

Preface

In 1987 I started to study the problem of the *prabandhams*. The *prabandhams* are a number of literary genres in Tamil. Although several authors have written on this subject, there is still no definition of the term *prabandham*. For some authors, the word seems to be almost an equivalent of 'genre.' Others apparently use it to denote a special kind of literary works or literary genres. It seemed to me that, before any attempt at defining the term could be made, it should be clear which genres or types of genres were called *prabandham*. Therefore, I started making an inventory of *prabandhams*.

I studied modern and traditional secondary literature, and found around 250 genres which were mentioned as *prabandhams* in one or more of these sources. After I had made an inventory of the contents and forms of these genres, it became clear that they formed a very heterogeneous group. Some *prabandhams* were 'defined' as being written in a particular metre, others as dealing with a specific subject. Some 'definitions' were very simple (e.g., 'a poem in *akaval*-metre'), others very elaborate ('first it deals with this subject, then with that, and then with yet another, and all this in a variety of metres').

Since it would be impossible to study all these genres, or even every type of genre, I decided to concentrate on one example: *kuravañci*. *Kuravañci* was chosen because it is an interesting genre, which incorporates various poetical and musical forms, as well as themes that also appear in many other genres. Furthermore, as will be shown in this study, it is a genre which shows something of the variety in the 'definition' of the term *prabandham*: some authorities include *kuravañci* in their list of *prabandhams*, while others of the same period do not. This indicates that *kuravañci* is a genre 'at the edge' of *prabandham*. Some authorities apparently employ a strict definition that excludes *kuravañci*, while others use a broader one that includes it. Thus, *kuravañci* probably tells us more about the definition of the group of *prabandhams*, than a genre which is considered as a *prabandham* by all authorities.

This study, therefore, concentrates on *kuravañci*. It starts with a description of a number of *kuravañci*-works. In this description various aspects of form and content are compared. From these descriptions it is possible to form an idea of the development of the genre (e.g., elements that were added in the course of time). In the last two chapters, *kuravañci* is placed in a broader context. First,

it is compared to other genres which are in some way similar to it (e.g., genres dealing with 'folk' characters). After this, a survey is given of other *prabandhams*, and of the authorities who give lists of *prabandhams*. From the distribution of *prabandhams* over the various lists, it can be seen that there existed differences of opinion as to which genres were *prabandhams*. On the basis of these differences and statements in modern secondary literature, it is possible to formulate a number of characteristics of *prabandhams* as a group.

Until now, only a few books and articles have appeared on the subject of *kuravañci*. Most of them (e.g., 'Kuravañci' by M. Saṃmugam Pillai and Nirmalā Mokaṇ) tend to concentrate only on the contents of the genre or of individual works. Sometimes a few things are said about the origins and development of the genre. In general, the authors only repeat the traditional view on these subjects, apparently without checking if this view is correct. However, some authors have other opinions on these origins, which partly contradict the traditional one. Furthermore, as will be shown in this study, the traditional views on the development of the genre turn out to be erroneous. The information on this development as given in these modern sources is therefore unreliable. In some of these sources, the form of *kuravañcis* is mentioned in one or two lines, but it is never described in any detail. Usually, it is only stated that they are in the form of 'opera' or that they are performed with songs and dances. Traditional sources, too, say very little about the form of *kuravañci*. In short, although much is already known about the contents of various *kuravañci*-works, a study of their form, and of the origins and development of the genre, is badly needed. This was one of the reasons for writing this study.¹

At the moment, over a hundred *kuravañcis* are known. Of these, about 30 have appeared in print (all *kuravañcis* used for this study have been printed). Some *kuravañcis*, like the famous *Tirukkurrālakkuravañci*, have been printed many times, from the early twentieth century onward. Other works have appeared in print only recently (for instance, *Mōhinivilāsa-kuravañci nāṭyanāṭakam*, published in 1985). Obviously, many more *kuravañcis* still await publication. Since it was impossible to study all *kuravañcis*, I had to make a selection. Because I did not have the time to edit texts first, I decided to limit my study to texts that had already been edited. From these I chose a number of works more or less at random, including both famous and little known ones, religious as well as secular. Until now, most authors who have written about *kuravañci* concentrated on the most famous work of the genre: *Tirukkurrālakkuravañci*. This work is generally considered to be the best example of a *kuravañci*. However, a work that is considered to be the best may have special features that other works of the genre lack. Therefore, if one wants to

1 In the case of *prabandhams* in general, the situation is even worse.

form a picture of the average work of a genre, it is better to look at a less famous, more 'ordinary' work. For this reason, I did not take *Tirukkurrālakkuṛavañci* as the main work to be studied (although I did use it for comparison). Instead, I chose a work entitled *Kumāraliṅkar kuṛavañci*, precisely because it is an 'average work.' It is not especially famous (although it is mentioned in one introduction to another work). It was written at the court of a minor king. The author must have been competent, but there is no reason to suppose he was really outstanding. The same is true of the work itself: it is pleasant and well done, but not special in any way. Before I started reading the work, there was no reason to suppose that it would be out of the ordinary. On the contrary, it was likely that it would be a completely conventional work, and as such representative of the whole genre. After reading and comparing it to other *kuṛavañcis*, it indeed turned out to be fully representative. It is of an average length and contains all of the main features, as well as a few minor embellishments. The use of prosody and *rāga* is conventional. Its hero is a king (kings and gods are the main kinds of hero in *kuṛavañcis*), its heroine a beautiful girl. They are surrounded by other standard characters. In short, *Kumāraliṅkar kuṛavañci* is an average *kuṛavañci*-work.

Kumāraliṅkar kuṛavañci was not been studied before. The title is mentioned in V. Premalata's introduction to *Tiyākēcarkuṛavañci*. Apart from this, it has never been mentioned in any book or article on the history of Tamil literature. The work was published in 1982, by the Dr U. V. Swaminatha Ayyar Library (Madras). In the introduction to this edition, a few things are said about this work. As is usually the case in introductions to *kuṛavañcis*, the contents are described in some detail. The rasas ('emotions') created by the work are also discussed and there is a degree of historical insight and information with regard to a possible author of the work (one 'Veṇṇāppuli'). However, as will be shown in chapter one, the historical information in one part of the introduction seems to arrive at the early 17th century as the date of the work, while another part of the introduction gives 1760 as the date (the possible author, 'Veṇṇāppuli,' lived in the 17th century). Hence, even the modern introduction leaves us with a number of questions. The work itself, however, is quite straightforward. *Kumāraliṅkar kuṛavañci* tells two stories: the first is the story of a girl who falls in love with king Kumāraliṅkar; a fortune-teller predicts that the king will marry the girl. In the second story, the fortune-teller's husband, a hunter, searches for his wife; in the end he finds her and they are reunited. These simple stories are told with a wealth of descriptions (people, places) and enumerations (countries, mountains), and the king is praised in every stanza. The work adopts the form of an opera: it is sung throughout, while dancers depict the actions and feelings of the characters. The *rāgas* for some of the songs of this *kuṛavañci* are given, but the music itself has been lost. However, the music of some other *kuṛavañcis* is still known, so we are able to form an idea of the

kind of music used for *kuravañcis*. This music is classical ‘Carnatic’ music, with some ‘folk’ influences. One can safely assume that the music of *Kumāraliṅkar kuravañci* was similar to this. *Kuravañcis* were (and are) danced in what is now called Bharata Nāṭyam, the classical dance-style of South India. For one of the *kuravañcis* mentioned above (*Tiyākēcarkuravañci*) not only the music for the ‘representative’ dance pieces is given, but also that for the ‘pure dance’ interludes. However, a study of the dance aspect of *kuravañci* falls outside the scope of this book. We will look only at those aspects of the works that can be found in the written or printed texts.

For this study, a structuralist approach has been used. The topics that are discussed in the first two chapters, as well as the terminology of these discussions, are mainly based on Genette’s ‘Figures III’ (especially on the second part: ‘Discours du récit’), and on Bal’s books on narratology (see bibliography for details). The contents of the works have been divided into different levels, called ‘history,’ ‘story,’ and ‘text.’ On the basis of this division, it is possible to show differences and similarities between works and genres on different levels. As will be shown, all *kuravañcis* are identical at the ‘history’ level (the most basic one). The ‘stories’ (based on this history) have been divided into ‘events’ or ‘elements.’ At this level, some differences between *kuravañci*-works occur: some events or elements can only be found in a few works, others in all of them. As may be expected, those elements most closely connected with the ‘history’ appear in the largest number of works. Obviously, the largest differences are on the ‘text’ level, the level of the actual wording of the works, and in other ‘form’ aspects. Chapter three focuses on the form of the works. The first sections of this chapter deal with prosody. The order in which the elements of prosody are discussed is similar to the order that is used in traditional sources. This is a logical order, from the basic metrical units up to metrical forms (a method that also resembles a structuralist approach). For the sections on music, which follow those on prosody, a similar method has been applied. On the basis of these aspects, the various *kuravañci*-works can be compared to each other. This can give some idea of the development of the genre. Such a comparison can be extended to other genres, as is done in the last two chapters. The concept of dividing aspects of a work into ‘elements’ is not only found in modern Western theories: From the 10th century onwards, there has been the tradition of the ‘*pāṭṭiyals*.’ These *pāṭṭiyals* (amongst other things) describe literary genres (including *kuravañci*). In many cases, a genre is described by giving the ‘elements’ of the story. As will be shown, *kuravañci* is one of the genres that are described in this manner. It has already been said above, that prosody is also treated in this way. Hence, structuralism somewhat resembles the approach of the *pāṭṭiyals*; the idea of a work as a structure, built of elements, must have been very familiar to the *kuravañci*-authors.

In a way similar to that of the *pāṭṭiyals*, this study as a whole departs from a small unit (i.e., one particular work), via intermediate stages (the *kuravañci* genre, related genres) to a larger context: the whole field of the *prabandhams*. On the level of individual works, there are hardly any uncertainties (sometimes the dates of the works are not known). However, the more one broadens the field of study, the more one comes across uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions. Hence, much of what is said in the very last sections of this thesis is only hypothesis and open to discussion.

Most of the research for this study was done during the years 1987-1990, while I was assistant at the Vakgroep Oosterse Talen (the Department of Oriental Languages) at Utrecht University. In January 1992 it was accepted as doctoral thesis by this same university. I would like to thank the staff of the department for their continual interest and advice. My thanks also go to the staff of the University Library, who helped me in obtaining material from all over the world. Furthermore, I would like to thank the staff of the British Library (Oriental Reading Room), London; the India Office Library, London; Kerala University, Trivandrum; Tamil University, Tanjore; Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, Tanjore; École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry; Adyar Library, Madras; Institute of Asian Studies, Madras; International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras. And finally, I am grateful to the following people for their suggestions and advice: Dr K. Nachimuthu (Kerala University, Trivandrum); Smt. Tilakam (Tanjore); Dr M. Saṁmugam Piḷḷai (Tamil University, Tanjore); Prof. Ramanujam (Tamil University, Tanjore); Dr Ramaswamy (Tamil University, Tanjore); Dr S. Agesthialingom (Tamil University, Tanjore); Dr F. Gros (École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry); T. V. Gōppillaiyar (École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry); Dr S. C. Kersenboom (University of Amsterdam); R. A. McQuail, who corrected the English; and, of course, prof. K. V. Zvelebil, my teacher and advisor, without whose help I could not have finished this study.