

# Meaning as Rescuer: Colonizing the Colonizer, the Tamil Way

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## Introduction

In this paper I approach an afterlife of a Tamil bhakti poem composed by a prominent English colonial administrator based in colonial Madras Presidency during the first half of the nineteenth century. The poem was the subject of controversies immediately upon its appearance in print; some people defamed its composer and questioned the credibility of his faith in his own religion. The poem was slandered and seen as evidence of the colonizer's conversion to the colonized's religion. Intriguingly, the poem was commented upon by a native Tamilian scholar, thus restoring the fame of the composer and rescuing the poem from the charge of verbal absurdities. The poem in question was entitled *Taravukkoccakakkalippā*. Its disparaged author is the celebrated Francis Whyte Ellis (1777–1819), who at the time served as Collector of Ramnad. The untitled commentary was written by Muttuccāmiṭṭai (?–1840), Ellis's close friend and a Tamil teacher at Fort. St. George College. As *Taravukkoccakakkalippā* is comprised of five stanzas written in Tamil in praise of Lord Shiva, it was hailed later as *Namacivāyap pāṭṭu*.

The poem, the controversy surrounding it, and Muttuccāmiṭṭai's response to this controversy supply the central theme of this paper. This paper advances a question about what happens when a colonizer *mimics* the colonized. By answering this question, I argue that the colonizer's Tamil text is a delineation of inverse colonization, and the commentary is an act of epistemological honoring given by a colonized to a colonizer's text. I also contend that the text and the commentary is an *inverse paring* in

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the colonial semiosis and in the Tamil literary relation as well, and it envisages an anomalous colonial discourse, the colonization of colonizer by the colonized.

### The Poem: A Small History

In his *Tamil Plutarch* (1859), the earliest surviving English account Tamil literary works and authors, Simon Casie Chitty, after introducing some of the major works of the famous Tamil poet and scholar Muttuccāmiṭṭai, has the following to say about him:

Besides the two works noticed above, he wrote a commentary on Mr. ELLIS' stanzas, called *Taravu Kochchagakalippa*, (தரவுகொச்சக்கலிப்பா); this he did in order to refute an idea which was prevalent amongst the Hindus that Mr. ELLIS, having ended each of his stanzas with the words *Namasivaya*, he had therefore become a convert to their religion; By proving that these words were never intended to represent the pentagrammaton, but only to convey the meaning "reverence to the only God." (Chitty 1859:56)

Translating it to Tamil and extensively expanding the *Tamil Plutarch* after 27 years, Arnold Sadasivam Pillai made clear the name of the group who had made the assertion that Ellis was converted to 'their' religion. It was the Saivites who made the accusation, said Arnold. He sarcastically labeled the whole incident *Ūrār uḷariya apavātam*. We infer from Chitty's account that it was not an accusation by a specific group (he mentions no name), but the poem was displayed as evidence of the power of their own religion (whoever they were). But in the words of Arnold Sadasivam Pillai, it was a calumny (*apavātam*). He exceeds his source text and says that the arguments of Saivites amounted to tittle-tattle (*uḷaral*). He labels the Saivites as *ūrār*, people living in *ūr* and thus making the accusation a universal one. He adds that Muttuccāmiṭṭai had given a proper refutation by writing a commentary to the negative arguments (*etirk kūrru*) of the Saivities (Arnold 1994:243). Arnold seems to point to the polemical writings of the Saivites of that time. The Saivites took an active role in condemning heretical texts during the 19th century (Paramacivan 2014: 119–22). The well-known polemics written by Saivites against the *aruṭpā* (divine) songs of Thiruvārutprakasa Vallalār, alias Chidambaram Ramalingam (1823–1874),

denigrating them as *maruṭpā* (songs with error) is worth mentioning at this juncture (Caravaṇaṅ 2001:40–43). While none of the Saivite texts condemning Ellis's poem have survived, from these accounts of the two earliest literary historians of Tamil, we can infer three distinct moments within a complex colonial event: Francis Whyte Ellis composed a Tamil poem resembling a Saiva poem, it was accused of a specific religious commitment, and a commentary on it was written by a native named Muttuccāmiṭṭai to refute this accusation. Neither author specified how many poems were written by Ellis, or when and where they were published. Neither the poem nor the commentary has been quoted as evidence.

We infer from one Singarapelavanderam Pillay that Ellis had written only one Tamil poem and that it had five stanzas. He gives all five stanzas of Ellis's poem as *taravukkocakakkalippā* (Singarapelavanderam Pillay 1859: 112). Taking a cue from him we find all the five stanzas in 1819 edition of Ellis's commentary on the *Tirukkuraḷ*. It was posthumously published (Ellis died in 1819) and had no front page. Each stanza of the printed poem ends with *namaciṅāya*, the sacred mantra of Saivites. He quotes his own poem in his commentary for the tenth couplet of the first chapter (*kaṭavul vāḷttu*) of the *Tirukkuraḷ* (Figure 1). Ellis also translated his poem into English. Neither the Tamil poem nor the translation appear to have been published in any other books or in the existing colonial magazines. He did not inscribe his name in it. It is also clear from reading his *Tirukkuraḷ* commentary that it was Ellis's custom to give the title or the author's name of the poem that he quotes from. Ellis's silence shows his *avaiyadakkam* ('apology to the assembly' or 'intellectual modesty'). Ellis's commentary has been republished twice, once in 1844 by the American Mission press and again other in 1955 by Madras University but excluding all the grammatical notes. Controversy should have surfaced after the wide circulation of 1819 edition.

Like Ellis's poem, Muttuccāmiṭṭai's commentary has also an eventful publication history. In 1843 Appāvupīḷḷai published a small volume of the uncollected poems of Vīramāmuṇivar, alias Constantine Joseph Beschi (1680–1747). He included Muttuccāmiṭṭai's commentary in it without any context (Figures 2–3). In 1936, the same Appāvupīḷḷai edition was reprinted as a facsimile (Figure 4).

**தரவுக்கொச்சக்கலிப்பா**

நனநீயுமலியிலொநனமணியார்பேரகடவிய  
 எனறுரைபாரநமபுவரோயிவருகுநதஞ்சமுண்டு  
 பினனீரமதினமலரநநிற்றமலரோயெனுடசேழிப்ப  
 முனறெயவமகிடடெனபேனமுறையொவறைய நமசிவாய

மணனூடுவானூடுமனிதரகாரொல்லவரும  
 எனனூதவண்டமவையிவறறுளளாமபல்வயிரும  
 கணனூடடிநகானூதமனமாடடிநகண்டபரம  
 நனனூமனிவனவணங்கியென்பவரோ நமசிவாய

சிறநிறைவரிவவுலகுடசிநியோரினசிறுபொருளில்  
 வறநிறையவாங்குவரோவல்லமையும்கிழ்ச்சியுள்ள  
 பறநிறைவனீகிறையவாங்கதாயேயாகுகிறுற  
 செறநிறைவிட்டுடடிநிறையசொரிவேனே நமசிவாய

வாயமையொனறுமாயயொனறுமவாருளதிலவேழநியாய  
 நீயெல்லொடெல்லாநீநினனூளில்லாபொருளில்லை  
 நீயெல்லேயிருளேநீயுயரச்சிசீயாழம  
 வாயொனநிடடுலகெலாமவணவருகடுவ நமசிவாய

யமனவருககாவகிமபொநியுயியாதலையெப்பொறுகொமைச்  
 கமதநிலைப்போனமுனமலரநநருவருயிருமலரடங்கி  
 மேலததிலகூரதுளிகேரவெலியிற்றகுவிநதயாக  
 வமருளதிலமாதல்கேயெமைநதாடு நமசிவாய

Figure 1. Ellis’s *Taravukkoccakakkalippā* in 1819 edition of his *Tirukkural* (p. 37)

**The Poem**

Ellis titled the poem as *Taravukkoccakakkalippā* presumably following the Tamil Saivite literary tradition of labeling poems by metrics. Such practice emphasized the metrical uniqueness, as well as the poet’s ability in composing using such a meter. For example, many songs of Appar in *Tēvāram* corpus are named as *thiruthtankam* following the meter.<sup>1</sup> He is admirably called as *tandakaventhār* accentuating his ability in composing poems in the tough *tandakam* meter. *Kalippa* is considered as a suitable

meter to praise God. In Tamil Vaishnavism, the *Alvars* most widely used *kalippa* meter. *Kalippa* seems flexible to compose poems in *aṭiyār pāvāṇai* (impersonating as devotee). Ellis has elaborately discussed the characteristic feature of *kalippa* in his Tamil metrical grammar.

The subject matter of the poem is very simple and explicit, all five stanzas talk about the importance of the mantra *namacivāya*. In the first stanza, Ellis says Lord Shiva is the giver of all benefits. He is like a waveless ocean and the one who does not abandon those who believe in him. His grace is like a flower and blossoming in (his) heart. Moreover, it has a self-reference. He says, '(Hereafter) I will stop worshipping other deities and say your name *namacivāya* with devotion.' In the second stanza, he concentrates on the *nirkuṇa*, or the ineffable aspect of the god. Lord Shiva is invisible to all mortals, immortals, and all other beings. Everyone should worship him from a distance, saying in one voice "*namacivāya*." In the third stanza, he compares Shiva with all earthly kings. Lord Shiva is not like earthly impotent kings enforcing their subject to pay tribute. He is the truly beloved king requesting no tribute. Referring to himself, Ellis says, 'I pay tribute to him, saying *namacivāya* by pouring my soul.' In the fourth stanza, he talks about the all-pervading nature of Shiva. He is light, darkness, height, and depth. Without him there is nothing in the world. In an authorial voice he demands, 'Let the whole world praise him exclaiming *namacivāya*.' In the fifth and the last stanza, he comments on the uncertainty of human life. The five sense organs are useless when death approaches. The blossom of the soul will fade away. And it will get agitated like a water drop trembling in a lotus leaf. He finds a way to pacify the war within the body saying, 'one (or all) should chant "*namacivāya*.'"

I will take the first song followed by his own translation for a brief discussion (Ellis 1819:37–38):

நன்றியுமலையில்லா நன்மணியார்பேர் கடலாய்  
என்றுரைப்பார் நம்புவரே – யிவருக்குந் தஞ்சமுண்டு  
நின்னீரமதின் மலர்ந்த விறமலரேயெனுட்செழிப்ப  
முன்றெய்வம் விட்டென்பேன் முறையொன்றாய் நமசிவாய

[Nanṛīyūm alaiyillā nanmaṇiyārpērkaṭalāy  
eṇṇuraippār nampuvārē – yivarukkun taṅcamuṇṭu  
niṇṇīramatiṇ malarnta viṇmalarēy eṇuṭ celippa  
munṇeyvam viṭṭēnpēn muraiyōṇṛāy **namacivāya**]

Thou, who vouchsafest all good, art a waveless sea abounding in  
 precious jewels,  
 And the refuge of those who thus believe in thee;  
 As the beauteous, full-blown flower of thy grace flourisheth in my  
 soul,  
 I quit all other deities and say with entire devotion–reverence to the  
 only God!

*Namacivāya* is the sacred mantra for Saivites. It is also considered as the name of Shiva. In *Tēvāram* the *patikam* ('unit of ten stanzas') ending with *namacivāya* are commonly called *namacivāya patikam* in the Saivite literary tradition. There are four such *patikams* in the *Tēvāram* corpus. Two were authored by Tiruñāṇacampantar (7th century CE), one by Appar (7th century CE), and the other by Cuntarar (9th century CE). Only one of Tiruñāṇacampantar's two *patikams* ends with *namacivāya*. Campantar is credited with the authorship of singing *namacivāya patikam*. In English translation, the first stanza of his *namacivāya* ending *patikam* runs like this:

It is the name of my god *namacivāya*,  
 The true meaning of the four *Vedas*  
 Will lead those who chant  
 With love and compassionate  
 With tears flowing profusely  
 To the path of righteousness (3:22)

Given the style and content of Ellis's stanza, it seems that he modelled his poem on the *Tēvāram*. If he had written ten songs, he might have kept the title *namacivāya patikam*. This stanza has three components: the praise, the mute possession of God, and the verbal surrender of the devotee. Of course, praising God is a recurrent theme in all Tamil bhakti poems. In Ellis, eulogizing moves back and forth from God's inanimate feature (*alaiyillā nanṇaṇiyārpēr kaṭalāy* and *niṇṇāramatiṇ malarnta viṇamalarēy*) to animate feature (*tañcam aḷittal*). Proclaiming God to be a refuge for all beings is a commonplace in Tamil Saivite songs. Appar sings the following *patikam* when he is being persecuted:

He is the one who recites the famous Vedas,  
 Lives in the light-filled celestial world.  
 His feet are like gold and beautiful:  
 Keep them in mind

Fold your hands, and pray  
 Even if you're tied to a stone pillar and thrown into the sea  
*namacivāya* will be a good companion.  
 It will save you. (4:11)

These lines are echoed in Ellis's 'And the refuge of those who thus believe in thee' (*nampuvārē – yivarukkun tañcamuṅṅtu*). An individual experiences are portrayed as a universal one in most Tamil bhakti poems. To rephrase it in the words of Vološinov (1973:89), every Tamil bhakti poem sings the 'I-experience' of the individual devotee (the poet) with God in the guise of 'we-experience.' Ellis adopts a similar strategy in his poem.

Most of the eulogization in Tamil bhakti poems ensue from a commitment to God. In the Saivite tradition, the commitment comes when the devotee is taken over by the God. The mute collaboration initiated by the god (Lord Shiva) turns an ordinary man or other religious person into a Saivite devotee. Ellis represents himself as Shiva's devotee from another faith (*munreyvam viṭṭenpēn*), who thus registers himself as a witness to such a collaboration (*un aruḷ ennuḷ celippa*). Since chanting the name of God enacts a form of verbal surrender, saying *Namacivāya* with devotion (*muraiyonrāy namacivāya*) is the external manifestation of bhakti and the proof of conversion. Ellis follows the traditional method of narrating the self of Tamil *nāyaṅmār* in this poem. In one of his *patikams*, Cuntarar adds his own life history:

Oh! good ascetic!  
 Who has arisen in the temple called `Tiruppāṅṅikkotuṅṅtu` in Karaiyur  
 The glorious land of worship of the learned.  
 I have enshrined in my mind your sacred feet  
 They are my companion – no others  
 I became a human being  
 I attained the state where I will not be born again  
 Even if I forget you  
 My tongue uninterruptedly  
 Will continue to say *namacivāya*. (7:48)

All three *nāyaṅmārs*, along with Ellis, glorify *namacivāya* as possessing a transcendental significance. *Namacivāya* will help elude danger of one who chants it in this human birth. These *patikams* require chanting with great reverence. They highlight bodily action (*meypṅātu*) in order to demonstrate the deferential respect to God. The total surrendering of oneself to the

name itself will help to evade the difficulties in life. It even overcomes *samsara*, the condition of being born again and again. Ellis's poem, we may say, is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers (Barthes 1977:146) of Tamil Saivite culture.

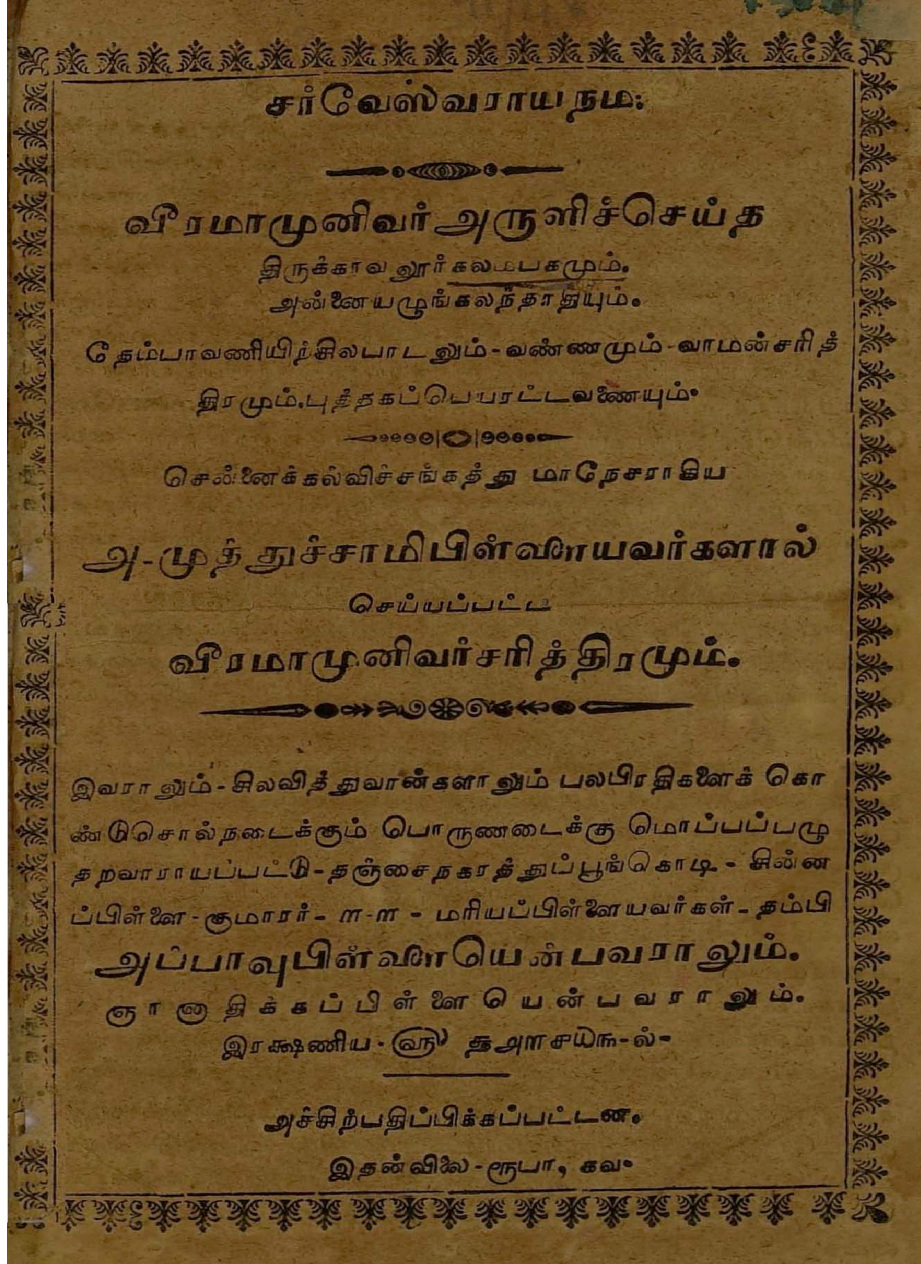


Figure 2. Appāvupillai's 1843 edition of Muttuccāmiṭṭai commentary (p. 1)



## The Commentary

Muttuccāmiṭṭai's commentary is elaborate. It runs to two pages in print for each stanza. He concentrates on what Eco (1992:25) calls the intention of the text essentially ignoring the intention of its author. His reading is to find the intention of the text and to weaken the intention of the interpreter "who beats the text into a shape which will serve for his purpose" (Eco 1992:25) which in turn he does. Muttuccāmiṭṭai partially follows Tamil commentarial procedure of *kaṇṇalittu uraittal*, giving word by word meaning to a poem. It is one of the evaluative methods in doing commentary and is popularly called *patavurai* (*patham*, 'word,' *urai* 'meaning'). *Kaṇṇalittu uraittal* is usually followed by an elaborate discussion called *viḷakkavurai* on the status of words in the poem, their disuniting, arranging, and rearranging to make comprehensible meaning, its context, the other commentators' opinions (contemporaries and the predecessors) and refutations, et cetera. Muttuccāmiṭṭai's commentary lacks a *viḷakkavurai*; instead, he extensively discusses each word in the *patavurai*, seemingly rendering unnecessary a separate *viḷakkavurai*. He disidentifies (Muñoz 1998:12) the Tamil poem with Saivism in four ways. I will briefly discuss the first stanza.

Firstly, rather than offering a one-to-one word meaning, he piles up numerous words to gloss each word in the poem. To put it another way, he strings together numerous signifiers in an orderly fashion rather than giving a monovocal signification to every given sign. These stacked signifiers that are indexed to every word in the poem disequilibrate the signification. For example, the first word in the first stanza *nanṛīyūm* has two lexical items, corresponding to its *cīr* (metrical unit): *nanṛu* (benefit, goodness) and *īyūm* (will give, bestow). The meaning, under a canonical reading, is straightforward: [It] will bestow benefits. The poem is composed in a way that the last word is implicitly tied with every word in the poem. One should add the last word *namacivāya* to *nanṛīyūm* to get 'namacivāya will bestow benefits.'

But Muttuccāmiṭṭai gives fourteen meaning for this short phrase, with each meaning segueing into the next. I will list a few.

All [those are called] benefits [are] assembled as one and stand erect as a hill. It is called the Hill of Wisdom. It has no limits and boundaries. [You = Shiva] stand at the top of this hill. Flowing like a waterfall [you are] bestowing goodness, dripping benefits relentlessly. Drying not

even in summer, [you are] like an auspicious pond. Like a flood (*veḷḷam*), [you] flow and fertilizes all three worlds with benefits. According to [your] order, the *cakkaravāḷam* (the entire universe) rotates, goes, and circles.

Muttuccāmiṭṭai destabilizes the signification of the Saivite sign and insists that we read another signification into it, thus creating a web of affinities. He endows words with undecidabilities. *Nanṛīyūm* no longer has the Tamil Saiva Siddhantic meaning of individual liberation, rebirth-less status, et cetera (Mahadevan 1955:6). He deliberately disjoins the name *namacivāya* with *nānṛīyūm* and catalogs countless benefits of an imagined omnipresent being.

Second, he seeks to foreclose further speculations about Saivite interpretation. For example, the second line of the stanza “*alaiyillā nam’maṇiyār pēr kaṭalāy*” gets the following commentary:

He is like a waveless ocean. He is an endless ocean of grace. He, like a pure, graceful ocean with sacred jewels, exceeds the limits of [previously] enumerated aspects of six and eight qualities (*kuṇṇkaḷ*) and has infinite godly aspects.

Rather than list full eight qualities, as enumerated in Tamil Saiva Siddhanta, he only gives six: independence (*taṇvayattaṇātal*), omnipresence (*eṅkum viyāpakaṇātal*), freedom from embodiment (*uṭampilaṇātal*), boundless benevolence (*ellā nalamum uḷaṇātal*), beginninglessness, eternity (*mutalilaṇātal*), and being the first cause, the sources of all beings (*evārriṅkum kāraṇaṇātal*). Further, he first gives plausible interpretations of words (*alaiyillā nam’maṇiyār* and *pēr kaṭal*) and then invests them with a surfeit theologically grounded meaning. In doing this, he invokes in his reader an inability in finding certain further meaning by his massive deployment of signifiers.

Thirdly, he ambiguates the signs. The last word *namacivāya* in Muttuccāmiṭṭai’s commentary is: ‘I pay obeisance to you now, the only god who stands forever.’ He recodes *namacivāya*. Ellis is very clear in understanding that the two words *nama* and *civāya* denote the name of Lord Shiva. He translates the word in preference to transliteration to give the literal meaning for the western audience. He adds a small note of the compound *namacivāya*:

The compound here translated “reverence to the only God” is composed of two Sanscrit words, *namah* adoration, reverence and *seva* ya the 4th case of *śiva*, which, as is exemplified in many of the preceding extracts, is used, not merely as the designation of the third person of the Hindu triad, but as the peculiar name of the Deity. The Whole, *namāśivāya*, is called the *pañcācshara*, pentegrammaton, and its mystic signification is amply explained in the *Aḡmas* (Ellis 1819:37–38).

If any Saivite reads the poem, he will immediately deduce that *namāśivāya* is Lord Shiva. The immediate interpretant (Peirce 1906:505) of the sign *namāśivāya* for any Saivite is Lord Shiva himself. The traditional referentiality of an insider prohibits other meanings. But Muttuccāmi-pillai decategorizes the sign and liberates it from its intrinsic meaning using Ellis’s translation as his cue. The commentary pronounces what Derrida (1997: 112) calls the suspension of vocative absolute, in order to dissociate the proper name from its intuitive meaning that was established in usage.

Fourthly, he uses Tamil Christian registers as an interpretive framework and thus re-signifies the poem to resemble Tamil Christian poem. He does this for the whole poem. For the line *munreyvam viṭṭenpēnmurāiyonrāy*, he comments as follows:

Because of my ignorance I prayed to other gods. Now I quit those gods. I will come to you. With deep devotion I will only surrender to you. I will pay obeisance saying *ātiparā* (the origin), *aṅātiparā* (the endless), *aṅantātiparā* (the indefinite), *cupamparaparā* (giver of pleasure). By chanting [like this], I search for you with desire (*ācaiyāl tēṭi*), mingle with you in love (*aṅpināl kūṭi*), sing in joy (*ānantamāyyp pāṭi*), praise (*vāḷṭti*), bend, applaud, pray (*vaṅaṅkip pōrrrip pukaḷntu toḷutu*), extol (*tōttarittu*), and do worship with oblation (*arccittu ārātikkinnēn*).

The bracketed text are transliterated names of gods used by Tamil Christian theologians to denote God in Christian prayers (Tiliander 1974). By using a Christian register, Muttuccāmi makes resemblances between Siva and the Christian Lord, transforming the poem into an empty text that invites the reader to fill with their own meaning. He intentionally ambiguates the words, collapses the traditional Saivite referentiality, and converts the poem to a Tamil common.

In general, his commentary does not lead to a certain meaning or conclusion but to a vast lexical field of Tamil. The meaning production is posed not from within the Tamil Saivite textual practice or in the Saivite philosophical practice but from *within* the ensembles of a more general (non-denominational) Tamil poetics. He disidentifies the poem by investing it with a new life (Muñoz 1998: 12).

## Colonizing the Colonizer

Ellis's *Namacivāya* poem and the commentary written by Muttuccāmiṭṭai cannot be easily overlooked as simply another example of the “author-commentator relationship” that always occurs in the Tamil literary tradition. In the Tamil tradition, both the author and the commentator are always from within the same tradition. The author represents the past and the commentator represents the present. So, every commentary tries to accommodate the past in the present. Here, in the case of Ellis and Muttuccāmiṭṭai, this relationship is undermined. It is an interaction between two people from two different lands. The original author (Ellis) did not belong to any of the Tamil scholarly lineages that preceded him; he is not from within and is new to it. He represents the West. But the commentator comes from within the tradition. He represents the native tradition. The author and the commentator worked together and knew each other well. Muttuccāmiṭṭai's commentary in a way represents intersubjective time (Fabian 2014:30) even though the author was dead.

There is something else that is important to note at this point. It was a relationship that did not often happen between the native and the foreigner in colonial times but here it did happen. A foreigner intervened within the Tamil tradition, and a native subsequently framed the terms of this intervention. A text written by a European/Foreigner/Colonizer/Englishman has been authorized by a non-European/Native/Colonized/Tamilian. In rephrasing the postcolonial terms, it was an odd interplay between a colonizer and colonized. In short, the colonizer “pretends to be colonized” and the colonized protects and authorizes the colonizer himself. We must search for an answer to this anomalous mimicking and authorizing with a very unsophisticated question: what happens when a colonizer mimics a colonized in the Tamil land?

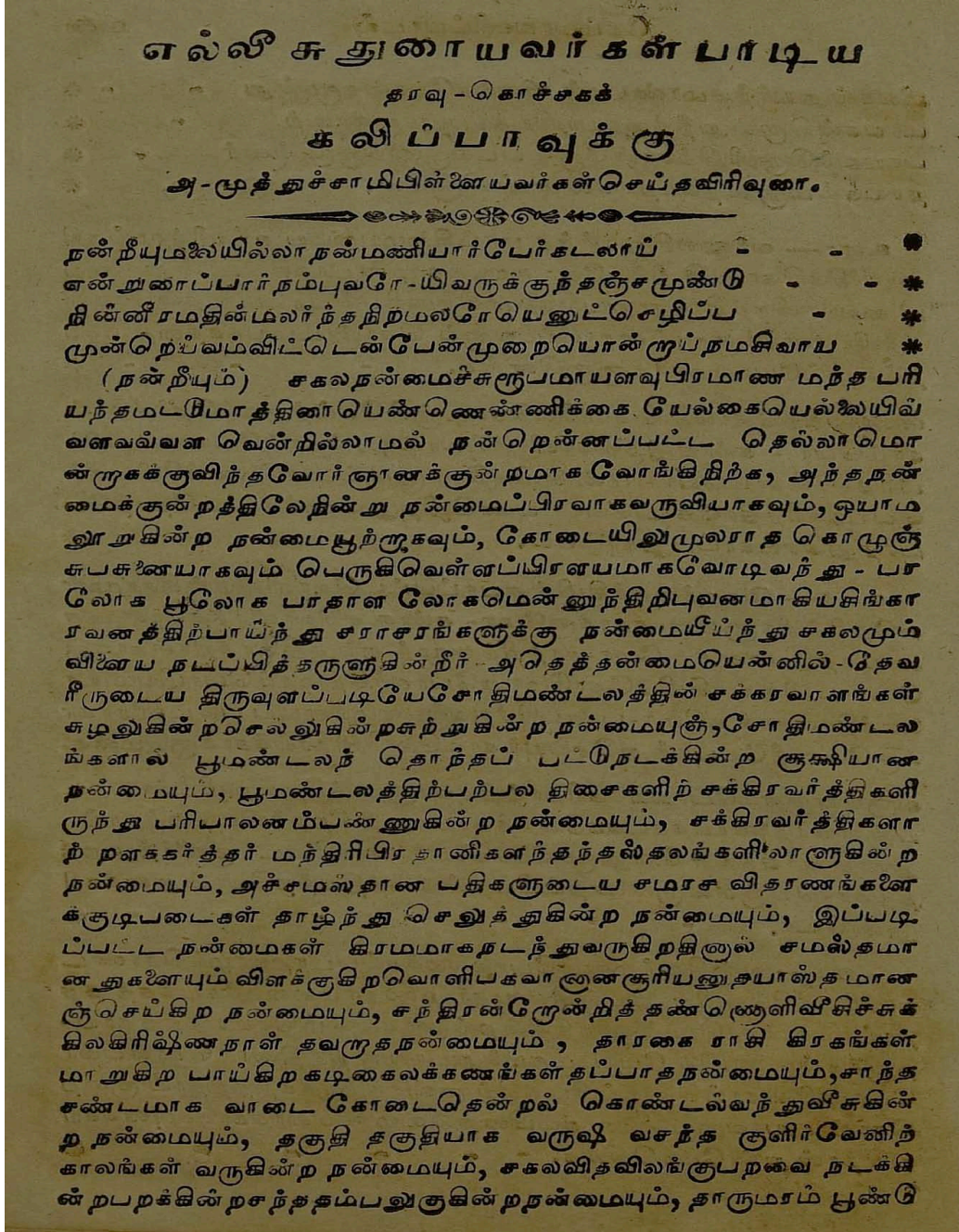


Figure 3. Muttuccāmiṭṭai commentary in Appāvupīṭṭai's 1843 edition (page 30)

Mimicry is a key discourse in postcolonial theory. It tries to find an answer to the question of what happens when a colonized imitates the colonizer, and it always reads from left (colonized) to right (colonizer).

Speaking about mimicry, Frantz Fanon (1963) says that besides the business/colonial relationship, there is also another unhealthy relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He observes that the colonized/native is not even acknowledged as a human being by the colonizers. The man who was colonized begins to see his own nativity as a major obstacle to him. The grand awe-inspiring images that the colonizers create about themselves among the colonized haunt the colonized and the colonized man marvels at those majestic-awe-inspiring images. These images begin to deeply ingrain themselves in his mind. He begins to believe that he will gain value if he becomes like the colonizer. Then the colonized begins to yearn for the recognition of the colonizer and looking for a way to achieve it and finds a way to do so. So, Fanon contends, the colonized starts to act like a colonizer. This is the moment, Fanon argues, where the annihilation of the self-identity of the colonized starts. He affirms that colonized wants to become white or to disappear (Fanon 1963: 158–59).

Homi Bhabha (1994) rereads this concept of mimicry. Rather than seeing it as a willed destruction of self-identity of the colonized, Bhabha sees mimicry as a threat to the colony. Suppose a native speaks English like an Englishman. He behaves like that Englishman. According to Fanon, this “imitation” is the destruction of the identity of the natives, a fading away of his inherent authenticity. But for Bhabha, it is an event that shatters the very foundations of the colonizers (here, British) and their powers. It erodes the very roots of the colony. The reason he is an Englishman is because he speaks English. This Englishness is what sets him apart from the natives. Now, when that language is spoken by colonized the English colonial-identity is itself in danger of extinction (Bhabha 1994:85–92).

On the one hand, by reading Fanon, we infer that the language of the colonized is destroyed when the language of the colonizer is spoken by the colonized. On the other hand, by reading Bhabha, we surmise that the colonizer's own language, the reason of his being a colonizer, goes away from him. Here, the Indian who makes it look like an Englishman emerges. That is why the colonizers do not like the colonized ‘mimicking’ them. Both theorists concentrate on the destruction on both sides centering around the colonizer.



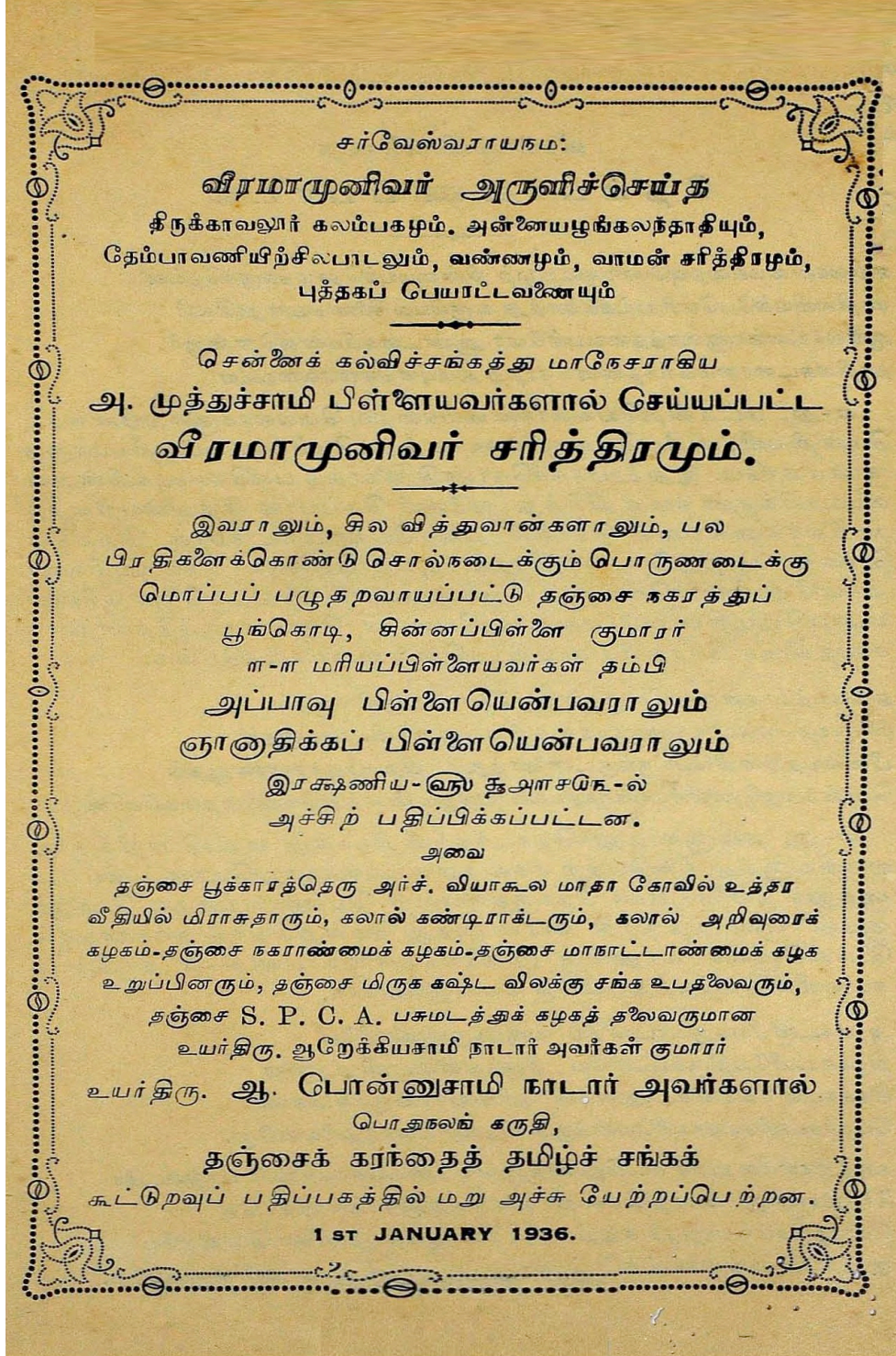


Figure 4. Muttuccāmiṭṭai commentary, 1936 edition (Facsimile) (first page)

Our case requires us to read from right (colonized) to left (colonizer). I propose that there were two stages of colonization that happened in Tamil land. Firstly, the colonization of the *maṇ* (soil), which I call colonization proper. Secondly, the colonization of the *agam* or the self-knowledge of Tamils, which I call internalization. In both cases, and crucially, this process is a reciprocal one. Valentine Daniel (1984:79–94) excavates the anthropology of Tamil by trying to understand their concept called *ūr*. Every *ūr* within the Tamil territory has its own *kuṇam* (quality), an unseen force. The *maṇ* (soil) is the embodiment of *kuṇam*. It varies with every *ūr*. The *kuṇam* of the *maṇ* of a particular *ūr* affects and indeed constitutes the person who lives there. If a person from a different *ūr* with different *kuṇam* affected by its own soil starts to live in another *ūr*, then his *kuṇam* gets changed in accordance with the soil of the new *ūr*. *Maṇ* (soil) of the new *ūr* affects and replaces the old *kuṇam* of him. *Maṇ* does the colonization. It colonizes the person without his consciousness. If a person shows stinginess (*eccil taṇam* or *kañcattaṇam*), it is because of his *ūr*. If he evinces gullibility (*kēṇattaṇam*), the reason falls on the *ūr* (Daniel 1984:89–93). Colonizing makes the colonized subject to display the *kuṇam* of that place. The *kuṇam* of Tamil land, thus, subjugates and authorizes an alien subject to live in it.

Adhering to *Tolkāppiyam*, I will name the alien subject as *purapporuḷ*. *Tolkāppiyam* divides the Tamil world into *akam* and *puṛam*. *Akam* or *akapporuḷ* is interior and invisible. *Puṛam* or *purapporuḷ* is exterior and includes all visible material objects of the Tamil world. *Akam* and *puṛam* are two sides of a coin. *Puṛam* stands outside ready to be taken by the *akam*. In turn, *akam* requires *puṛam* to exist. *Akam* collects suitable *purapporuḷ* to define itself. Ellis, an alien /European with an initially different *kuṇam*, after coming to the Tamil world, becomes *affected* by the *maṇ*, thereby becoming a *purapporuḷ* in it.

But *kuṇam* has also another characteristic. It speaks itself through language (Daniel 1984:81). Literally, *kuṇam* possesses, manifests itself, and speaks through the subject. The Tamil language has its own “in-ness” (Shulman 2016:94) which exhibits itself through the *kuṇam*-subjugated *purapporuḷ*. We infer from another colonial administrator, Arthur Coke Burnell (1840–1882) that Ellis acted like a Tamilian by wearing Tamil clothing (Burnell 1878:35). The physical exhibition of *purapporuḷ*, however, though it supports this reading, is not our concern here.



Ellis's text is, I will designate, an inheritor text (in the terms of the *Nannūl*, it is a *vaḷi nūl* following a *mutal nūl*). In Tamil literary tradition, an inheritor text locates itself *intertextually* in a lineage. It respects and credits its predecessor and emulates it to confirm its own presence and its predecessor simultaneously. So, an inheritor text is a "mimicked text," mimicking the tradition from within. Here, imitation establishes the scholarship (and in turn scholarship establishes the "imitation").

But there is also a danger in imitation. It does not always get the recognition it deserves. It loses its originality and becomes a subordinate text to its antecedent text. Nevertheless, its errant second-ness begets sacredness into the fold of Tamil-Saivite textual economy. It is no longer viewed simply as a subordinate text but becomes 'one of the respectful texts' in Tamil Saivite lineage. From this point of view, because of its conscious intertextuality, Ellis's poem *becomes* a Saivite poem in Tamil Saivite lineage. His is a mimic text, mimicking the tradition from outside. It is a colonizer's poem that impersonates the colonized's style, content, and unreproducible "aura" (Benjamin 2008:23). The in-ness made a *purapporuḷ* (Ellis) compose a poem not in English but in Tamil and located it in a Tamil lineage. In-ness has spoken through the *purapporuḷ*. This first colonization makes efficient and keeps the *purapporuḷ* in waiting for the internalization.

When an alien *purapporuḷ* becomes a Tamil *purapporuḷ* it is ready to be taken by the *akam*. How does *akam* incorporate a *purapporuḷ*? Daniel categorizes Tamil knowledge as double-edged, in that the knowledge about the other, or object knowledge, is but an extension of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge tries to acquire object knowledge in two modes. The first mode of acquisition is, he terms, *ṇaiippāl arital*. The second mode as *pakuppāl arital*. The former seeks to find the commonalities between the self and the other, the latter seeks to distinguish the self from the other. If the self-knowledge finds any familiarity in the object knowledge, then we have no object knowledge but the self-knowledge alone. Object knowledge becomes the extension of self-knowledge (Daniel 1984:234). *ṇaiippāl arital* internalizes the other.

I call Muttuccāmiṇṇai's commentary a reliant (or satellite or dependent) text (*Cārupu nūl*). *Cārupu nūl* arises only if there is *vaḷi nūl* without which it does not exist. It is an epistemological honoring of its predecessors. *Cārupu nūl* always authorizes both *mutal nūl* and *vaḷi nūl*. Muttuccāmiṇṇai de-religionizes the inheritor text (Tamil poem) by disaggregating the signified

from the signifiers, empties them and re-Tamilizes the text to fit into the Tamil textual lineage. Though it does not alter the signifier, it does eliminate the signified and produces empty signifiers. Contrary to the Tamil tradition, Muttuccāmiṭṭai's reliant text disagrees with the inheritor text. But that disagreement internalizes the text. His *inaippāl arivou* transmutes the *purapporu!* as an empty signifier and makes it to invite as many signified as one can discern but with an inherent-social fact (Saussure 2011: 113). In a way, the colonized dis-identifies the Tamil poem of his colonizer to negotiate the textual economy of the whole Tamil literary tradition. It authorizes the Tamil poem of a foreigner as a *Tamil* poem. He internalized or re-colonized the colonizer. When Ellis as *purapporu!* was investigated by the Saivite *pakuppāl arivou* to distinguish the other from the self, Muttuccāmiṭṭai's *inaippāl arivou* finds the familiarities, accommodates, and transforms the as alien *purapporu!* as familiar *purapporu!* suited for everyone.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For *Tēvāram* citations, see <http://www.thevaaram.org/ta/index.php>.

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