

## Preface

This book is a revised version of my PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Hamburg in 2004. The idea of doing a doctoral project on the *Icakkiammaṅ Katai (IK)* came from Professor Dr Ulrike Niklas of Cologne University. I am greatly indebted to Ulrike Niklas, who generously let me use the texts of N1-N9 (see below) that she had collected. The work on the edition and translation is a tale of losing and refinding different versions of these texts, and much to my pleasure also of discovering new texts of great value. Versions N2-N9, containing a large amount of the material that I had intended to work on, disappeared when still in the possession of Ulrike Niklas, during the first working phase, a fact that seriously complicated matters. By the time they were found again, the first draft of the translation had already been completed. Despite this, after these versions were refound I drew upon them and completely revised the first draft of the translated text. That my principal advisor, Professor David Shulman of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, stumbled upon the lost texts during a visit to Cologne can only be called a miracle. Following this second phase of translating and editing, another piece of great good fortune occurred. During my fieldwork in Kaṅṅiyākumari district I discovered another version of the text, N10, in the possession of the bow-song bard Kalaimāmaṅi (“the bright jewel of art”) T. Muthucami Pulavar, who graciously supplied me a copy of it. The edited and translated text then underwent a complete revision once again.

It was not until I had finished the work on the text that I seriously began investigating the role of the text in its cultural environment in general and in the *koṭai* festival in particular. For this purpose I undertook two field trips to the research area in the years 2002 and 2003.

On the first trip, in 2002, I visited the southern districts of Tamilnadu (Tirunelvēli, Tūttukuṭi, and Kaṅṅiyākumari districts) during the festival season that runs from March to May. A personal invitation to participate in the annual festival held in Paḷavūr in May 2002 gave me reason to extend my visit. This was a unique opportunity, one that provided me with a vast quantity of new material to be studied: nine hours each of video documentation of the rituals and an audio recording of the bow-song. During my stay in the Tirunelvēli and Kaṅṅiyākumari districts, I was able to establish personal contacts and hold interviews with a large number of people: temple priests (Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai; M. Paṅṭu Piḷḷai; E. Aruṅācalam); temple owners (P. Taṅkarāj Nāṭar; Nāṭar Tiru Kānti) and *koṭai* festival committee members (Ca. Paḷaṅiyā Piḷḷai et al.); people who undergo possession by the deity (Kuṭṭi Ammāḷ et al.); bow-song singers (T. Muthucami Pulavar; G. Muttuleṭcumi and her husband G. Gopikriṣṇaṅ of Eṭṭaiyāpuram; and S. Svayamburajan of Rājakkamaṅkalam); and other informants and consultants (Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai; Rama Subha; members of the Folklore Resource and Research Centre (FRRC) of St. Xavier’s College in Pālayamkōṭṭai, especially Peter A. Raj, Britto Vincent SJ, and Dr Ramachandran Nair; Dr T. Lourdu, former Director of the FRRC; Ms Pakialeṭcumi of Teṭṭukkūṅṭal in Akastīcuvaram; Dr S. Alagesan in Tūttukuṭi; Dr Jeyakumar; Mr Muthucami, Director of Śaiva Siddhanta Publications; Dr M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, Director of the National Folklore Support Centre in Chennai); Professor Dr Mā. Navanītakriṣṇaṅ; Dr Vijayalakṣmī (a well-known performing artist); Professor Dr R. Venkatarāman (art historian); Dr G. Sethurāmaṅ; Dr V. Ayyanar (all of the Department of Folk Arts and History of Arts at Maturai Kamrāj University); and Professor Dr T. Naṭarājaṅ (Head of the Department of Manuscriptology at Maturai Kamrāj University), from whose expertise in working with manuscripts I benefited greatly.

A second field trip to Tamilnadu was carried out from mid-November 2002 to February 2003, the period when recitations are held for the goddess every Tuesday. In both years fieldwork assistance was provided by I. Muthukumar. The field research on *Icakkiamman* proved to be much more fruitful than expected: in addition to the festival documentation made in the spring of 2002, twenty-six 90-minute audio-cassettes of interviews in Tamil were recorded. On my second field trip I arranged for the bow-song bard T. Muthucami Pulavar and his group to perform his full-length version of the *IK* (N10) in the traditional bow-song style. This performance was held in a neutral setting on two days in November 2002. This version is, in terms of length and comprehensiveness, very close to my base text. In collaboration with the FRRC of St. Xavier's College in Pālaiyamkōṭṭai, Tirunelvēli, I made audio and video recordings of the entire performance. A copy was made available to the FRRC's archives.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the persons in India mentioned above. Their support made my field research both an enriching and fruitful experience. I am deeply grateful to everyone, and also especially to Dr C. Subramanian for his constant friendship and counsel, as well as for his patience in helping me transcribe the taped interviews made during the research. I would also like to thank Professor Dr Arokianathan of Pondicherry University, who was the first person I approached with the corrupt text material. T. Muthucami Pulavar, I. Muthukumar, and Peter A. Raj deserve special thanks, not only for supporting me in my months of fieldwork, but also for making the production of a video of the bow-song performance of the entire text possible. In addition to providing me with the new version N10, T. Muthucami Pulavar (who later showed himself to be the outstanding bow-song bard that he is) also greatly helped me in comprehending linguistic peculiarities of the N1 text. I cannot thank him enough for all this.

I am particularly glad to have the opportunity to express my deep-felt gratitude to Professor Don Handelman and Professor David Shulman of the Hebrew University for providing me in Jerusalem with the stimulating intellectual atmosphere that enabled me to develop my ideas. I would like to thank in particular my supervisor David Shulman, whose scholarship fills me with admiration, for patiently guiding me through my work from nearly beginning to end. Moreover, my sincere gratitude is no less due to Professor Dr Ulrike Niklas for her encouragement to study the Tamil goddess *Icakki*, to Professor Dr Eli Franco, Professor Dr Dieter Kapp, and Professor Dr Karin Preisendanz, who graciously provided me with their support, and to Professor Dr Lambert Schmithausen, who accepted my doctoral thesis in the field of Indology at the University of Hamburg.

During the period of revising the work for publication I was aided by several scholars; to mention but a few: Dr Martin Delhey, Dr Kengo Harimoto, Professor Dr Harunaga Isaacson, Dr M. Maithrimurthi, Professor Dr Lambert Schmithausen, and Dr Eva Wilden. All helped me in various ways including a number of most valuable suggestions and bibliographical references.

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Finally, a very special "thank you" goes to Cynthia Peck and Philip Pierce, each of whom corrected the English text. Their reading went beyond the bounds of common duty, and I was indeed fortunate that they were so painstaking. It goes without saying that any mistakes in this study are entirely my responsibility.