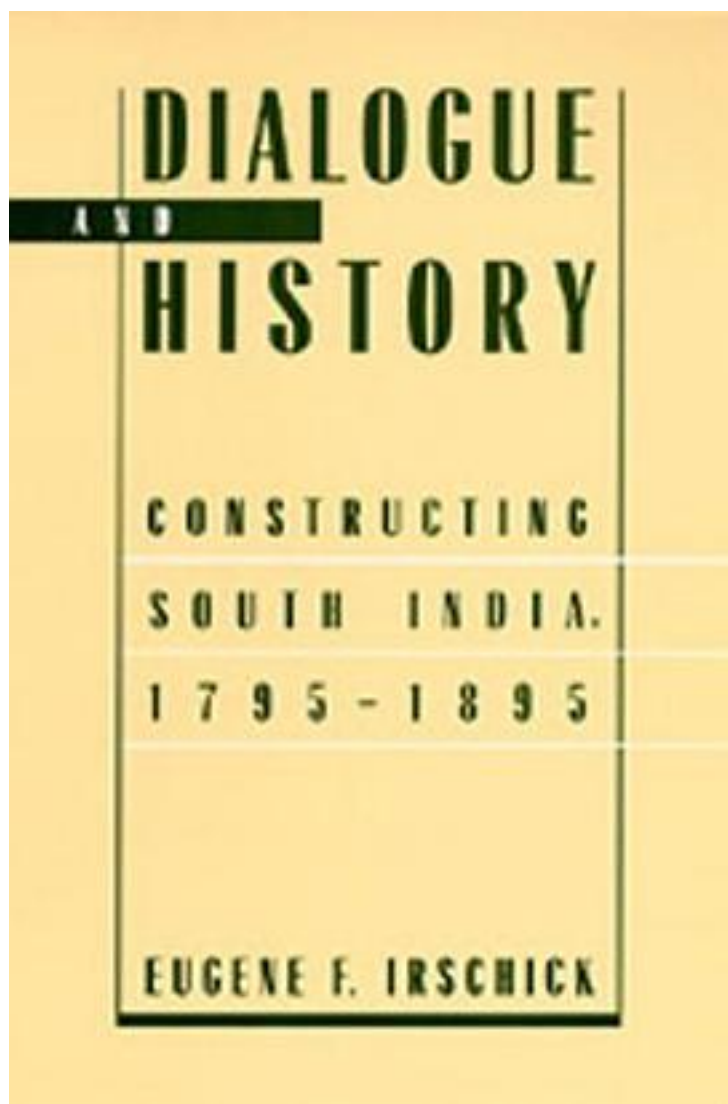


Dialogue and History



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Eugene Irschick deftly questions the conventional wisdom that knowledge about a colonial culture is unilaterally defined by its rulers. Focusing on nineteenth-century South India, he demonstrates that a society's view of its history results from a "dialogic process" involving all its constituencies. For centuries, agricultural life in South India was seminomadic. But when the British took dominion, they sought to stabilize the region by inventing a Tamil "golden age" of sedentary, prosperous villages. Irschick shows that this construction resulted not from overt British manipulation but from an intricate cross-pollination of both European and native ideas. He argues that the Tamil played a critical role in constructing their past and thus shaping their future. And British administrators adapted local customs to their own uses.

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