

RESPONSE

Response to G. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi

Taste of Laughter: Aspects of Tamil Humour is a book on Tamil language jokes and tales in the Southern Indian language Tamil. It is written in English by an author living in Italy, and it is published in Germany. Is such an international and intercultural venture meant only for those knowing Tamil? What kind of a *joke* is this?

If the book is meant for those who know Tamil, then why is it not, if not written in Tamil, at least published in Tamil Nadu? Let us also question if it is even easily available in Tamil Nadu. As is well known, it is not only the ideological power-structures in academic scholarship but also research and publications that often determine the perceptions and even the expectations of a scholar. Thus, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi not only “would have preferred” another reviewer but even specifies what she would have “expected [of an] Indian reviewer.” Must the Indian reviewer fit the imagination of the European orientalist?

As far as Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi’s discussion, analysis, and annihilation of the essentialist theories are concerned, I did say in my review that it was thorough. The problem with the discussion, however, is not (at least not for a scientific reviewer) its unreadability, but that the author theorizes over materials in Tamil language from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu without reference to any Indian theory of humour. I do not add this believing it to be outside my immediate concern with the book. The entire discussion is with reference to theories based in “other” cultures, philosophies, and experiences. This methodology was the hallmark of colonial Indology and its continued practice is, to say the least, regrettable. The bibliography of the work is a visual example: raw materials (primary literature) from India and theoretical works in various European languages.

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