditional Tamil teachers. Even in his youth he showed remarkable powers of versification, and was one of the prolific poets of his times.³

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³ Biographical details of Meenatchisundaram Pillai are drawn from the brilliant biography by his illustrious pupil U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, Sri Meenatchisundaram Pillaiavargal Charithiram, 2 Vols, Madras, 1938-1940, (Tamil University, Thanjavur facsimile reprint 1986). Henceforth referred to as SMPC.
Meenatchisundaram Pillai spent most of his time in the company of young students who accompanied him everywhere. His time was divided between teaching and verse-making, all his material needs being taken care of by his patrons. His literary output, for the most part, consisted of thala puranams and other minor forms of belle lettres (prabandam or chittrilakkiyam) which he composed on the invitation of local patrons. Some of his earlier compositions in this regard were Pazhasai Pathitrupattu Andadi, Thiruppaigneeli Thiribandadi, Uraiyyur Puranam, Vatpokki Kalambagam and Thirumylai Puranam. By 1860 he had made such a name for himself that he was made the adheena vidwan or the official scholar of the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam or Madam, the renowned Saivite monastery. From then on, his needs and those of his pupils were taken care of by the madam. Apart from imparting education to his many pupils, Meenatchisundaram Pillai wrote a Kalambagam (a minor literary form) on Ambalavana Desigar, the senior pontiff (peria pattam) of the madam, for which he was awarded the title of Mahavidwan. He was closely identified with the Thiruvavaduthurai Madam, and on completing his sixtieth year in 1875, an year before

7 Ibid., Vol. I, p.139.
10 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 204.
his death, the conventional celebration of *sashtiyapthapurthi* was held in grand style as a fitting honour.\(^\text{11}\)

Apart from the Thiruvavaduthurai Madam, Meenatchisundaram Pillai also received occasional patronage from the Dharumapuram Adheenam, another leading Saivite monastery. On the request of its pontiff, he composed *Satchidananda Malai* and *Thirukkurukkai Puranam*.\(^\text{12}\) On the occasion of the latter’s premiere he was honoured and rewarded. He was also patronized by the Kundrakkudi Thiruvannamalai Adheenam on a few occasions.\(^\text{13}\)

Many of Meenatchisundaram Pillai’s *thala puranams* were sponsored by local men of influence, especially landlords, tahsildars, traders and caste ‘headmen’. *Kundandai Puranam* was sponsored by the tahsildar of Kumbakonam, Sivagurunatha Pillai,\(^\text{14}\) *Mangalambikai Pillaitamil* (1866) by Kanakasabai Pillai, a textile merchant,\(^\text{15}\) and *Kudandai Thiribandadi* (1866) by one Ambalavana Chettiar.\(^\text{16}\) *Kandadevi Puranam* (1867)\(^\text{17}\) and *Veeravana Puranam* (1868)\(^\text{18}\) were commissioned by Chettiar, while *Thiruthurithi Puranam* (1867) was

\(^{11}\) Ibid., Vol. II, p. 208.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., Vol. II, p.196.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 259.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 276.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p.278.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p.279.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 308.
sponsored by some Senguntha Mudaliars,\textsuperscript{19} and \textit{Thaniyur Puranam} (1868) by Saliyars.\textsuperscript{20} The puranams on Attroor, Vilatholi and Thiruvaloliputtroor were sponsored by the Saiva Vellalars of those localities.\textsuperscript{21}

The \textit{thala puranam} was the art form par excellence of the age of patronage. As U.V. Swaminatha Iyer wrote,

Most of Meenatchisundaram Pillai's works are puranams. People in every Saivite centre of the day wished at least one puranam or other prabandam to be composed by him.\textsuperscript{22}

The head of Dharumapuram Madam went so far as to state that a puranam (for a particular holy centre) was more important than even the \textit{Thevaram} (the compositions of the seventh-century Nayanmar saints).\textsuperscript{23} Such indeed was the prestige of the puranam, that the gullible people of Sooraikkudi politely insisted that Meenatchisundaram Pillai write no less than four lines in every verse of his puranam on their town!\textsuperscript{24}

Given the authority and prestige that \textit{thala puranams} carried, poets like Meenatchisundaram Pillai had a field day in the age of patronage. They were sought after during the second half of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 295.
\item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 300.
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 215.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 280.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Letter of Dharumapuram Madam's head, in \textit{ibid.}, Vol. I, p. 230.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. I, pp. 281-2. Thala puranams were usually written in quatrains. In any case, rare is a Tamil verse form which has less than four lines.
\end{itemize}
the nineteenth century by a range of patrons, who receive our attention in the following section.

1.1.2 The Patrons

The first category of patrons were the zamindars and native princes. These vestiges of Nayakkar rule, preserved by colonialism as 'the hollow crown', continued with their earlier, though reduced, patronage of poets and other cultural producers. Well into the late nineteenth century, especially under the dawanship of A. Seshaiya Sastri, the Raja of Pudukkottai conducted an annual function on the occasion of Navaratri, when gifts up to even Rs.100 were given to poets and scholars. A. Seshaiya Sastri won much respect in the world of Tamil letters for fully sponsoring C.W. Damodaram Pillai's edition of Kalithogai, and helped in U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's publishing ventures too.

Ponnuswami Thevar (1837-1870), the brother of the Raja of Ramanathapuram, was well-known as a patron of art and literature. Some of the poets that he patronized were Thillaiyambur Chandrasekara Kavirayar, Mambala Kavirayar, Mahamahopadhyaya Raju Sastrigal and Vidwan Thiyagarasa Chettiar. He always had a

27 C.W. Damodaram Pillai, Kalithogai, Madras, 1887, Preface.
28 See M. Raghavaiyangar, Sentamil Valartha Thevargal, Tiruchi & Madras, 1951, for a biography of Ponnuswami Thevar and his son Pandithurai Thevar.
29 Ibid., pp. 39-42.
scholar with him to read out verses to him and discuss them.\textsuperscript{30} Ponnuswami Thevar provided the funds for many of Arumuga Navalar's editions, especially those of Thirukkural Parimelazhagarurai, Thirukkovaiyarrurai, Sethu Puranam, and Tharukka Sangiragam.\textsuperscript{31} The publication of Chandrasekara Kaviraja Pandithar's pioneering anthology of occasional verses by Tamil scholars, Thanicheyyut Chinthamani (which incidentally, contains a number of verses in praise of traditional patrons) was also sponsored by Ponnuswami Thevar.\textsuperscript{32}

Ponnuswami Thevar's good work was continued by his son Pandithurai Thevar (1867-1911), the zamindar of Palavanatham. Among his court-poets were Narayana Iyengar, Ettaiyapuram Veeraswamy Iyengar, Mu. Ra. Kandasamy Kavirayar and others.\textsuperscript{33} He contributed Rs.500 towards Swaminatha Iyer's edition of Purananooru,\textsuperscript{34} and fully sponsored his Manimekalai.\textsuperscript{35} Apart from these, Pandithurai Thevar sponsored numerous other works like Ramasami Pillai's edition of Thevaram: Thalamurai, Sivagnana Munivar's collected works, Sabapathy Navalar's Sivasamavatha

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 30.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 47. Also see T. Kailasam Pillai, Arumuga Navalar Charithiram, Chidambaram, 1985 (1st edition 1916), p. 16.

\textsuperscript{32} M. Raghavaiyangar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.76.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 39-40.

\textsuperscript{34} Puranooru, Madras, 1894, Preface. Also see his autobiography, \textit{En Charithiram}, Madras, 1990, pp. 740-2 (originally serialised in \textit{Ananda Vikatan} between 1940 and 1942).

\textsuperscript{35} Manimekalai, Madras, 1898, title page.
Maruppu, the works of Sunnagam Kumaraswamy Pulavar of Jaffna, and shortly before his death, the monumental encyclopaedia of Tamil literature, A. Singaravelu Mudaliar's Abidhana Chintamani. His crowning achievement was the founding of the Madurai Tamil Sangam in 1901, which went a long way towards materially encouraging Tamil works.

Some of the other zamindars who patronized literary production were Hirudalaya Marudappa Thevar of Uttrumalai zamin, who is best remembered for having supported Annamalai Reddiar of Kavadi Chindu fame and Ramalinga Thevar, the Zamindar of Siruvayal who patronized U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's edition of Purananooru. Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai, the poet, mentions that the Zamindar of Namakkal, Duraiswamy Reddiar was a Tamil enthusiast who contributed little sums to poets who sought his help. The Zamindar of Chokkampatti and Pethachi Chettiar, Zamindar of Andipatti were also known as patrons of literature.

The monasteries, especially of the saivite fold, were also in the forefront of patronage to Tamil scholars. Established in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, they had a long tradition of imparting education and patronizing literary

36 M. Raghavaiyangar, op. cit., p.80; A. Singaravelu Mudaliar, Abidhana Chintamani, Madras, 1910 (reprint 1982), Preface.
37 Uttrumalai Thanippal Thirattu, n.d. See Aranga Seenivasan, Kavadi Chindum Kavignan Varalarum, Madras, 1984, for a biography of Annamalai Reddiar. For a detailed account of the royal treatment extended to Tamil scholars at the Uttrumalai zamin, see Swaminatha Iyer, En Charithiram, Madras, 1990, Chapter 113.
38 Madras, 1894, Preface.
production. 40 This tradition was maintained during the second half of the nineteenth century too. The monasteries owned enormous stretches of prime wet lands, especially in the Kaveri delta and wielded both economic and religious power, which was beginning to be undermined under colonial rule. The historian of nineteenth-century Tamil literature, Mylai Seeni. Venkataswami lists the monasteries of Thiruvavaduthurai, Dharumapuram, Thiruppanandhal, Kanchi Gnanaprapakasar, Madurai Thirugnanasambandar, Kumbakonam, Chidambaram, Thiruvannamalai, Thuraiyur and Myilam as patrons of literature during this period. 41

Like Meenatchisundaram Pillai, Arumuga Navalar (1823-1879) too was patronized by the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam, and in fact, Navalar, the title by which he is even now known, was conferred by the Adheenam. 42 Moreover, it also patronized Navalar's editions of Ilakkana Kothu and Tholkappiya Soothira Viruthi. 43 U.V. Swaminatha Iyer himself was only a vidwan at the Thiruvavaduthurai Madam before he was coaxed by Thiyagarasa Chettiar to join the Kumbakonam Government College in 1880. 44 Every publication of his had the blessings, if not the financial assistance, of the

40 For a history of Thiruvavaduthurai Madam, see Arasavanathu Aranilayam, Thiruvavaduthurai, 1962. For Dharumapuram Madam, Tamil Valarkkum Dharumapuram, Dharumapuram, 1981.
41 Pathonbatham Noottrandil Tamil Ilakkiyam, 1800-1900, Madras, 1962, p.66.
42 T. Kailasam Pillai, op.cit., p. 82.
43 Ibid. p.82.
44 Swaminatha Iyer, En Charithiram, 1990, pp. 478-484.
Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. In fact, his first published work was a publication of the Adheenam.\(^{45}\) His edition of Chilappadhikaram (1892) was financed by, among others, the pontiffs of Thiruvavaduthurai, Thiruvannamalai and Thiruppanandhal Adheenams.\(^{46}\) Similarly, C.W. Damodaram Pillai, Swaminatha Iyer’s senior contemporary and pioneering editor of long-forgotten Tamil classics, was also patronized by the Thiruvavaduthurai Adheenam. It provided Rs.100 for each one of his publications, apart from paying for copies purchased.\(^{47}\) In fact, he gave so much importance to the patronage of the madams, that, in his periodization of Tamil literary history, he called contemporary times as the Adheena Kalam (‘the age of madams’).\(^{48}\)

The third category of traditional patrons were landlords and caste leaders, who, as administrators of local temples, sponsored the composition of thala puranams and other forms of minor literature about their locality, and thereby derived much authority and legitimacy in their domain. As we saw earlier, Meenatchisundaram Pillai composed scores of such works, and lived on their patronage.\(^{49}\)

What was common to all these traditional patrons was that they were of the social classes surviving from pre-colonial times.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp. 450-1.
\(^{46}\) Chilappadhikaram, Madras, 1892, Preface.
\(^{47}\) C.W. Damodaram Pillai (ed.), Ilakkana Vilakkam, Madras, 1889, Preface. For his biography, see T.A. Rajarathinam Pillai, Cl. Vai. Damodaram Pillai Avargal Charittiram, Madras, 1934.
\(^{48}\) Veerasoliyam, Madras, 1881, Preface.
\(^{49}\) SMPC, passim. Also see 1.1.1 above.
The zamindars, native princes, monasteries and landlords controlled large tracts of land, and thrived by expropriating the surplus. These social classes, especially the zamindars and monasteries, were losing ground in the late nineteenth century, and by the first decades of this century, were being displaced by a new class of wealthy peasants growing rich on the expansion of commercial crops.\textsuperscript{50} The monasteries, too, began losing their once total control over lands, and, perhaps as a consequence of this, were involved in protracted litigations. Moral degeneration too set in, and, as a result, their religious authority waned. Thus, by the late nineteenth century, these social classes could not provide sustenance for cultural production. The decline of traditional patronage was reflected in the rise of a new form of financing publications: the system of subscriptions, which was largely sustained by the new social class of professionals and overseas bankers spawned by colonialism.

1.2 \textbf{Changing Forms of Patronage: The Subscription System}

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, we see visible signs of the dwindling of traditional forms of patronage. Literary producers were directly hit by this shrinkage in sustenance. Even Meenatchisundaram Pillai, who functioned in the heyday of patronage, when asked by his leading pupil Thiyagarasa Chettiar, why his later-day works like \textit{Ambar Puranam} did not match the high quality of his earlier \textit{Uraiyr Puranam}, he attributed the richness of

\textsuperscript{50} C.J. Baker, 'Tamilnad Estates in the Twentieth Century', \textit{The Indian Economic and Social History Review}, 13(1), January-March 1976. Also see his \textit{An Indian Rural Economy: The Tamilnad Countryside}, 1880-1955, Delhi, 1984, pp.461-3.
the latter to the ample patronage he had received for it. He even added that if he was given similar patronage he could write even better.\(^{51}\)

During the 1880s and 1890s, literary producers often complained of lukewarm response from traditional patrons. Somasundara Nayagar (1846-1901), a Saiva Siddhanta scholar and a stormy petrel active in the hairsplitting theological debates of his times, complained in a series of letters to U.V. Swaminatha Iyer about the inadequate response of the Thiruppananthal Madam to his appeals for patronage.

What can I do if the Thiruppananthal Swamigal chooses to be so reluctant in my case. There are no limits to my commitments. The promises I had made to the pressmen in anticipation of Swamigal's money have all been broken.\(^{52}\)

And then again, a couple of weeks later, he wrote to Swaminatha Iyer, urging him to intervene on his behalf.

.... I find it delicate to remind persons of such high standing. But my commitments are so pressing that I can not keep quiet. That Acharya Prabhavam has been held up for the last two months will go to show my uncomfortable situation. Another part of Kooresavijayabangam needs to be printed. I had nurtured the fond hope that with the help of [the Thiruppananthal] Swamigal I could complete the printing of all pending books. ....\(^{53}\)

In this context of dwindling support from traditional patrons, literary producers were forced to look for sustenance from other sources. Their attention now turned to the new social classes spawned by colonialism. Damodaram Pillai, who had for long sung the praise of madams and their patronage, had by the mid-1880s lost about Rs. 3,500, and was making entirely different appeals:

My efforts are not geared towards pecuniary gain. I will be content if I can avoid losses. The amount of money I have lost so far by publishing books is not little. In order that people who involve themselves in such projects may not lose their money, all those who have passed university examinations, and are placed in high jobs should buy one copy each of all the classics published in their mother tongue.

Damodaram Pillai made similar appeals on other occasions too. The Swadesamitran of 8 November 1898, reviewing U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's edition of Manimekalai also called upon English educated people to subscribe to the cause of Tamil books, especially the classics.

To tap the resources of this class, the system of publishing through subscriptions was hit upon. In response to C.W. Damodaram Pillai's appeal in the Hindu, a substantial number of subscribers came forward to fund his publication of the classic Kalithogai. Apart from some traditional patrons like the zamindars of

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54 Kalithogai, Madras, 1887, Preface.
55 Tholkappiyam - Porulathikaram, Madras, 1885, Preface.
56 See, for instance, his preface to Kalithogai, Madras, 1887.
57 Reprinted in Kumari Malar, August 1976.
Perur and Uttrumalai and the pontiffs of Thiruvavaduthurai and Thiruppananthal, many of the subscribers were English-educated professionals. They included Poondi Aranganatha Mudaliar, Professor of Mathematics at the Presidency College, Madras, A. Ramachandra Iyer, Judge of the Mysore Chief Court, T. Ganapathy Iyer, Judge of the Kumbakonam Sub-court, Sir Raghavaiyangar, an advocate at Kumbakonam and S. Seshaiyar, Professor at the Kumbakonam Government College. Many others, similarly, were magistrates, lawyers and teachers. G. Subramaniya Iyer and M. Veeraraghavachariar, the founders of the Hindu and the rising stars of the new profession of journalism, also offered to print free of cost any classic not exceeding 30-31 formes that Damodaram Pillai may choose to publish.

Similarly, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's first major publication, the Seevakachintamani (1887) was also largely financed by subscriptions. He first released a prospectus, calling for subscriptions. Though the first subscription was taken by the Thiruvavaduthurai Madam, Swaminatha Iyer got a number of subscriptions from the new social classes. As many as 70 subscriptions were collected in Kumbakonam alone, where he taught Tamil in the Government College. Through the efforts of Thiagararasa Chettiar, another 20 to 25 subscriptions were collected. Poondi Aranganatha Mudaliar, apart from signing up himself, canvassed subscriptions from Pammal Vijayaranga Mudaliar, Savalai

58 Kalithogai, Madras, 1887, Preface.
Ramasamy Mudaliar and others who held high positions in the colonial administrative machinery. Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar, the man who had provoked Swaminatha Iyer into taking up the task of editing ancient manuscripts, was a judge. He too canvassed subscriptions for Seevaka Chintamani. Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and his brother at Colombo also regularly contributed to Swaminatha Iyer's publishing ventures.

Frequently, subscribers of one publishing venture offered to subscribe for subsequent projects too, an indication of the enthusiasm of a new class keen on acquiring further social respectability. In the copious autobiographical writings of U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, we find, from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards, less and less references to traditional patrons. Not only his operations, but also his scouting for patronage, shifts to the city of Madras, the seed-bed of the new social classes. He frequently refers to persons like Justice Mani Iyer, the advocate V. Krishnaswamy Iyer and Professor Poondi Aranganatha Mudaliar, the eminent professionals of their times, as his benefactors.

60 Ibid., p. 589.
61 Salem Ramasamy Mudaliar to U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, dated 22 October 1887, U.V.S. Papers.
63 See, for instance, the letter of one Arangasami Mudaliar, Cuddalore to Swaminatha Iyer, dated 2 August 1892, U.V.S. Papers.
Apart from the first generation of English-educated professionals, another new social class which subscribed to publishing was the Nattukottai Chettiars. By the 1880s, having gained windfall profits by entering financial markets of south-east Asia which was being opened up for colonial exploitation, the Chettiars indulged in philanthropy to acquire social prestige commensurate with their economic affluence.\textsuperscript{64} Over a 100 of the about 180 subscribers to \textit{Sodasa Prabandam} were Chettiars.\textsuperscript{65} Scores of subscribers to Dandapani Swamigal's (1830-1899) publications were Chettiars, especially from Colombo.\textsuperscript{66} Similarly, Damodaram Pillai also received substantial funds from Burma.\textsuperscript{67} On receiving funds from a Nattukottai Chettiar banker of Rangoon, he made bold to state:

\begin{quote}
I pray .... that following this example, other Nattukottai Chettiars, too, who have gained renown in philanthropic activities these days, should assist similar undertakings.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

U.V. Swaminatha Iyer too has written at length about the generosity of the Chettiars.\textsuperscript{69}


\textsuperscript{65} P. Arumugam Pillai, \textit{Sodasa Prabandam}, Madras, 1899, Appendix.

\textsuperscript{66} See, for instance, Dandapani Swamigal, \textit{Nangunool Arulatchi}, Madras, (Eswara) 1877, List of Subscribers.

\textsuperscript{67} See \textit{Kalithogai}, Madras, 1887; \textit{Choolamani}, Madras, 1889; \textit{Tholkappiyam - Chollathikaram}, Madras, 1892.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., Preface.

Thus, by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Tamil book-publishing was largely sustained by subscriptions. Even the Registrar of Books made note of the burgeoning volume of publications, and commented (in 1893) on the ".... new editions with comments of standard Indian epics and legends which as serial publications are appearing in parts with the aid of subscriptions." 

Here, we would like to emphasize that the earlier traditional forms of patronage and the new system of subscriptions were not exclusive, there being considerable overlap. For instance, we found Damodaram Pillai's Kalithogai being subscribed to by the zamindars of Perur and Uttrumalai and the pontiffs of Thiruvavaduthurai and Thiruppananthal Madams, apart from the new social classes. Likewise, Swaminatha Iyer's Seevaka Chintamani's subscription list was opened by none other than the pontiff of Thiruvavaduthurai Madam. Essentially, the problem was that the new class of professionals was a very narrow one, being small in numbers. It had jumped into the fray to fill up the void created by the demise of traditional patrons. Consequently, the age of patronage was bound to end, sooner or later. The contribution of the new professional class lay in making the breakthrough for the middle classes to take over publishing. We shall take up this in greater detail in the subsequent chapters. For the present, we shall turn our attention to the decline and fall of the age of patronage.

The Decline of Patronage

The decline and fall of the age of patronage can be traced by looking at three characteristic aspects of patronage-publishing: the arangettram; the sirappu payiram and the title page.

1.3.1 Arangettram

The arangettram (premiere) was a cultural event which was carried over to the later half of the nineteenth century from the pre-print era. It was the occasion on which a literary product was premiered and made available for 'public' consumption. The event was usually fixed on an auspicious day, and the news passed on to the local people and persons of importance in neighbouring localities. Organized by the patron of the work, the arangettram was the occasion when he derived social prestige and cultural authority by making public his patronage. Consequently, it was often a very pompous affair. The arangettram was usually held in a public place, especially the local temple, thereby giving religious sanction and authority to the event and the text. Meenatchisundaram Pillai's Uraiyur Puranam (1860) was premiered in the Uraiyur temple,71 his Seekazhi Kovai (1861) at the Valampuri Mantapam in the southern piragaram (corridor) of the Brahma Purureswarar temple72 and his Mannippadikkari Puranam (1864) in the sannidhi (sanctorum) of the concerned temple.73 Dandapani Swamigal's Thillai Ithalagalandadhi

73 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 236
was premiered in the Ayirankal Mantapam of the Chidambaram temple.74

The mantapam or the hall would be decorated with traditional festoons and the arangetram would begin at an appropriate muhurtam (auspicious time). The palmleaf manuscript would then be placed before the presiding deity of the temple, and worship would be offered. The text would then be placed in the hands of the author, who, after accepting the prasadam (usually, sacred ash and flower-garlands) would proceed with the arangetram. Often the text would be read out by one of the author’s disciples,75 while the author himself would elaborate on the meaning of the verses and explain the literary and mythological allusions to the devout audience. These sessions could continue for a number of days (usually in the late afternoons), depending on the length of the composition, its terseness, the ability and inclination (the latter being proportionate to the value of the patronage) of the author.76

During the course of the arangetram, the audience present could raise questions and seek clarifications. These often turned out to be occasions to give vent to one’s jealousies, or show off one’s scholarship or raise sectarian disputes. Instances of confusion created during arangetram are recorded by U.V.

75 This is referred to as Kaiyedu Padithal.
76 The description of the Arangetram is largely based on the premiere of Thirupperunthurai Puranam in SMPC, Vol. II, pp. 175-6.
Swaminatha Iyer in his biography of Meenatchisundaram Pillai. Some persons jealous of his high standing tried to cause commotion during the arangetram of Uraiyyur Kanthimathi Pillaitamil,\(^77\) while a Vaishnavite scholar raised sectarian questions during the arangetram of Kudanthai Puranam (1865).\(^78\) Kanchipuram Sabapathi Mudaliar raised a genuine question regarding the use of a dialect-word when Dandapani Swamigal premiered Guhan Pillaitamil in Madras.\(^79\)

The arangetram, as we mentioned earlier, was the occasion of great social prestige to the patron who commissioned the composition. No wonder patrons took great care to make such occasions an unqualified success. Often they made arrangements to forestall unauthorized questions from, in their view, undesirable people, who were out to spoil the show.\(^80\) Depending on the wealth and wherewithal of the patron, the arangetram could continue with short breaks for well up to a year as happened in the case of Nagai Karona Puranam (1869).\(^81\)

The author would often refer to the patron’s largesse both in the text and in its exposition before the audience. People of the times realized the prestige that arangetram conferred on the patron. Jealous rivals spreading rumours to scuttle arangettrams were common, as happened in the case of Sivagurunatha Pillai, the

\(^{78}\) Ibid., Vol. I, p. 274.
\(^{80}\) See, for instance, SMPC, Vol. I, p.137.
tahsildar of Kumbakonam, who commissioned Kudandai Puranam (1865). Given the cultural importance of the event, patrons were also quick to take offence at the drop of a hat. For instance, once Meenatchisundaram Pillai during the course of the arangetram of Thirupperunthurai Puranam delayed the beginning of a day's discourse waiting for a favourite student of his to turn up. Subramania Desigar, the sponsor of the puranam, and the administrator of the local temple, had already arrived and was offended by this gesture and refused to preside over the arangetram in the subsequent days.

The valedictory day of the arangetram was celebrated to match the festivity of the inauguration. It usually attracted huge crowds, even from neighbouring localities. The text could be taken in a procession on an elephant (as happened in the case of Kudandai Puranam) or in a palanquin (as in the case of Thirupperunthurai Puranam). It was on this occasion that the author received, apart from ritual and ceremonial gifts like silk towels, etc., remuneration both in cash and in kind. Meenatchisundaram Pillai received Rs. 2,000 for Thirupperunthurai Puranam and an equal sum of money for Kudandai Puranam, collected by the patrons at Kumbakonam apart from an exquisitely designed palanquin. For the Seekazhi

Kovai, he received purses ranging from Rs.50 to Rs.300 from a number of patrons. 88

In the heyday of patronage, only at the end of the arangetram was the idea of publishing the manuscript mooted. After Meenatchisundaram Pillai had premiered Mayoora Puranam (1868), many emphasized the need to print it. It is evident that the authority of the composition was derived only after it was conventionally premiered in an arangetram, the printing being, more or less an afterthought. Printing was seen merely as a way to simply multiplicate copies of an already sanctified text. But with the gradual advancement of print culture and technology, and the erosion of patronage with all its cultural deadweight, the institution of arangetram began to crumble. By even 1869, when the arangetram of Meenatchisundaram Pillai’s Nagai Karona Puranam was still in progress with all its attendant paraphernalia, the manuscript was being printed in Madras under the supervision of his student, T. Subbaraya Chettiar. By the time the palm-leaf manuscript was taken in ceremonious procession through the streets of Nagappattinam, the printed volumes were already available. 89 The occasion of arangetram was becoming a mere ritual shorn of its earlier cultural significance.

The arangetram of Professor Poondi Aranganatha Mudaliar’s Kacchi Kalambakam in 1889 further highlights the diminishing importance of the event, if not its hollowness in the

88 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 177.
changed context of the times. The function was held in the Thondai Mandala Thuluva Vellalar High School, Madras and not in the precincts of a temple. The hall was filled by "Tamil and English scholars, High Court judges and advocates and other gentlemen" and not the crowd of earlier days. The text had already been printed and distributed to the audience, who flipped through the pages as the arangetram progressed.

As the discourse progressed, everyone in the audience followed the verse on the printed page. At the end of a page, the entire audience would turn it over; though the paper was thin, the rustling of the paper could be heard, indicating the considerable size of the audience.

This matter-of-fact description scarcely conceals the irony of the whole situation. Indeed this was a far cry from the days of Meenatchisundaram Pillai when the audience had no text at hand, and had to listen to the oral discourse.

1.3.2 The Sirappu Payiram

The sirappu payiram or sattrukkavi, a prefatory poem placed at the beginning of a text, was usually composed by the author's teacher, colleague or student. Its function was to introduce the text and, by extension, confer authority on it. This practice of writing sirappu payirams came into vogue in early medieval times and had been codified in Nannool, the twelfth-century grammatical text. The sirappu payiram, set in verse-form, usually elaborated on the


91 Ibid., p. 104.
standing, lineage, tutelage and scholarly abilities of the author and the importance of the text and its subject matter, referring also to the patron who commissioned the work. In a feudal society where education and knowledge was the preserve of a restricted social stratum, authority naturally derived from being recommended by somebody already in possession of the requisite qualifications.

Meenatchisundaram Pillai, as could be expected, was inundated with requests for *sirappu payirams*. Even Arumuga Navalar had to seek *payirams* for *Thirukkovaiyarrurai* and *Thiruikkural Parmelalagarurai* in order to get Ponnuswamy Thevar’s patronage. During his long literary career, Meenatchisundaram Pillai must have composed scores of *sirappu payirams* for a variety of poets and scholars. That acquiring *sirappu payiram* was a matter of contacts and nearness to powers-that-be is clear. As U. V. Swaminatha Iyer writes, anyone who managed to get a *sirappu payiram* from the Tamil scholar Sabapathy Mudaliar, also got one from Meenatchisundaram Pillai, using the former’s good offices. If Meenatchisundaram Pillai wrote many *sirappu payirams*, his works themselves were not exempt from such *payirams*. His *Akilandanayaki Pillaitamil* had 15 *payirams* by contemporary Tamil scholars including the widely respected Malavai Mahalingaiyar and Uraiyur Muthuveera Upathiyayar.

93 Ibid., Vol. I, p.69.
Similarly, U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, too, had to respond to requests for *sirappu payirams*. On one occasion, Ambalavana Desigar, the pontiff of Thiruvavuduthurai Madam virtually ordered him to write for Sabapathy Navalar’s *Dravida Pirakasikai* (1899). Likewise one Sabapathy Pillai of Coimbatore requested him to contribute a preface to *Avinasi Karunambikai Satakam*. C.W. Damodaram Pillai also acquired and published *sirappu payirams* for his editions of Sangam classics and other texts. Sootha Sangithai, which appeared under Valloor Devarasa Mudaliar’s name, had *sirappu payirams* by 28 scholars. Vedanayakam Pillai’s *Nidinul* had no less than 60 *sirappu payirams*! Dadapani Pillai’s *Thillai Thiruvayiram* had a more modest 11. In fact, rarely ever did a printed book of the nineteenth century not have a *sirappu payiram*.

Often, the *sirappu payirams* were written without even the text being read, with the author indicating the lines on which he wanted the *payiram* to be written, though Swaminatha Iyer claims that Meenatchisundaram Pillai was more discerning:

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95 Ambalavana Desigar to Swaminatha Iyer, Kadaga Ravi 21, Vigari (Tamil Calendar), 1899, U.V.S. Papers.

96 Sabapathy Pillai to Swaminatha Iyer, dated 3 May 1891, U.V.S. Papers. Also see the letter by M.R. Arunachala Kavirayar, dated 9 November 1906 asking for a *payiram* to Palvanna Mudaliar’s *Siddhanta Ratnavali*.

97 See, for instance, *Veerasoliyam*, Madras, 1881.


99 Madras, Sarvathari (Tamil calendar), 1888.

100 Mylai Seeni. Venkatasami, op.cit., p.351.

The **sirappu payirams** of Meenatchisundaram Pillai would be in keeping with the standing of the authors concerned. Due to his **sirappu payirams** the authors gained much prestige. Therefore many of them tried in myriad ways to get him to write **sirappu payirams** for themselves. He would write them in the [verse-forms of] **agaval**, **virutham** and **tharavu kochagam**. If the work was a very good one he would write an **agaval** [a lengthy verse-form] or many **viruthams**. Otherwise he would write a short verse or two indicating in plain terms that such and such a book was written by such and such a person. It was in his times that **sirappu payirams** were in vogue.\(^\text{102}\)

This passage sums up, succinctly, the importance, authority and prevalence of the **sirappu payiram**. Clearly it was the hallmark of the age of patronage when literary works, produced by a small group of privileged scholars, circulated within a circumscribed social sphere. In such a context, the **sirappu payiram** was a stamp of approval, a gatepass for entry into the world of letters.

But as patronage dwindled, and Tamil publishing sought to enter a wider social sphere peopled by the emerging middle classes, **sirappu payirams** became redundant and anachronistic. As a historian of nineteenth-century Tamil literature puts it, "The practice of printing **sattrukkavis** was in vogue until the beginnings of the twentieth century. Later, it disappeared completely."\(^\text{103}\) A case in point is Subramaniya Bharati, the first modern Tamil poet, whose


\(^{103}\) Mylai Seeni. *Venkasasami*, *op.cit.*, p. 351.
entry into the world of letters coincides with the end of the age of patronage. Bharati never sought a sirappu payiram for any of his books and wrote but two payirams, early in his career,\textsuperscript{104} while his protege Bharatidasan ridiculed the poets of the pre-Bharati era for running after sirappu payirams.\textsuperscript{105}

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the practice of writing 'modern' prefaces in prose had begun to emerge. C.W. Damodaram Pillai\textsuperscript{106} and U.V. Swaminatha Iyer were some of the first in this regard. As Swaminatha Iyer writes in his autobiography about his Seevaka Chintamani (1887),

In those days, most of the printed Tamil books never had a preface. As I felt that it would be of use to the readers, I planned to write a preface which could form part of the book. Then I thought out the various things that needed to be said in the preface. ... \textsuperscript{107}

1.3.3 \textit{The Evolution of the Title Page}

Compared to the arangettram and the sirappu payiram, the title page was a very recent phenomenon, the product of the technology of print. The title pages of nineteenth-century Tamil imprints were crammed with a range of information on the text, the author, the patron, the printer, etc. which could baffle modern

\textsuperscript{105} Bharatidasan Kavithaigal, Vol. II.
\textsuperscript{106} The brilliant editorial prefaces of Damodaram Pillai have been compiled and brought out as a handy volume. See Damodaram, Jaffna, 1971.
\textsuperscript{107} En Charithiram, Madras, 1990, p.608.
readers.\textsuperscript{108} U.V. Swaminatha Iyer's \textit{Seevaka Chinthamani} is a good example in this regard.

The text of \textit{Seevaka Chintamani}  
by Thirutthakka Thevar  
with the commentary of  
Maduraiaciriyar Bharatvasi Nacchinarkkiniyar  

These  
as per the wishes of  
M.R.Ry. Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar avargal  
were examined by  
Ve. Swaminathaiyer  
of  
Uthamathanapuram  

the student of  
Subramaniya Desiga Murthigal  
of Thiruvavaduthurai Atheneam of the  
Thirukkailaya tradition  
and  
Meenatchisundaram Pillai  
the Mahavidwan of the above adheenam  
and  
Tamil teacher at the Kumbakonam  
Government College  

Printed at Madras  
at the Dravidarathnakara Acchukkoodam  
of T. Govinda Acharya  
Price Rs. 8  
1887  
Copyright Registered  

While the prominence given to the printer's name could be explained in terms of colonial administrative stipulations, which imposed utmost surveillance on the purveyors of printing technology,  

\textsuperscript{108} As the Librarian-in-Charge of the Maraimalai Adigal Library, Madras during 1987-1990, I often found even post-graduate Tamil students fumble with nineteenth-century title pages unable to write proper bibliographic entries.
the other copious details clearly indicate what mattered in the age of patronage: the title had to be elaborate and self-explanatory; the name of the patron was to be given precedence; the authority of the author derived less from his position in a government college than as the pupil of traditional scholars.

With the change in the material basis of literary production, the structure of the title page too changed, omitting many details. As patrons ceased to exist, and the authority of the author no more derived from his tutelage under traditional scholars, the title page drew a blank on these counts. As the stature of the author as a distinct professional / intellectual grew, his was the only name that mattered and it was given prominence on the title page. Parallel to the author's rise was the emergence of the institution of the publisher / publishing house and the diminishing importance of the printer (see Chapter 4). These changes in the organization of the book-publishing trade is reflected in the title page of twentieth-century Tamil books with the publisher's name finding a place and the printer relegated to the imprint-page, as a mere statutory requirement.

The historian of printing and publishing in India, B.S. Kesavan, completely misses the point when he overlooks the changing material basis of literary production which nineteenth-century title pages manifest, and writes:

[The title page] used to be crowded with information and hardly could we isolate the author's name at a glance. A change is now noticeable and simple title pages are in vogue. We have reached a stage when the title page contains minimum information necessary for a reader to know about the document. It is interesting that the earlier title pages even mentioned the names of those who
financed the book, as also the names of the father and grandfather of the author, and also gave the names of the different eras for the date at the same time (Kollam, Saka and Salivahana).\textsuperscript{109}

Kesavan is not only blind to the cultural and material underpinnings of the title page, but also adopts a derisive tone when describing it, thus betraying his ethnocentrism.

1.4 \textit{Concluding Remarks}

We shall wind up this chapter with some concluding remarks on the end of the age of patronage in Tamil publishing. The pre-colonial and early colonial classes which provided patronage for literary production were losing out in the context of the social transformation effected by colonialism in its early industrial-capitalist phase. The first generation of western-educated professionals attempted to fill the breach. The subscription-system of publishing was a product of this social formation. But this revised form of patronage too did not survive as it did not match the changing worldview of the emerging middle classes. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer stopped collecting subscriptons for his \textit{Pathupattu} edition when he heard the complaint that subscriptions were a ploy to earn money.\textsuperscript{110}

In keeping with the changed times, he had to prefer to sell the book as a finished product or, in other words, as a commodity.

\textsuperscript{109} History of Printing and Publishing in India, New Delhi, 1985, p.81. R. Muthukumaraswamy, the noted-librarian and Tamil bibliographer, shows more cultural sensitivity, when, after a broad and informative survey of Tamil title pages, sees aesthetic considerations behind the transformation. ‘Tamil Noolgalil Thalaippu Pakkam’, in Tamil Vattam, 2nd Anniversary number, Madras, 1969.

In this context of changing economic and class formations, art forms also changed. The predominant literary genres of the age of patronage were the thala puranams and other belles lettres. With the widening public sphere and the tentative beginnings of a larger reading public, not only the material basis of literary production but literary production itself had to change. "... common monotonous compositions, pilgrims' songs and verses in praise of dieties, saints and religious apostles and reformers, native princes and chiefs and patrons of authorship ... "111 were not the fare for the middle classes.

No wonder the system of patronage and its literary products came in for criticism from middle-class intellectuals. One V. Meenatchisundaram, writing in the Viveka Chintamani, an organ of the 'Agency for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge', though mildly lamenting the decline of patronage, was quick to add that it was preferable to patronize books ('of useful knowledge', no doubt) suited to the present times.112 T. Lakshmana Pillai made similar observations in his article on 'developing the Tamil language'.113 Comparisons to the wide range of books published in England were made and the state of indigenous publishing deplored. Both of them laid stress on the need to spread education, and emphasized that the patronage of the public was essential in the age of printing, for the growth of the language. This was to set the agenda for the Tamil publishing world to be dominated by the middle classes in the following century.

111 Review and Analysis of books registered in 1899, G.O. No. 114-5, Educational, 10 March 1900.
112 Viveka Chintamani, 8 (11), March 1900.
113 Ibid., 1 (4), August 1892.
The system of patronage made one last ditch effort to hold on. Pandithurai Thevar, a leading patron of earlier times, sought to give institutional form to traditional patronage by founding the Madurai Tamil Sangam in 1901, which received financial support from the likes of Pethachi Chettiar, the zamindar of Andippatti: a sign of the difficult times individual patrons had fallen into. The Sangam published or patronized a number of Tamil classics but became more or less defunct after Pandithurai Thevar's death in 1911.114

By the end of the nineteenth century, the age of patronage was effectively over. But we take 1905 as the year in which Tamil publishing made a decisive break with patronage. In that year U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, who had spent three decades in the world of publishing with the support of traditional patrons and the first-generation of English-educated professionals, petitioned to the Government of Madras that the pecuniary support ... "that I have received [thus far] has been by no means adequate", and requested its support for his work.115 Moreover, Subramaniya Bharati, the first modern Tamil poet, too, had just launched on his writing career. It is to this post-patronage period that we now turn to, in the next chapter.

114 M. Raghavaiyangar, op.cit., pp.89-91.

115 G.O. No. 600-1, Educational, 6 September 1905. The government sanctioned Rs. 1,000 for this past work and Rs. 500 for the following two years.