Chapter Two

Feminist Scholarship, Cultural Studies, "idazhiyal": Critical Approaches to Popular Culture

This chapter describes what I see as two major and distinctively different critical approaches in contemporary studies of women and "popular" culture and goes on to examine current approaches in Tamil scholarship towards Tamil journals. What the former share is their allegiance to feminism (though, given their different locations, they differ in their "feminism" as well) and their attempt to use popular culture as a way of articulating questions about gender. However, their intellectual trajectories as well as their implications for gender politics are fundamentally different. Both approaches are valuable in that they compel us to take seriously genres that are either confined to the literature cataloging approach we will soon discuss, or, worse still, ignored partly because they are "popular" forms and partly because they are seen as something that only women read. However, even as they open up the realm of the "popular to feminist analyses, they are limited in their theoretical reach.

The "Images of Women" Approach

The first of the two approaches, the "images of women" mode of criticism, is enormously popular both on the left as well as on the right, both within and outside academia. It informs, for example, most popular analyses of women and media. This criticism is based on the assumption that "reality" or "truth" pre-exists its representation as image. The image of women in cul-
ture is then measured against this reality and judged to be either "stereotypical" or a faithful reflection. Implicit in most of this criticism is the notion that popular literature contains "negative stereotypes" of women and that it *objectifies* women in certain typical or formulaic ways. For instance, Gita Wolf in her article on the construction of gender in Tamil magazines perceives all of them as expressing the same kind of misogyny, irrespective of their caste affiliations:

The narratives [of Tamil magazines] work at two levels: firstly, they gratify, in a crude and often perverse fashion, male fantasies and projections of female sexuality; and secondly, they also project on their large female readership, continually limiting traditional versions of women's notions of themselves and their possibilities. ...although the various editors and publishers of these weeklies come from varied caste, class and occupational backgrounds, there is complete consensus on the ideology. All caste and class differences appear to be subsumed to patriarchy. (Wolf 1991: WS-71)

C.S Lakshmi's book The Face Behind the Mask: Women in Popular Tamil Literature (1984), which deals with the subject of women writers in Tamil Literature, also follows the images of women approach in describing popular Tamil journals:

The clinging creeper, educated yet unassertive, uneducated and tongue-wagging, "queen" of the house, "sweet-wife", "loving mother", image with a few exceptions were the way women were portrayed. Most women heartily clung to these images and perpetuated them in their own literary attempts... Kalki began a column called "Penngal Ulagam" in December 1942. One "Lakshmi" wrote in these columns on various fictitious women characters. The women were innocent, interested in dressing, movies; got angry with their husbands on small issues and were consoled only if they were taken out. An image of a child-like character was the first one that was written. The other women
characters were the gossiping types like the servant woman who talks of how she controls her husband and the rich woman's making fanciful conversation. (C.S Lakshmi 1984: 46-47)

Writing about the misogyny inherent in Anandavikatan's humour, she says:

Anandavikatan true to its name, (Happy Jester), carried a joke on its cover in every issue. Most of them were women. The image presented of a woman was mostly of one dominating her husband. One of the front cover jokes showed a husband carrying countless parcels with his wife walking beside swinging her hands. (Lakshmi 1984: 46)

There is a moralism inherent in the work of C.S Lakshmi and Gita Wolf which leads to the grouping together of what are quite possibly very different representations of women, different because their ideological histories and contexts are different. What happens then is that a range of representations are simply read as "bad" or "negative-stereotypical" images of women. Typically, any recognition of a woman's sexuality is judged in blanket and uncritical terms as an instance of her objectification, a "bad" image in textual terms. Inevitably, such negative stereotypes are perceived to be a feature intrinsic to popular literature, a natural extension of their "vulgarity". There is little attempt to tease out the ideological subtleties of each text. For instance, Wolf and Lakshmi's work does not account for the ways in which the caste affiliations of each magazine inflects its gender politics. Wolf argues that "all caste and class differences appear to be subsumed to patriarchy". She fails to recognize that patriarchy is not universal and monolithic, that
it is necessarily linked to questions of caste and class. C.S Lakshmi's work suffers from an almost total focus on Brahmin women writers and Brahmin owned magazines.

The notion of the "stereotype" in the work of both Wolf and Lakshmi corresponds to the Frankfurt school notion of "false consciousness", a notion which, as we shall soon see, has been critiqued within Cultural Studies. Implicit in both the images mode of criticism as well as in the Frankfurt School approach is the belief in a pure space of reality outside of ideology.

Cultural Studies

Following the entry and the subsequent institutionalization of Cultural Studies as well as the range of critical and methodological approaches which emerged in its wake especially within U.S academia, feminist criticism of popular literature in the west has, by and large, moved away from the text-based "images" mode of criticism. In what follows, I will trace the intellectual trajectory of the discipline of Cultural Studies as well as that of the influential theoretical and methodological approaches such as ethnography, audience studies and psychoanalytic criticism which it helped promote.¹

Allied as it was with the New Left, the work of critics such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (of the Birmingham school in the U.K) sought to question the silences within Marxism on questions of gender, culture and subjectivity.² Marxist criticism of culture, perhaps best represented by the work of critics from the Frankfurt School, perceived some forms of high culture as outside ideology and all mass culture as ideologically pernicious. Even
as they pointed to the political importance of mass art, critics from the Frankfurt school such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse argued that mass art was completely dominated by the "consciousness industry" and that its audience lived in a state of "false consciousness". As Raymond Williams points out, Marxist writing commonly uses three versions of the term "ideology": a system of beliefs typical of a certain class; a system of illusory beliefs or what is known as "false consciousness", as opposed to true scientific knowledge; or the general processes of the production of meaning and ideas ("Ideology": 1977). Drawing on the second meaning of ideology as illusory belief, critics from the Frankfurt school argue that most popular literatures are ideological, suggesting that there exists a pure space outside ideology which certain kinds of high literature inhabit. The work of Louis Althusser however demonstrated for us the problems with this particular definition of ideology. In his influential essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Althusser argues that 'there is no practice except by and in ideology' and also that 'there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects' (1977: 44). Cultural Studies challenged the distinction between high culture and popular culture and the assumption that the former could be outside ideology while the latter was always "ideological". The "popular" within Cultural Studies came to be seen as a potential site for the emergence of alternate ideologies.
The work of Janice Radway, Tania Modleski and Carol Thurston, which may be broadly characterized as the American liberal-feminist engagement with Cultural Studies, represents a crucial though not very visible departure from the political agenda of Cultural Studies as it was envisaged by the Birmingham school. Using a range of methods to challenge what they regard as the dominant position often endorsed by feminist critics that romance is an all-powerful and politically disabling ideology and that romance-readers are largely passive victims of a false-consciousness, they read an incipient feminism into romance fiction and attempt to construct romance readers as agentive subjects.4

Radway's Reading the Romance employs ethnographic methods, questionnaires and personal interviews to explore what romance reading signifies to a small group of thirty white, middle-class housewives living in the American midwest in a town to which she gives the pseudonym 'Smithton'. Radway's main informant, Dorothy Evans or 'Dot' as she is referred to, runs a bookstore. All thirty participants in Radway's ethnographic study, most of whom are housewives with school-going children, are Dot's customers. Dot is an avid romance reader herself and publishes a newsletter in which new publications are rated for their quality. Her customers rely on her advice and assistance in choosing a varied array of romance novels. Dots's helpful and personalized suggestions frees them from having to rely solely on a single line of books like the Harlequins and enables them to experiment
with new authors. **Radway** argues that this gives readers a degree of control over what they read; the *romance* industry is hence not all-powerful.

Radway makes a case for romance readers by talking of their competence, their status as discerning readers and their ability to articulate their likes and dislikes. According to Radway, the **Smithton** group repeatedly emphasizes the fact that their tastes in romance fiction are not adequately addressed by the publishers and that they often read books which they don't fully like or endorse because "sometimes even a bad book is better than nothing" (1984: 50). She points out that despite the **formulaic** appearance of romance fiction, "there are important differences among novels for those who read them that prompt individual decisions to reject or to read" (1984: 50). The Smithton **women** have clearly articulated likes and dislikes regarding romance fiction, as Radway discovers in the course of her survey. She argues that they demonstrate a high level of competence in reading the romance and possess an intricate knowledge of the genre. In some cases, their expertise has led them to write their own romance for publication. The Smithton readers feel that romance novels, especially those rich in historical and geographical detail, enable them to gather knowledge about other times and places. Reading often becomes a substitute for travel.

Radway argues that romance fiction provides women with the care and nurturance they miss in everyday life:

As an activity, [romance reading] so engages their attention that it enables them to deny their physical presence in an environment associated with the responsibilities that are acutely felt
and occasionally experienced as too onerous to bear. Reading, in this sense, connotes a free space where they feel liberated from the need to perform duties that they otherwise willingly accept as their own. As a result, they vicariously attend to their own requirements as independent individuals who require emotional sustenance and solitude. (1984: 93)

According to Radway, through the act of romance reading, the Smithton women are laying claim to a leisure time when they are at least temporarily free from the task of caring for their families. In explaining the romance's appeal to women, she uses Nancy Chodorow's account of the female personality as a self-in-relation. Chodorow's argument is grounded in object relations theory according to which a child's social-relational experience from early infancy determines its later growth. The child's early social relations with its primary caretakers are internalized as its most basic model of itself as self-in-relation. This model survives well into adulthood. According to Chodorow, the effects of the mother-child relationship are manifested directly in both men and women. Early and exclusive mothering of a female child leads to a very strong identification of the daughter with her mother, making the process of individuation difficult for female children. The lack of sexual difference leads to a prolonged pre-oedipal state wherein the female child fails to experience herself as a separate entity. Chodorow argues that because girls remain unconsciously connected to their mothers well past their infancy, women are more likely to feel at ease in regressing to a state of identity diffusion, where the boundary between self and others remains largely indistinct. In a similar situation of exclusive
mothering, male children must insist on a rather violent separation from their mothers in order to establish their identity as "not female". Unlike male children, female children learn to view themselves as a self-in-relation, which is later generalized as a view of the self as an extension or continuation of the world and others.

During the oedipal period, the girl's turn to her father is motivated not by a desire for the intrinsic properties of the penis, but because of a recognition that it symbolizes all that is not-mother. Her first attempt at individuation then is indistinguishable from her identification with and desire for her father. According to Chodorow, when the female child learns that her mother prefers people like her father who have penises, she desires one for herself in order to secure her mother's love. Her need for her mother continues even into adulthood. Adult women constantly wish to regress into infancy in order to reconstruct the lost intensity of the original mother-daughter bond. Their ego boundaries continue to be permeable and they tend to experience an ongoing need for nurturance and attachment. Radway's argument is that the romantic heroine's story closely resembles Chodorow's account of female personality development. The romance narrative often begins at a point when the heroine has just lost a particular relationship, either through death or through separation, and is forced to face the world alone. Radway contends that the heroine's consequent terror and feeling of emptiness may evoke for the reader memories of her own separation from her mother and her attempts to establish an individual identity. The heroine appears boyish and independent at this
point. This independence, Radway argues, can be understood as a symbolic representation of a woman's journey towards individuation and subsequent connection. The heroine's search for her identity and her attempts at individuation are linked to her developing relationship with the hero. Symbolically, her relationship with the romantic hero represents a turn to the father. The narrative ends with the heroine successfully having achieved a self-in-relation. According to Radway, Chodorow's theory also accounts for the particular desires satisfied by romance reading. The heroine and, vicariously, the romance reader, become the object of the hero's unconditional care and nurturance. Such nurturance would otherwise be unavailable to them within a patriarchal set up. Radway argues further that once the reader finishes with a romance novel, she is forced to return to her real situation, a situation in which her relations with others continue unaltered. Romance reading then is temporarily therapeutic. The romance's "short-lived therapeutic value, which is made both possible and necessary by a culture that creates needs in women that it cannot fulfill, is finally the cause of its repetitive consumption" (1984: 85).

Radway's reliance on Chodorow once again indicates to us that gender is the only analytical category she is concerned with. In being uncritical of the discourse of psychoanalysis, Radway is also unable to account for the ways in which psychoanalytic theory itself reproduces the structure of sexual difference as it is deployed in western thought. Chodorow's framework is problematic because she equates sexual with social identity and
therefore fails to deal adequately with the construction of sexual identity.\(^5\)

It is also significant that Radway does not choose to describe the participants in terms of their racial backgrounds.\(^6\) She refers to them as "ordinary" women, housewives who form a community of romance readers in the small town of Smithton. The word "ordinary" then seems to function as a metaphor for middle-class white. Radway acknowledges the smallness of her sample audience. However, it is not the smallness of her sample or even the fact that it does not encompass women from a variety of racial locations which is problematic, but the fact that race is simply not part of her analysis. Her participants remain unmarked racially because they are white and hence, normative. Radway's analyses fails to account for the ways in which her participants' location as white women shapes them as a community and gives them the specific competencies which may be required to read romance fiction. As Ruth Frankenberg points out, racism is often conceived of as something external to white women even though it is a system that helps to shape their sense of self. She argues therefore that it is important to look at the "racialness" of white experience, to explore the ways in which "whiteness" is constructed (1995: 1):

Naming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility ... To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign everyone a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people — that, rather, racism shapes white people's lives.
and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life. (Frankenberg 1995: 6)

If Radway puts forward the thesis of the reader in control, the resisting reader, Modleski makes the text of the Harlequin romance itself a site of protest and resistance, despite an overall appearance of a highly conservative plot. Unlike Radway, Modleski relies almost exclusively on psychoanalysis to analyze the structure and appeal of romance fiction. Challenging the position of the Frankfurt school critics on mass-produced art, Modleski argues that while the mass cultural text may "both stimulate and allay social anxieties" she would "avoid imputing to...the board of directors of the Harlequin company an omniscience about the nature and effects of their product" (Modleski: 1982: 28-29). In thus defending the "board of directors" as not-so-evil, she continues to be caught in the politics of intentionality that she is attempting to refute. Such a concern with intentionality is politically useless and implicit in this is the assumption that individual intentions can actually matter. Modleski goes on to argue that since the production of ideology is not the work of any identifiable group, one must turn to a study of the consuming unconscious.

Modleski cites a television commercial for Harlequin romances which shows a middle-aged woman lying on her bed holding a Harlequin novel and preparing for her "disappearing act". She contends that women's longing to "disappear" cannot be totally condemned in the light of John Berger's argument in Ways of Seeing (1973) that the display of women in the visual arts results in a woman's self being split into two. As a result, a
woman is constantly accompanied by her own image of herself; she has to survey herself all the time. Romances, according to Modleski, enable the reader to believe in the possibility of transcending this divided self, if only temporarily. They use the ideology of love to enable their readers to achieve a state of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness.

Modleski uses the theory of repetitive compulsion to explain the romance's appeal. According to this theory, art derives from some persistently disturbing psychic conflict which, failing its resolution in life, seeks it in the symbolic form of fantasy. Modleski argues that the Harlequins, in presenting a heroine who has escaped psychic conflict, invariably increases the reader's own psychic conflicts, thus creating an even greater dependency on the literature. She contends that this leads us to believe the other commonly accepted theory of popular art as narcotic. Just as certain tranquilizers taken to relieve anxiety, though temporarily helpful, are ultimately anxiety producing, romance fiction is only temporarily successful in helping the reader to "disappear". Both Radway and Modleski then defend romance reading as a space where readers can temporarily seek respite from reality by finding nurturance and achieving self-forgetfulness.

The necessity to counter the Frankfurt school has compelled critics like Radway to theorize female agency in ways that are both unconvincing and problematic. Popular culture is seen rather simplistically as women's means of expressing resistance. Firstly, Radway's meticulous account of the way the romance industry makes use of new techniques of book production, distribution, advertising and marketing in order to generate a need
among its female audience for the romance genre leads us to believe that the romance industry is all-powerful. Given her own presentation, she would have to marshal stronger evidence to argue that the romance reader exercises agency vis a vis the romance industry's manipulative mechanisms. However, what is perhaps even more problematic is the way in which she theorizes agency as lying outside the field of power relations. From her account, it appears that the Smithton women exercise pure agency when they claim leisure time or when they take time off from their emotionally draining lives. She does not seem to recognize that the industry informs even those acts seemingly expressive of their agency. The problem seems to lie in her posing the debate as one about ideology versus agency, wherein both ideology and agency are mutually exclusive and therefore pure.

Similarly, from Modleski's analyses, it is not very clear what constitute the "elements of subversion" which she had earlier claimed were part of the seemingly conservative plots of the Harlequin. The temporariness of this subversion, which Modleski herself emphasizes, indicates to us that the subversive potential of the Harlequin is highly limited. Modleski argues:

An understanding of Harlequin romances should lead one less to condemn the novels than the conditions which made them necessary. Even though the novels can be said to intensify female tensions and conflicts, on balance the contradictions in women's lives are more responsible for the existence of Harlequins than Harlequins are for the contradictions. (Modleski: 1982, 57)

In a defensive move similar to Modleski's, Radway claims that the love of romance can be seen as a hidden protest against
patriarchal culture. She argues that "critical power ... lies buried in the romances as one of the few widely shared womanly commentaries on the contradictions and costs of patriarchy" (1984:18). She fears however that this critical power will not really develop into conscious resistance against patriarchy because the overall ideological effect of romance reading is to reconcile women with their positions in patriarchy. Given that readers take the historical and descriptive detail in romance fiction as true, Radway contends that they are likely to believe the romance's assertion that men can fulfill women's needs.

Radway seeks to represent romance fiction and romance readers as "resisting" patriarchal structures, though nowhere does she really elaborate on the precise nature of these patriarchal structures. Speaking at a workshop on Media and Gender" recently, Madhava Prasad pointed out that studies which describe the audience as resisting the "dominant" never define the dominant and are confined to talking in terms of individual resistance (1997). Audience research or reception studies always proves that there is no "dominant" but nevertheless requires the thesis of dominance to characterize individual response.

Radway's celebration of the resisting romance reader and Modleski's unsubstantiated claim that the plot of the romance contains subversive elements are both half-hearted, even premature, in the light of their own anxieties about the ultimate effects of romance fiction. Their theoretical move of describing the phenomenon of romance reading as a means of temporary respite from the harsh demands of reality is deeply problematic for it only reinforces dominant notions about popular culture as
a site of false-consciousness, an escape route from a reality which has been constituted as prior to the text. Even as they position their critique against the Frankfurt school argument that audiences of popular cultures are "passive" and exist in a state of "false consciousness", their analyses unwittingly retain the remnants of this argument. In describing romance reading as "compensatory" and "therapeutic", they seem to suggest that the fairy-tale world of the romance helps women to cope better with the reality of their lives. The romance narrative continues to function for these critics as illusory ideology, the only difference being that this ideology is seen as temporarily beneficial, as giving women "a sense of emotional wellbeing" (1984: 93).

In their attempts to read "resistance" into the romance novel or agency in its readers, Radway and Modleski fail to recognise that there is no uncorrupted, non-ideological space, that the "free" reader is an impossibility. They do not see the female subject as regulated by power even at points when she appears to be exercising control, choice and agency. Given their rather simplistic understanding of how power or ideology works, Radway and Modleski resort to two extremes; on the one hand, they uncritically celebrate romance fiction and defend the reader, on the other, they express their anxieties about the connections they suspect between romance fiction and patriarchal structures. To see the subject as temporarily outside ideology/power would then be as problematic as assuming that ideology is all-powerful and makes agency impossible. Such a perception simplifies the
field of analysis, permitting us to read only one or the other, ideology versus agency, within a given cultural formation.

In her theorizing of female agency and liberation, Carol Thurston echoes Radway and Modleski. Using the images-of-women mode of criticism, she argues that the genre of the erotic romance has moved away from traditional sex-role portrayals, thus challenging the assumption that romances reinforce traditional social norms and that they have remained essentially unchanged through time especially as regards sex-role stereotyping. The erotic romance, she claims, has broken with conservatism to trace the evolution of the 'liberated' American woman with a responsiveness unmatched by any other mass entertainment medium" (1987: 7). She argues that in the erotic romance, the female persona is no longer split between two characters, the "good", self-sacrificing, chaste heroine and the "bad", selfish, sexy, "other woman". Instead, the heroine is a complete person, sexually assertive as well as good. Moreover, she is an independent, modern person with a strong drive for self-determination. Thurston's thesis is that the erotic romance represents the sexual liberation of the American woman. Implicit in such a thesis is the equation of sexual "liberation" with female agency, an agency which she images as being outside the field of power relations (1987). However, as Michel Foucault tells us, relations of power are not exterior to other relationships such as the sexual; they are, rather, immanent in them (1976). Foucault argues that wherever there is power, there is also resistance. Resistance is therefore never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. The romantic heroine's sexual assertiveness cannot simply
be seen as occurring in a purely liberatory space. As Judith Butler tells us:

...agency belongs to a way of thinking about persons as instrumental actors who confront an external political field. But if we agree that politics and power exist already at the level at which the subject and its agency are articulated and made possible, then agency can be presumed only at the cost of refusing to inquire into its construction. (1992: 13)

In other words, both agency and the subject are always within the field of power and politics.

Radway, Modleski as well as Thurston take for granted the categories of "woman". They seem to assume that romance fiction is essentially part of "women's culture". Such an assumption characterizes feminist criticism of women's magazines as well. In her book *Inside Women's Magazines*, Janice Winship looks at the women's magazines published in Britain, at the domestic weeklies of the 1950s to the glossies of the 1980s. Winship argues that it is impossible to think about femininity and women "without considering, among other things, motherhood and family life, beauty and fashion, love and romance, cooking and knitting – and therefore romantic novels, cookery books and women's magazines' (1987:6). Like Radway then, she advances the argument that women's texts are belittled in a culture that is largely male. Again, in a theoretical move similar to Radway's, she goes on to defend the "separate world" created by women's magazines, arguing that they give women some breathing space and support.

The assumption implicit in the work of Radway, Thurston, Modlesksii and Winship that 'women' pre-exist their representa-
tion and their construction in culture is premised in turn on the concept of a human essence that exists independently of and prior to the category of the social. Within this particular framework, the human subject who is represented as the origin and source of knowledge is "socialized" into certain values. However, the categories of the human subject and of "women", as recent theories show, emerge in the very construction of their representation. Modleski, Radway, Thurston and Winship tend to assume unproblematically that romance fiction and soaps are "women's culture". They seem inspired by the quantitative fact that these texts are so "popular" with so many "ordinary" women. There is an implicit essentialism in a position that fails to examine the processes by which certain texts come to be gendered as women's texts, assuming instead the popularity of certain texts among women as a "natural" fact.

Audience research criticism or reception studies allows for the asking of only two kinds of questions, why romances are popular and how the individual (and therefore "free") reader reads (and resists) these texts. However, when we attempt to situate women readers and popular literatures in a particular context such as our own, paying more attention to the specificities which govern and shape them, it is no longer possible to work with Reception studies' notions of the "free", individual reader and of the "popularity" of a certain kind of literature. Both the images-of-women mode of criticism as well as the reception studies mode works with the notion of the individual reader and of a certain reality as pre-existing cultural representations. We need to reconstitute our object of study in ways that
allow for the contextualization of readers, both institutionally and historically.

"Idazhiyal": An Approach to the Tamil Journal

Since this dissertation attempts to signal the creation of "women readers" and "non-Brahmin readers" of Tamil journals within specific historical and institutional spaces, it becomes necessary to examine some of the most common critical approaches to the popular Tamil journal. Scholarship in Tamil regarding the journal, given its location, has been concerned with questions quite different from those posed by the Cultural Studies critics whose work we examined above. While gender, reception and readership are frequently used analytical categories in Cultural Studies, Tamil scholarship has been largely concerned with retrieving and tracing the history of the Tamil journal.

A growing realization that a monolithic history of the "Indian" journal would lack both depth as well as sensitivity to the regional scene has been largely responsible for the emerging sub-discipline of "Idazhiyal" or Research on the Tamil journal within Tamil literary criticism. "Idazhiyal" scholars like A.M Samy have pointed out that most histories of the "Indian" journal either marginalize (sometimes even completely fail to mention) the Tamil journal or grossly misrepresent facts surrounding its rise and growth (1992: 20-23). Samy attributes this partly to the ignorance of Bengali historians who were among the first to write histories of the Indian journal and partly to the apathy of Tamil scholars who unthinkingly accepted histories written years
ago and hints at an anti-Tamil bias on the part of most scholars writing on the subject.

According to "Idazhiyal" scholars, despite the fact that Metcalfe's repeal of the press laws which resulted in official sanction to the practice of Indians owning printing presses came into effect only after 1835, a few journals both in Tamil as well as in other vernaculars, notably Bengali, printed and published locally by Indians, had begun to make their appearance even earlier. In Bengal, Madras and Bombay, Indians had owned and operated presses even before 1835. According to A.M Samy, way back in 1812 a person called Gnanaprakasan was running a press in Madras; Tiruvengadam owned a press in Kancheepuram in 1819; in 1816, Gangadhar Bhattacharya first published the Bengal Gazette and the still extant Gujarati journal Bombay Samachar appeared as early as 1822. Samy clearly refutes Murdoch's documentation of Tamil Magazine which appeared in 1831 as the first Tamil journal, arguing that the credit for being the first goes to the monthly Masadinasaritai which appeared as early as 1812. While there is no archival evidence for Samy's claim regarding the existence of this journal, it certainly appears to be an informed guess. He points out that there is evidence to suggest that one "Masadinasarithai" press, had printed the Tirukurral in 1812. Its title page mentions that Malayapillai Kumaran Gyanaprakasan is the printer and that the press was that of Masadinasaritai. Samy argues that a journal called Masadinasarithai must have existed at the same time that the Tirukurral was printed because the title page of the latter specifically refers to Masadinasaritai's press in the possessive. Also, he argues, it was common
practice in those days (as also in some cases, in the present) for the names of journal as well as of that of the press which printed it to be one and the same. This journal, (Samy opines that this was primarily a news magazine), if it indeed existed, was most likely printed, published as well as edited by Gnanapramakasan. Contradicting the claims of Samy, another "idazhiyal" scholar, S.Innasi, records Gangadhar Bhattacharya's Bengal Gazette, which appeared in 1816, as being the first journal started by an Indian and goes on to provide us with a very different trajectory altogether for the Tamil journal.

Disappointingly, "idazhiyal" studies remain mired in the cataloging approach. As we saw above, the cataloging of journals (or preparing a "pattiyal" as it is known in Tamil) is inevitably dogged by debates and controversies over which particular journal should be given the status of the earliest. Often, "idazhiyal" scholars are hampered in their efforts by inadequate archival material. At best, these catalogs offer us brief and pithy descriptions about each journal though with little attempt at providing us either with a sense of its particular context or with an analytical framework for reading it. Despite an implicit claim to "objectivity", these catalogs are inevitably limited given the ways in which they categorize journals. Innasi, for instance, divides journals into literary, social, religious and multi-lingual journals. A lot of journals which might not fit into these narrow categories would not be considered. This kind of cataloging as well as categorizing is indistinguishable from the reports on Indian journals published by the government or other official bodies such as the Press Trust of India. These
reports provide information regarding the periodicity, language and the place of the journal's publication, the year of its first appearance and details regarding its circulation. Some reports such as the annual report from the Registrar of Newspapers for India published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, employ only two categories to describe journals, "news-interest publications" and "non-news interest publications".¹¹

Print-Technology and its Reception in South India

Any history of the Tamil journal will inevitably have to begin by documenting the introduction of the printing press in India and its quick spread into South India.¹² Printing technology was first introduced into India by Christian evangelists from Portugal. Portuguese authorities dispatched a printing press to Abyssinia via Goa. The press never reached its destination however and the first printing press in India was established at Goa in 1556 by these Portuguese missionaries. This was both because of the growing awareness among the Fathers in Goa about the necessity of printing Christian literature in Indian languages and because of the Emperor of Abyssinia's unexpected loss of interest in the Portuguese missionaries. In 1577, acting on the request of the Christian fathers at Ambalakkadu, a village 20 miles south of Trichur in Kerala, the missionaries who had landed at Goa prepared part of the type for what was to be both the earliest example of printing in an Indian vernacular as well as the earliest example of printing in an Indian language in India. This was a book in Malabar Tamil titled Tambiran Vanakkam, a
sixteen page translation by Father Henriques and Father Manoel de Sao Pedro of Father Marcos Jorge's Doctrina Christina, printed at Quilon in 1578 (Kesavan: 1985). The Doctrina Christina also known as the Cartilha, which had earlier been printed in Lisbon in 1554, had transliterated Tamil into Roman characters and script and had preserved some of the Tamil colloquialisms of the sixteenth century. Tambiran Vanakkam was reprinted at Cochin in 1579. Printing technology therefore spread rapidly in the South with the first ever printed book in India being in Tamil. Within a century of the printing of Gutenberg's Bible in Germany then, efforts were on to fashion different types for Indian languages.

Tamil printing however went into a lull after 1612 and given the absence of paper mills and the difficulty of getting paper the dominant practice was to write on palm leaves. After the Portuguese initiative in printing, Danish Protestants who set up a mission at Tranquebar in order to counter the effects of the Portuguese Catholics, began to take the lead. In 1713, the Danish missionaries led by Bartholomew Ziegenbalg succeeded in getting a press for Tranquebar from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K) in London. With the help of the German Johann Gottlieb Adler from Halle, the first printing work in Tamil was started in Tranquebar the same year. Ziegenbalg printed his Catechism, a Tamil translation of the first part of the New Testament and devotional songs using the types made at Halle. Dissatisfied with these types, Ziegenbalg and his associates got smaller type faces engraved anew in Tranquebar, set up both a type-foundry and, later, a paper mill at Porayar close by. Religious books mostly connected with Christianity with
a few stray titles on the Vedas and Islam formed the bulk of the output of the Tranquebar press which functioned for over a hundred years. Ziegenbalg's book on Tamil grammar Grammatica pamulica printed at Halle in 1716 was an important source for European scholars of Tamil. With him begins the Germanic tradition in Indological and Tamil scholarship.

Printing came to Madras in the mid-eighteenth century when a printing press was taken out of the French settlement in Pondicherry as booty by Sir Eyre Coote after the siege of 1761. Placed under the care of the S.P.C.K missionaries headed by Johann Philippe Fabricus in Vepery, a suburb of Madras, this came to be known as the East India Company's Press. The nineteenth century was marked by the emergence of many presses in Madras such as the Madras School Book Society Press (1820) which catered to the needs of the students at the Missionary schools and the Madras Male Asylum Press, the Government Press (1831) which printed various government and military orders. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1815), The Madras Religious Tract Society (1818), the Tinnevelly Tract Society (1820), the Jaffna Tract Society (1823) and similar other societies brought out hundreds of Christian tracts in Tamil.¹³

John Murdoch's Catalogue of the Printed Book in Tamil (1865) is the earliest source of information on Tamil printing and publishing. This was followed by his Catalogue of the Christian Vernacular Literature of India (1870). Educated at Glasgow and the continent, Murdoch came to Madras as an agent of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland and joined the Christian Vernacular Education Society (known today as the Christian
Literary Society) on its formation in 1858. He was responsible for the establishment of a Religious Tract Society which was to produce Christian literature in Srilanka, then called Ceylon. He was also the motivating force behind the Christian Vernacular Education Society and published school books, pamphlets, tracts and books for general reading both in Tamil as well as in other regional languages. Despite certain glaring faults such as the omission of the year of publication and other misrepresentations arising from an improper knowledge of Tamil, the Murdoch Catalogues remain an invaluable source of information on books and journals published in the Tamil country, recording as they do hundreds of titles, mostly connected with Christian literature from Tranquebar's early printing up to 1865. Most "idazhiyal" studies including those by A.M Samy mention Murdoch's Catalogues as the first attempt to write a history of the Tamil journal. Obviously, the cataloging approach is in itself partly Murdoch's legacy.

As A.R Venkatachalapathy points out, though the first Tamil book was printed way back in 1578, it was not until the socio-economic transformation effected by colonialism and the loosening of administrative restrictions on Indians owning printing presses, that books began to be produced in large numbers (1994: 274). In 1835, the Governor General Charles Metcalfe withdrew the rigid press laws imposed by the British government, thus opening the floodgates of printing in India (Kesavan: 1985, 68). But Venkatachalapathy argues that even in the latter part of the nineteenth century, printed books existed side by side with palm leaf manuscripts giving rise to the simultaneous existence
of very different reading practices and orthographies (1994: 274-277). While the older generation was much more comfortable with the palm leaf manuscript and with the associated reading practices which emphasized memory and learning by rote, the younger generation had begun to take the printed book for granted. The availability of a greater range and a larger number of texts with the advent of print resulted in the gradual erosion of the authority of traditional scholars. With the printed book came the concept of private reading and the fixing of the text in terms of orthography.

Apart from Christian literature, the earliest printed material which began to appear in Tamil in the mid-nineteenth century, was mostly in the form of newspapers and magazines. Prominent among these were Dina Varthamani a weekly published from Madras which first appeared in 1855 and Sudesamitran which appeared in 1900. In the face of financial problems, the latter was sold to the Indian National Congress in 1973. It continued to appear off and on till March 31, 1981 when the last issue was published. In Sudesamitran. we have one of the earliest examples of what was soon to become a vibrant pro-nationalist Tamil journalism.

The development of the Tamil journal is closely linked to the growth of nationalism. As A.M Samy has pointed out, to the Tamil journal goes the credit of fashioning a simple, "people's" Tamil (1992: 284). The fashioning of an easy vernacular prose which would have a wider reach especially among the middle-classes was in itself a nationalist project. The high-flown Tamil of ancient Tamil literatures were accessible only to the
With the introduction of print and the appearance of the journal in Tamil, we have a new type of reader, a reader who was not required to be a scholar (which often necessarily meant a Brahmin male). The journal then democratized reading practices to a large extent. Despite the fact that the upper-castes continued to maintain their hold on literacy, the fashioning of a new type of journal Tamil meant that the journal became comprehensible to a wider audience. Given that newspapers often were, and, in fact, still are, read out to large groups of people by one person, they did not necessarily require a literate audience. This of course was not the case with the Tamil novel which made its appearance a few years after the first journals. The novel was far more suitable for private reading.

The Tamil journal of the early and mid-twentieth century was differentiated in terms of caste affiliations. It is crucial then to locate the journal within its specific caste matrix. As we shall see in the course of this dissertation, not only did each journal of this particular period vary widely in terms of its overt political agenda, it also differed in terms of style. What we have essentially are two kinds of journals, those which emerged out of the upper-caste nationalist press and those which were produced by the counter-nationalist Dravidian/non-Brahmin press. We begin however with the present, with the English language Femina and Woman's Era, on the one hand, and the Tamil Mangai and Mangavar Malar on the other, all four of them magazines of a very different kind from the early twentieth century Tamil journals.
Even within traditional literary criticism, attempts have been made at constituting a new object of enquiry in place of the literary text. Reader-response criticism represents one such attempt. Critics such as Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish claimed to have effected a shift in the status of the reader from passive, powerless consumer of the text to a dynamic figure who constructs and fashions the text's meaning. While so far reading had been seen as absorbing and attempting to understand the meaning of the text or as experiencing the effects intended by it, reader response critics problematized the interaction between reader and text, arguing that it was important to focus on how the reader chooses to interpret the text. These critics argue that the reader is always engaged in constructing certain hypotheses about the text's meaning, making implicit connections and filling in on its indeterminacies. No text, they argue, is complete without the reader. Reading is not a straightforward linear movement; the reader's pre-understandings generate a frame of reference within which s/he interprets what comes next, but what comes next may retrospectively transform his/her original understanding. Reader-response criticism created a climate within English Studies for questions such as what the reader likes to read and what constitutes a popular text and why.

Feminist critics such as Patrocinio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn have attempted to engage with Reader-response criticism (1986). Schweickart points out that mainstream reader-response criticism is largely preoccupied with two questions: first, does the text control the reader or vice versa? and, second, what constitutes the objective reality of the text? The reader, she points out, can either submit to the power of the text or take control of the reading experience. Schweickart argues that the feminist reader should read the text as it was not intended to be read, with a constant awareness of its androcentricity.

The "reader" in reader-response criticism remains a depoliticized figure existing solely in relation to the text. Her social situatedness, her location in class and race, her relation to other texts and the ways in which she is trained to read these, all of which determine her formation as a subject remain invisible. Reader-response criticism draws upon the legacy of Romanticism in suggesting that reading is by and large a private and socially unsituated act. Even as reader response critics recognise the existence of a "community of readers" who draw upon similar interpretative strategies, this community is not read as socially and historically located. While the role of inter-textuality and learnt interpretative codes in the reading process are emphasized, the ideal reader is still understood within a largely liberal framework as one who is open-minded and apolitical. Even as s/he is bound by the limitations of the interpretative codes s/he has been trained in, these codes, for
Reader-response theory, are purely literary. Her social and historical location are not perceived as crucial elements in the shaping of her reading position.

2 See Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies," *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg et al (New York: Routledge, 1992) for a more elaborate laying out of the intellectual and political trajectory of Cultural Studies. Also, see bibliography for references to the work of Hall and Raymond Williams.


5 Reader-response critic Schweickart also uses Chodorow's work to examine what she calls a feminist mode of reading that is "centred on a female paradigm" (1996: 52). She refers to Adrienne Rich's essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" to show that in feminist readings of women's texts, the dialectic of control which shapes mainstream readings of texts gives way to a dialectic of communication between text and reader. According to Schweickart, Rich mediates between 'the context of writing and the context of reading' (1984: 4). Her use of the personal voice reminds us that her interpretation is informed by her own subjective perspective. She reaches out to Dickinson in an attempt to establish her affinity with another woman poet. Schweickart argues that Nancy Chodorow offers an apt psychoanalytic explanation for women's desire to seek an affinity with others. According to Chodorow, while 'men define themselves through individuation and separation from others, women have more flexible ego boundaries and define and experience themselves in terms of their affiliations and relationships with others' (1986: 54-55). The problem with Schweickart's arguments is that she essentializes and universalizes 'male' and 'female' readings of texts without recognizing that reading positions are socially constructed, not natural.

6 Radway's questionnaires solicit information about the participant's age, her financial and educational background, marital status, reading history and religious preference, the time she spends on reading, where she buys romance novels, whether she is employed, how many children she has and so on.

7 Echoing this position, Leslie Rabine suggests in an essay titled "Romance in the Age of Electronics: Harlequin Enterprises", *feminist Criticism and Social Change*, ed. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York: Methuen, 1985), that romance fiction, like other forms of mass culture, has displayed an uncanny abili-
ty to "ingest... social, economic or cultural historic change in women's lives" (1985: 252). This, he argues, is obvious from the way the Harlequin series is selling the concept of the working heroine with a glamorous job. Rabine also describes the changes in the way the romance industry functions as one reason for the dramatic increase in the popularity of Harlequin romances in the last decade.

8See the work of A.M Samy, S.Innasi and Somaley (check bibliography for references). The word "idazh" is the Tamil version of the sanskritized "patrikai". When printing technology had just come to Tamilnadu, all printed matter (wedding invitations, newspapers, literary magazines etc.) were referred to as "patram" or "patrikai". It was only much later that the word "patrikai" took on the specific meaning of a news magazine or "seydi tal". Non-news magazines and journals were referred to either as "masikai" (which was an adaptation from the English "magazine" and also meant a periodical that came out every month) or as "sanjigai". In current usage, the word "patrikai" refers both to newspapers as well as magazines while the word "seydi tal" is used specifically with reference to newspapers. In this dissertation, I have used the word "journal" as a way of referring both to the newspaper as well as to the magazine. This is necessitated by the fact that often both these forms share the same histories and reflect the same ideological moment.

9In fact, as Samy himself admits, the earliest Tamil journals for which we actually have archival evidence are Udayatarakai which appeared in 1841 and Narbodakaro which first appeared in 1845. Copies of both these journals may be found at the Maraimalai Adigal library in Madras.

10The practice at that time was for the same person to take on the roles of printer, publisher and editor.

11English language journals are typically classified as "General interest newspapers" and "Periodicals". According to the UNESCO definition commonly followed by official reports in India, "General Interest Newspapers" is defined as any publication put on sale to the general public, which serves as an initial source or written news of current events in the field of public affairs, politics, government, etc. The term, 'initial source' is used so as to exclude periodicals such as weekly news magazines. UNESCO defines "periodical" other than a general interest newspaper as a publication which appears under the same title at regular intervals but more than once a year and whose contents range from information of a general nature to trade, technical and professional subjects. This definition covers all periodicals published weekly or at longer intervals except annuals. Similarly, the Government of India classifies papers into A and B categories. The A category is comparable to the "General Interest Newspaper" while category B is similar to the UNESCO's "Periodical".