



B. R. Rajam Aiyar (Iyer)

Born 1872, Madras

Died 1898, Madras

Biography Rajam Aiyar (1872-1898) wrote the first modern Tamil novel at the remarkably young age of 21. *Kamalampal Carittiram* (*The Story of Kamalampal*) or *The Fatal Rumour* (as he himself called it in English) catapulted him to literary fame in the vibrant literary life of colonial Madras at the end of the nineteenth century. He was born into a Brahmin family in an isolated village, which serves as the setting for his great novel, although little is known about his childhood or later years. He attended high school in Madurai and then earned a BA from Madras Christian College in 1889. A failed attempt to enter law school allowed him to join literary circles in Madras in the 1890s, first writing reviews for plays and then attempting his own short stories. It appears that he married at age fifteen, possibly to a girl of ten or twelve, although she had no children. His first and only novel then began to appear in instalments in a monthly magazine in 1893. In addition to *Kamalampal Carittiram*, he also published a number of influential essays on literature and culture, among them pieces on Ruskin, Tamil mystic poetry, Galileo and Goethe. During the last few years of his brief life, he devoted himself to popularising Vedanta philosophy, as expounded by Swami Vivekananda. He was editor of a magazine ('Prabuddha Bharata, Awakened India'), which was supported by Vivekananda. Even at that young age, however, he became something of a recluse, remaining in his room for days on end to write. He died at the age of 26.

Works

Fiction

Kamalampal Carittiram (Madras, 1893-1895)

Essays

'The Greatness and Littleness of Man' (Madras, 1896)

'Rambles in Vedanta' (Madras, 1905, posthumously)