This paper begins to survey the range of books published on religion in India in the 1850s and 1860s, the dawn of popular publishing in the region. Book publishing in this period was dominated by the editing and printing of classical devotional texts, along with a handful of original literary works. I pay particular attention to the polemical features of these publications, which authors and editors used to contribute to debates about caste and ritual. I argue that this theistic poetry, which at first glance may appear to be disengaged from current social controversy, served as one of the most important polemical literary forms in Tamil in this period.

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