Chapter I
Introduction

The Context

This is a study that examines how contact with the British historical writings produced a new sense of history in southernmost regions of India under colonialism. This thesis attempts to study the nature of this transition from the pre-colonial ways of narrating the past to the scientific methods of writing of history.

The pre-colonial forms of representation of the past had its own logic and epistemological positions which rendered them sensible in the society. These indigenous forms of representation of the past were pluralistic in nature, but all these forms enjoyed equal status as Pramana (authoritative).

A major epistemic rupture set in with the establishment of colonial rule in India. The colonial rule which was characterised as the age of modernity, reinforced its own epistemic order, as of superior category, in terms of rationality, truth and accuracy. This new epistemic order, anchored in the continental philosophy, initiated new process of historical scholarship. It generated a vast corpus of knowledge on all aspects of the life and culture in the colonised region of India and South India.

The representation of the past was one of the sites where knowledge of the past was generated in the framework of Western epistemic order. Modernity enabled a distinction between literature and history. It defined what history is and
how history should be written. Though the models of historiography of India exercised a great influence in the craft of historians, the making of the past in the colonial South was not just an imitation of Indian historiography. There are variations in relation to culture, people and region in the historiography of the far south. The historiography of the far south is re-examined here in terms of these variations by focusing on the dynamics of external and internal factors in the making of the past. The fundamental assumptions, postulates and historical interpretations that constitute regional/racial/cultural identities are reassessed.

The formation of regional identities brings out the pattern of interaction between the pan Indian model and the regional variations. This has found little space in the writings on modernity. So this needs to be studied. An attempt is made here to illustrate how the craft of historians in the colonial south articulated appropriation and resistance to the overarching models of historiography in India under colonialism.

The study of colonial historiography in the far South through the intensive reading of the historical texts in Tamilakam and Keralam is superfluous in the absence of an enquiry into the process of generation of sources. Since the use of sources constitutes the chief context of assessing the craft of historians, the different categories of knowledge produced by the official and non-official agencies are examined here. Such sources numerous and heterogeneous in nature can be characterized as the main factor of production of historical knowledge in the colonial south. So this thesis though primarily a critique of historiography is not limited to the conventional discipline of history alone. It transcends the
discipline and incorporates theoretical insights of disciplines such as Linguistics, Anthropology, Philosophy and Sociology. On the whole its domain is critical historiography and social theory.

The region under study consists of the southernmost states of India, such as Tamilnadu and Kerala. In the historical texts of colonial south India the region is designated as Tamilakam that included Keralam (the West Coast). Colonial Indian historiography considered the regions as south India. Indian historiography of later ages designated these regions as /extreme south/the far south. Combining these trends in Indian historiography, in this thesis, the combined regions of Tamilnadu and Kerala are designated as South India/Southern India/the far South. The term south of India is also employed in this study to designate the southern most regions of India (Tamilakam and Keralam).

The temporal scope of this thesis is limited to the colonial period from 1867 to 1945. The rationale is that it was during this period that a number of scholars attempted to reconstruct history of the region on modern lines. This was an age of production of historical texts on Tamilakam and Keralam.

**Objectives**

1. To analyse the different forms of representation of past in the premodern age and explain how they evolved and functioned in the socio-economic and political formations of their times.
2. To explore the nature of historiography in colonial South India as a site of transition from oral compositions of traditional chronicles to scientific writing of history.

3. To examine the role of cultural factors and the colonial intellectual impact in the making of scientific history in South India.

4. To examine the role of historiography in the formation of cultural/regiona identities in colonial South India.

5. To illustrate the different parameters employed by colonial historians for the reconstruction of history on modern lines.

6. To re-examine the notion of scientific writing of history and explain the limitations.

**Methodology**

Historiography is a modern phenomenon that has evolved through institutional patterning and modeled on the methodological norms of Positivism. It is related to the critical appreciation of texts of the past, their trends and shortcomings. Historiography has its own privileged status among the signs of the new cultural system, as it represents the normative framework as to how the texts of the past should be.

Positivist historians taking every possible precaution to assure objectivity of information, assumed that the knowledge thus derived would be true history. But the intellectual traditions of Postmodernism presuppose that knowledge can be articulated only through interpretation. So it is now commonly accepted that
true history is a contested notion. Historians today seldom believe that they write uncontested truth about the past. The main reason is the inescapable link of written history with the present.\(^1\) Histories are written under the control of the socio economic and political stimuli of historian’s times. Historians are bound by the present that provides them with their modes of perception of the past. It is being increasingly recognised that methodological objectivity would not mean more than the historian’s openness and transparency about the conceptual presuppositions deployed in their interpretation. The colonial historians did not have understood that sources in the form of texts displayed the intentions of the author, which were conditioned by the social and political environment to which the author belonged. If this is accepted it reveals that an understanding of the text lies partly in grasping what the kind of society the author was addressing. Thus the context consists of both “what the texts intended to mean and how the meaning was supposed to be understood.”\(^2\) But during the last twenty years through critical debates postmodernism has questioned several assumptions in understanding a text.\(^3\) There is a shift from the material context of a text to the language of the text. Language is no longer considered as a neutral, transparent medium. Reflexive reading of texts is a recent phenomenon enabled by postmodern thinking. It is different from the reflection over historical works that speak only of the author and his writings. But reflexive reading of the text

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1 R.G. Collingwood’s thesis of “Contemporary consciousness” (The Idea of History, rpt. OUP. 1994) has become too much a part of the accepted wisdom to require acknowledgement today.
brings forth the reappearance of the voice of the author. This is made possible due to:

a) The recognition that writing has its own limitations in expressing the ideas absolutely. There is a space between thoughts and writing.4

b) There is also the possibility of inconsistencies in expressing ideas. Hence reflexive reading is adopted as the method i.e. reflexive methodology capable of exploring the context. Inter-textuality of the historical works is explored in the process of using it.

Post modernism perceives a rather complex operational base that is better explained through discourse analysis. Methodological insights are also drawn from the critical social theories of Annales, particularly from the theory of production of space by Henry Lucienfbrve. In effect the methodology or the theoretical basis of hermeneutics adopted in the present study is a combination critical theory, Annales perspectives and postmodern thinking without being identified with any one of them. It is neither modern nor postmodern and in that sense a critique of both. This approach we owe largely to Pierre Bourdieu’s reflexive methodology.

Heuristics as a primary technique remains the same as usual divided in to primary and secondary. However, the primary data for the present study are what historians treat secondary, for ours is a historiographic study rather than historical study. It is historical too in the sense of history of ideas in historical writings.

4 Jonathan Culler on Deconstruction Theory and Criticism After Structuralism, London 1987, p. 44.
The different meanings attributed to discourse rather places the word in a position of advantage. Though the literal translation of the word is speech or conversation it denotes the relationship between formation of knowledge that commands authority and a particular environment that produces collective consciousness which provides new insights into an extensive realm of new knowledge and practices in different fields. The mechanism operates till the 'other' is reconstituted after the model. Thus discourse entails a particular mode of domination, organisation and reconstitution to which the others are subjected. 

Sources

One of the major themes of study in this thesis is the transformation that took place in the historical consciousness of the society of South India during the colonial period. To understand this transformation it is necessary to examine the peculiarities of the sense of past that existed in this land before we came into contact the West. In the traditional society of India, the sense of past that was expressed through several forms of literature such as the gatha, nārāsamsi-s, akhyana, vijaya, charitha, the itihasa, purana traditions and the non-puranic traditions (kavya and carita) are studied. The sections in the Rigvedic Samhita that are related to the expressions of past are examined. The pioneer texts by A.D. Pusalker F.E. Pargiter as well as the texts of later ages by scholars who conducted studies in these traditions are examined. There were traditional forms

Discourse is power/knowledge combine that subjectify people and control their thoughts and actions. For a discussion of discourse analysis and history, see Alun Munslow, Op. Cit. pp. 120-139.
of literature in the Southern most regions of India which shared broad similarities with these Sanskrit traditions. Song was the earliest form of historical tradition. Keralolpatti, the different categories of songs, Mooshaka Vaṃśa kavya, the caritam-s which existed in the traditional society of Keralam are studied. In Tamilakam different categories of songs existed from time to time. Nattupadalkal, pallupadalkal, kathaipadalkal, ula, parani and tutu are reviewed.

The pioneer historical texts emerged in the Southern regions of India (Tamilakam and Keralam) from 1867. Colonial historiography of Southern India was enriched by eminent scholars. In Tamilakom the pioneer V. Kanakasabhai (The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago, 1904) was followed by scholars such as Krishnaswami Aiyanger (South India and Her Mohammedan Invaders, 1921; The Beginnings of South Indian History, 1918; The Evolution of Hindu Administrative Institutions in South India, 1931; A History of Tondai Mandalam, 1940); M. Srinivasa Aiyanger (Tamil Studies, 1914); R. Sathianatha Aiyar (The History of the Nayaks of Madura, 1924); T.R. Shesha Aiyangar, (Dravidian India, 1925); K.G. Shesha Aiyangar (Cera Kings of the Sangam Period, 1937); K.V. Subramaniam Iyer (Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan, 1917); P.T. Srinivasa Iyengar (Pre Aryan Tamil Culture, 1928, History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A.D., 1931; The Past in the Present, 1928); K.N. Sivaraja Pillai (The Chronology of the Tamils, 1932); K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (The Pandyan Kingdom, 1929; The Colas, 1935; Foreign Notices of South India From Megasthenes to Mahavam, 1939); A. Appadourai (Economic Conditions in
South India 1000-1500 AD, 1936), C. Minakshi (Administrative and Social Life Under the Pallavas, 1938); T.N. Subramanian (History of Tamil Nadu to 1565 A.D., 1914); V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar (Studied in Tamil Literature and History, 1936) and S. Venkata Ramanyya (Early Muslim Expansion in South India, 1943).

In Keralam the writing of history in the form of a text was initiated by Pacchu Moothathu (Thiruvithamcore charithram, 1867); P. Shangoony Menon (The History of Travancore From the Earliest Times to 1867 A.D, 1878); K.P. Padmanaba Menon (Cochi Rajya Charithram, 1914, History of Kerala, 4 vols. 1929); T.R. Krishna Menon (Progress of Cochin, 1932); K.V. Krishna Iyer (The Zamorins of Calicut From the Earliest Times To A.D. 1806, 1936). Set the model for the writing of history in Keralam.

The primary sources for the study also include the Administrative reports, Census reports, the Descriptive catalogue of Manuscripts, the Survey reports, the State Manuals, the Ethnographical Studies that were initiated by the British administrative machinery in colonial South India. This created a system of knowledge about the land and its inhabitants.

The travelogues and missionery literature which were used as the sources by the colonial historians are also reviewed.

About the Chapters

This study is organised in three chapters. The second chapter entitled Representation of the past in the precolonial society of India examines the
evolution of different forms of representation of the past which existed in the precolonial society of India. On the basis of content and social environment they are categorised into Traditions of the Vedic Age, the *Itihasa* traditions, the *Puranic* traditions and the *Non-puranic* traditions. Their Structural peculiarities are discussed. The evidences for political, social and economic conditions are studied. The perceptions of space and time are studied in relation to the epistemological positions and logic which existed in the pre colonial society of India. The processes behind the making of the *itihasa* traditions and the *puranic* traditions as mega-narratives are examined. How the traditions in the pre-colonial society of India underwent a constant restructuring and complexities in accordance with the changes in political and social environments is the issue focused upon in this chapter. The primary sources, the studies on each of these traditions, and the studies on religions in India are employed as sources. For a better understanding of the linguistic peculiarities of these traditions the texts which discuss origins and structural peculiarities of different genres of literature are also consulted. As the traditions in the preliterate society centre round tribal chiefdoms, anthropological writings on tribal societies are also examined.

Chapter III, 'The Mapping of Tamilakam and Keralam in Colonial Historiography' examines the assumptions and interpretations that created historical units in the historiography of the colonial South. Such an exercise reveals that there is no single scientific criterion for the mapping of regions. The nature of historical interpretations in the formation of racial/culture/ regional/ identities is examined. The differences of opinion among historians in the
geographical definitions of regions, population and culture are illustrated to reveal the autonomy exercised by historians in the making of the past. The pattern of interaction between the pan Indian models of historiography and the variables in the craft of historians of the colonial south are examined. The arguments behind the construction of the geographical unit of the far south and the role of historical interpretations in the formation of regional/cultural/linguistic/racial identities are re-examined. How the making of the past was influenced by the specific social and political environment of the society to which the historians belonged is illustrated by examining the devotion to anti-brahmanical and brahmanical loyalties in the mapping of Tamilakam and Keralam.

As one of the basic premises of historiography in the Colonial South, the geographical formulations of India and South India as revealed by the British historical tradition are examined. Local narratives and precolonial forms of representation of the past such as *Ula, Parani, Tutu* and the *Saiva Siddhanta* literature of the medieval Tamil society and the different categories of local narratives of the ancient and the medieval Keralam are re-examined as a major category of sources. The official literature in the form of Survey reports, Census reports, Administrative reports, *State Manuals*, compilations of inscriptions were employed as the primary sources by the historians of Tamilakam and Keralam. These are studied with reference to how they provided a body of knowledge about the land and people which acted as determinants in the making of the past in the colonial South. The other
categories of sources such as travel accounts and missionary literature are re-examined as factors which conditioned the craft of the historians in the colonial South. The anthropological writings in the far south is also surveyed as one of the premises of colonial historiography.

Chapter IV entitled 'Historiography of Colonial South India, A Methodological Critique' examines the analytical procedure employed by historians in sources. The conscious or inadvertent objectives of historians in the production of historical texts are examined. How the contact with the West produced a sense of history in colonial South India is explained. The differences between the theoretical formulations of history, and the actual practices of writing history or illustrated by re-examining certain issues which the historians themselves defined as 'historical questions'. This chapter is not concerned with the truth/falsity of the contents of the texts. But it identifies how contact with the West produced a sense of history in the minds of the indigenous scholars.

Articles from journals and the proceedings of the South Indian History Congress and Indian History congress that are related to the present study have enabled to understand the embedded theoretical and conceptual problems in the colonial historiography of the far south. The texts of post-colonial period that are related to the present study are consulted as they highlight the methodological limitations of colonial historiography of the far south.
Scope

This study seeks to unravel the epistemological position of historiography in the colonial South. Such an exercise can help us understand the disciplining process that took place in the representation of the past in the southern most regions of India under colonialism. This study also endeavours to re-examine the processes behind the construction of certain postulates that continue to dominate South Indian historiography. It enables us to know how historical interpretation formed the base for cultural/regional/racial identities in the colonial South. This critical historiographic understanding is very significant in the contemporary social situation.