

Kuruntokai: TI. SAU. Aranganar's Edition as a Cultural Register

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: October

Year: 2025

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Mani, A. "Kuruntokai: TI. SAU. Aranganar's Edition as a Cultural Register." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2025, pp. 180–83.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS1-Oct.9873>

Dr. A. Mani

Assistant Professor of Tamil

Bharathidasan Government College for Women, Puducherry

Abstract

This study takes up a few selected cultural notes found in the first commentary and first edition of the Kuruntokai by Tirukkaṇṇapuram Sauripperumāl Araṅgan (Ti. Sau. Aranganar). While Ti. Sau. Aranganar's Kuruntokai edition is the primary resource for this paper, books and articles on culture and other works have been used as secondary materials.

Kuruntokai — Ti. Sau. Aranganar's edition

Attempts were made to supply a new commentary for that work because the old commentary on the *Kuruntokai* was unavailable. A native of Tirukkaṇṇapuram, Thirumālikaich Sauripperumāl Araṅgan (Ti. Sau. Aranganar), who served as a master of Tamil at the Vaniyambadi Madrasah Islamic College, had previously studied Tolkaṇṇiyam's Porul Adhigaram and later wished to study it again. He was attracted to the poems of the eight anthologies shown in the commentary. Seeing that the *Kuruntokai* among those anthologies had not yet been edited, he resolved to write a commentary and publish an edition. Prompted by a letter from Mannakkal Ayyampettai Mutthurathna mudaliyar, he visited the Government Oriental Manuscript Library in Chennai to copy the manuscript of *Kuruntokai*. The manuscript further encouraged in him the idea of composing a new commentary. Despite various interruptions, he produced and published a commentary edition of the *Kuruntokai* in 1915. This commentary includes prose glosses and mostly consists of concise explanatory notes.

Significance and Reception

Ti. Sau. Aranganar gained wide recognition as the first to compose and publish a commentary and edition of the *Kuruntokai*. He is also credited with as having clarified the internal divisions and genres within *Kuruntokai*, and as the pioneer who classified the poems by landscape (tinai)—these indubitably are achievements that deserve attention. It is noteworthy, however, that his contributions were not sufficiently honored by Tamil society.

Prefatory Note on Kuruntokai: Cultural Entries in Ti. Sau. Aranganar's Edition

The cultural entries that appear in Ti. Sau. Aranganar's commentary edition of *Kuruntokai* can be divided into (1) those in the preface and

dedications, and (2) those within the text and commentary itself. This article gives special attention to the preface and dedications in Ti. Sau. Aranganar's commentary and treats a few indispensable observations as article-length topics.

Gratitude and Cultivated Manners

The title page of Aranganar's edition reflects his cultured disposition and gracious thoughts. Authors who produce books customarily dedicate or present their works as offerings to respected patrons or beloved teachers. Such notices usually appear inside the book; it is rare for them to be placed prominently on the title page, as the history of book publishing shows. That practice still continues in many contemporary books. Aranganar's edition, however, may be described as a publication that quietly effected a change in this regard. It is regrettable that this reform passed without being widely recognized by those who followed; this proposed to be examined here.

Aranganar states the book's title as: "*Kuruntokai*, second among the Ettuthokai; the original and this new commentary prepared at Tirukkannapuram by Thirumalikai Sauripperumal Arangan (Ti. Sau. Aranganar)." He adds that the work was supported and endorsed by the Saivapreceptor Sri La Sri Sivaprakasa Swamigal and published with his sanction by the Vidyarthna Nagara Press, Vellore. Aranganar also records that he presented the book to his Tamil teacher as a token of gratitude and made him its dedicatee. On a separate page following the title page Aranganar published Sivaprakasa's portrait together with his own dedication statement. Placing such an inscription on the title page expresses Aranganar's cultured sense of gratitude. It is noteworthy and increasingly rare to find such cultivated sensibilities even today.

Grace Shown even to those who Wronged him

"Is there any use for praise if one does not repay with good deeds even those who have done him harm?" (Kural 987) asks Valluvar, questioning the value of praise if one refuses to do good to those who have caused him suffering. Valluvar's idea does not appear to be a mere common human instinct. The injunction about what may or may not be done governs human life as a moral code. Ancient Tamil literature contains many such cultural prescriptions. Aranganar cites this belief on the title page of his edition as evidence that those who have learned to discern these literatures also observe them in their own lives.

Aranganar's edition was produced over many years, as explained in the preface by Muthu Ratna Mudaliyar: "The effort he (Aranganar) undertook to publish this book far exceeded the time available to him" (Ti. Sau. Aranganar 1915: IV). Aranganar himself, who engaged in long research, notes (1915: 11), "...I completed writing the commentary only three years earlier," which shows that the edition appeared only after a long delay after completion. Only those who have finished a manuscript but see it unpublished for years understand the sorrow and anxieties that arise when friends or patrons ask about its publication. If a completed work remains unpublished, the grief is considerable. At that time U. V. Swaminatha Iyer was also preparing a commentary and edition of *Kuruntokai*, and he too was engaged in the attempt to publish it; this context should be kept in mind. The edition's failure to appear was not due solely to economics; there were other difficulties, and it is worth recounting them here.

Aranganar himself (1915: 15) tells us why his edition did not appear sooner: "Because the extensive manuscript I had prepared could not be printed by the press for more than eighteen months, and because prolonged delay produced certain printing irregularities, and because who knows what inner time constraints there were, I resolved to issue a shortened edition hastily rather than wait." Alas! the cruelty of the press affected Aranganar deeply, and when we learn how much he suffered, we feel sympathy for his condition. Not only Aranganar but Tamil scholarship at large suffered from the printer's conduct; a large portion of Aranganar's commentary was left out. If only that missing portion were recovered and added to a new edition, it would remedy the injustice done to him. We do not currently have access to biographical details about Aranganar's later life after his *Kuruntokai* edition.

Aranganar's fear of the printer is evident in his words: "I was greatly afraid of the press" (1915: 15), which shows how deeply the printer's behavior frightened him. Remarkably, despite the suffering the press caused him, Aranganar still acknowledged the press on the title page: "Printed at Vellore V.N. Press, from sheets 1 to 18," which reveals Aranganar's generous spirit in thanking even the one who wronged him. This demonstrates the virtue of doing good even to those who have done harm.

Respect for Teachers

We have seen from his dedication and the title page that Aranganar respected his teachers. The note he wrote on the page following the title page shows that he believed others should do the same. That note reads: "If students, after consulting their teacher, send a signed request, the original *Kuruntokai* and commentary will be sent to them at a price of two rupees and the commentary alone for one and a half rupees (1-8-0). A student may request and receive only one copy of a book. (Postage and handling extra)" (Ti. Sau. Aranganar 1915: no page number). This instruction stands as evidence of the moral rules about what one ought and ought not to do.

It is also noteworthy that Aranganar assigned the ownership of the work to Chozhavandhaan Kinnimadam Sivaprakasa Swamigal. He writes: "As a token of my heartfelt gratitude for the encouragement given to the promotion of pure Tamil by Sri La Sri Sivaprakasa Swamigal, I dedicate this book and its commentary to him" (Ti. Sau. Aranganar 1915: no page number). Aranganar's repeated expressions of thanks and the many pages of dedication and acknowledgements in his book are things that today's students and teachers should know about.

The Importance of Women's Education

The importance of women's education was widely discussed in the twentieth century. Mayuram Vedanayagar wrote a book titled *Women's Education*, which shows how highly the subject was valued in that era. Poets such as Bharati and Bharathidasan sang about the need for women's education. Yet many who speak about women's education today seem unaware that there was a period in Tamil Nadu when women's education flourished. The foreword by Muthu Ratna mudaliyar explains the true condition of women's education. That passage reads: "In other anthologies too there are many poems attributed to women poets. These show that this collection demonstrates to modern readers that ancient Tamil civilization valued women's education and that such education was not lacking in those times" (Ti. Sau. Aranganar 1915: III).

Acknowledging those who Helped with Publication

Some earlier editors of ancient Tamil texts, when their personal funds were insufficient, appealed to others for financial assistance to publish their editions. Aranganar's edition was produced in exactly this way. The generosity Aranganar displayed in making his resources known is noteworthy. He writes: "Even though English-educated, degree-holding teachers came to teach, the salaries paid to Tamil scholars who patiently taught many classes were very low compared with the wages paid to college teachers; therefore it was difficult for those with limited means to maintain their households. In that situation, trusting that wealthy patrons of Tamil would bear the large expense of producing this book with commentary, I printed and sent an appeal to many worthy people. Those who were generous and well-disposed honored me with their respect and assisted with gifts. Because these benefactors' names deserve to be recorded, I have published their names under the title 'Great Patrons Who Supported the *Kuruntokai* and Its Commentary,' together with the amounts they gave, as I had itemized in the appeal. How else could I show my gratitude?" (Ti. Sau. Aranganar 1915: 12-13).

During the era of kings, rulers had the duty to support and protect literature and the arts. After the advent of popular rule, wealthy private patrons and philanthropists took on the role of supporting the arts and literature. Tamil books increasingly appeared thanks to contributions from private benefactors. Aranganar's



acknowledgements show that there were, in his time, people who considered it their duty to support the publication of Tamil books. At the same time his notes reveal the wage gap between English teachers and Tamil teachers and the unequal social policies of the government then; this disparity was only corrected after India's Independence. There are many other observations in his preface, but in consideration of the brevity called for in a short article, this much is considered enough.

Conclusions

Ti. Sau. Aranganar is the widely acclaimed scholar who first composed a commentary on the *Kuruntokai* and published it. It is worth noting that Ti. Sau. Aranganar also clarified the internal divisions and classifications in the history of *Kuruntokai*'s commentary and for the first time assigned landscape (tinai) categories to the *Kuruntokai* poems.

The cultured manners and gratitude that recur on many pages of his book — the title page, the dedication page, and the acknowledgements — are matters that today's students and teachers should do well to know and appreciate.

Bibliography

1. Aranganar, Ti. Sau. *Kuruntokai* Mulamum Puthuraiyum. Vellore: Vidyarthna Nagara Press, 1915.
2. Swaminatha Iyer, U. Ve. *Kuruntokai*. Chennai: U. Ve. Swaminatha Iyer Library, 2009.
3. Bharathi, Bhakta Vatsala. Panpattu Manidaviyal Fourth Edition. Chidambaram: Meiyappan Publications, 2009.