The Spaces Inbetween. Ramalinga Swamigal (1823 – 1874), Hunger and Religion in Colonial South India

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Abstract
In this presentation I look at the extraordinary prose writings of the colonial Tamil poet and prophet Ramalinga Swamigal and his reflections of hunger, death and compassion. For the purposes of the this research presentation I shall only venture into those contextualisations of his thought which firstly, foreground it as a literary representation within a history of literary representations of hunger, the response to hunger and death and dying in Tamil literature. The reason for this is because it is only through seeing Ramalinga Swamigal's narrative of hunger as part of a larger literary landscape of such representations that predate his own writing that we can begin to make sense at all of these extraordinary yet obscure textual passages. At the same time, it is also in this presence of the past, as we shall see, that his uniqueness is asserted most vigorously. Thus, it is this very contextualization and historicization that will enable us to see what Ramalinga Swamigal does differently and also to consider how such a contextualisation might enable us to make some general albeit somewhat speculative observations about the transformation of such representations in early Tamil modernity.

About the Speaker
Professor Srilata Raman is Associate Professor of Modern Hinduism in the Department of Religion at the University of Toronto. Her academic interests include Tamil and Sanskrit intellectual formations in South India from precolonial times to modernity, Modern Hinduism, Colonial Sainthood and modern Tamil literature. She completed her B.A. in New Delhi, India, her M.Phil. at Oxford University, England, and Ph.D. at the University of Tübingen, Germany. The author of numerous articles, one monograph (“Self-Surrender to God in Srivaisnavism. Tamil Cats and Sanskrit Monkeys”, Routledge, 2007) and an edited volume (“Words and Deeds. Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia”, Harrasowitz, 2005). Her current, second monograph (forthcoming with Routledge in early 2014) is titled “The Transformation of Tamil Religion. Ramalinga Swamigal and Modern, Dravidian Sainthood”.

Event Details
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