CHAPTER V

PRABANDHĀS

The art of story telling is very much popular in Kerala. During temple festivals the Chākyār and Nampyār narrates, as the old sūta the stories from Puranas and Mahārabhārata. The texts used for these narrations are the Prabandhās, more specifically campū Prabandhas.

It was Dandi who for the first time defined the classifying it under Misra.

अधपधमयी काचित्त्वूरूरित्यभिधीयते / Kāvyādāra, P.29

Bhoja has given a beautiful description of Campu in the following verses.

अधालुबल्ल्यासनभविन्तपदस्वरतित
हृथा हि वासनलया कलितेव भीति: /
तर्माद्वादातु कथिनार्धजुष्पण सुखाव
चम्पूपचल्ल्यचन्वा रसना गदीया || Campurāmāyaṇa, P.23

ORIGIN OF PRABANDHĀS

Kerala is perhaps the only state, which was preserved the ancient mode of presentation of Sanskrit dramas. The Kerala theatre has inflated
the role of Vidūshaka 1 permitting him to use local language. When the Vidūšaka narrates stories outside the frame of the drama it is prabandhakūttu. He depends on the Prabandhās describing Puranic episodes.

In Rasasdanabhāṇa we get a beautiful description of the Chākyār presenting Kūttu. The Chākyār performs on the stage lighted with a brass metal lamp. On the side of the stage there is the Nampiar playing on the drum. Learned Brahmins are there to witness the show 2.

Poets have composed Campūs for the presentation of Kūttu by Chākyārs. Thus the Prabandhās form an important branch of Kerala Sanskrit Literature.

Melputtur Narayana Bhattatiri has composed the largest number of Prabandhās. Dr. N.P. Unni has recently collected and published 27 of his Prabandhās 3.

MELPUTTŪR NARAYANA BHATTA AND HIS PRABANDHĀS

Melputtur Narayana Bhatta is one of the shining stars in the literary galaxy of Kerala. He belonged to Melputtur Illam, a house in the Ponnani Taluk in Malabar and flourished during the second half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries A.D. 4
Narayana Bhatta has written a large number of Campū Kavyas generally known as Prabandhās for the use of the Chakyars for Kuttu in the temples. Many of the prabandhas he wrote were at the request of his friend Ravi Chakyar of Kuttanceri family. The Prabandhās deal with episodes from the epics and puranas. The aim of the poet is not to compose original literary works, but to give a text to the chākyārs for their exposition of the puranic stories. Hence Narayana Bhatta has borrowed profusely several verses from the classical works.

Following are the Prabandhās available to us.

Rājasūya Prabandhā

Dūtatākya Prabandhā

Pāñcālīśvayamvara Prabandhā

Nalāynīcarita Prabandhā

Sundopasundopākhyāna Prabandhā

Subhadrāharaṇa Prabandhā

Kaunteyaka

Kirāta Prabandhā

Kailasavarnana Prabandhā

Vyāsolpatti Prabandhā

Yudhīsthirābhīṣeka Prabandhā
PRABANDHAS OF R V P

RVP was closely associated with the kerala stage in its performance of Kūttu and Kūtiyyattam. He patronized great actors like

Matsyāvatāra Prabandhā
Vāmanvatāra Prabandhā
Nṛgamokṣa Prabandhā
Gajendramokṣa Prabandhā
Santānagopala Prabandhā
Kucelopākhayāna Prabandhā
Ajāmilamokṣa Prabandhā
Syamantaka
Sūrpanakhāpralāpa
Rakṣasotpatti
Daksayaga Prabandhā
Tripuradabana Prabandhā
Tarakāvadha Prabandhā
Aṣṭamimahotsava Prabandhā
Svahāsudhākara Prabandhā
Kotiviraha Campu
Chachu Chākyār, Painkulam Rama Chākyār. Mani Madhava Chākyār was his disciple. Naturally this association to the stage and Chākyārs led him to write Prabandhā for the performance.

He has written four Prabandhas—Ambariṣaṭācarita, Sukanyācaraṇa, Rādhāmadhava and Prahlādacarita.

**AMBARIṢACARITA:**

The story of Ambariṣa is described in Bhāgavata in 99 slokas. R.V.P. has condensed it in 20 slokas faithfully following the original story. It looks strange that there is no prose passage in the Prabandhā. Melputtūr in his Narayaniya narrates the story of Ambariṣa. This might perhaps have inspired RVP to treat the story as a separate work.

The theme of this Prabandhā is the devotion of Ambariṣa towards Viṣṇu. Sānta being the main sentiment, Bhakti comes as a dominant motive.

**Ambariṣa:**

In the Prabandha, the author depicts Ambariṣa as a deep devotee of Mahāviṣṇu in the following verse.

अनेकजन्मार्थित्वपुण्यवल्लरी

कालायिता भक्तिवर्भृत्त सुनिर्धिचतः
His another virtue is devotion to Brhamanas and Rṣis. The following verse is an example:

\[
\text{विषप्रिचतो दुर्दच्यवनादि पूजिते}
\]
\[
\text{जनादर्द्धेत तरस्य जगत्त प्राणनायक ॥ ॥}
\]

Owing to his devotion to Lord Vishṇu he practiced strictly the Ekādaśīvrata.

The character of the Durvasa is important in this work. Suddenly does he get angry. It is this nature that creates problems. In the AC describes the Dwadaśīvrata practiced through Arcana or worship.

**Vratas**

Brahmakānda of Padmapurāṇa describes several types of vratas and their greatness. They are given as answers to the several questions asked by Saunaka\(^32\).
Among these vratas, Ekādaśi Vrata is most important.

One should not take food on that day. The devotee will get unlimited auspicious results by the observance of Ekādaśi which is qualified as pāpanāśini (destroyer of all evils). When Ekādaśi and Dwādaśi happen to combine on a Tiruvonam (Srāvaṇa) day the Ekādaśi is qualified as Vijaya. If an Ekādaśi comes in the month of Phālguna (March) on a puyam (pusya) day, the wisemen extol this day as one promising good effects. On the Ekādaśi day one would perform Viṣṇu Pūja which gives universal happiness. He who does so will acquire children and wealth in this world and attain Viṣṇu loka after death.

The vrata observed on the eleventh day after a new moon or full moon is called the Ekādaśi Vrata. King Ambarisa observed very strictly and regularly the Ekādaśi Vrata to obtain the status Indra. This vrata would fetch food for the hungry and salvation for those who come in search of it. The method of observing the vrata is detailed below.

Those who observe the Ekādaśi Vrata should be on a regulated diet excluding meat and should avoid several acts on Daśāmi day, the day preceding Ekādaśi, on both the Ekādaśi days in the month. One should not take any food at all. The period which combines Ekādaśi with Dwādaśi (the twelthday) is called Harivāsra because of the presence of viṣṇu at
that time. That is good time for doing sacred yajña. That day when there is only a small portion of Ekādaśi and the rest Dwādaśi is the best day for yajñas. Trayodaśi (the thirteenth day) is good for breaking the fast. The which merges dwādaśi with Trayodaśi. It is not available to the vrta on a day which combines. Dasmi with Ekādaśi. Hell is the result if one does so. Completely abstaining from food on the Ekādaśī.

A.C. closely following the Bhāgavatapurāṇa extols duties to observe the vrata for the attainment of Moksha.

**SUKANYĀ CARITA**

Sukanya was the daughter of the King, Saryati. One day King and Sukanya went to the hermitage of Cyavana. There Sukanya saw two glowing substances within a hole of earthworm, and by chance she pierced them. As soon as she did this blood began to ooze from that hole. King found that Sukanya was the cause of misfortune. Then they offered prayers to Cyavana muni just to satisfy him according to his own desire. Also Srayati offered his daughter to Cyavana, who was very old man. With the help of Asvani kumara cyavana got his youth. This is the story described in this Prabandhā.
Sukanyācarita is comparatively a lengthy composition. Some verses are quoted to make the nature of the Kāvya clear.

Example 1.

भद्रे! गठवा पतित्वे वद “सुरभिषर्वा”
बाणाबाहुवस्त्वः
ब्रह्मनु! कुर्याव साशं तरुणममरव
च्वारुरुपं भवनाम्।
कर्त्तव्यशायमेको भुगुवः। समयः,
श्रृयतः, तुल्यवेषेः
व्यस्मास्वेकं वृणोतु श्लिष्टिपरित्तनया
स्तवाभिकारानुरूपम्।

Example 2:

२. श्रुत्या सा जनकोदितः तदवद
नान्दसमतादार्नम्
‘मा मा तात्! सुतां सत्तीमितरथा
मंस्याः, प्रसादं भज।
जानीषे तपसः प्रभावमुलः
तत्तोष्णश्रामणं
दशानुश्रब्हस्माद्: परिणाति
विदेशदत्तव्रुतम्।

The two poems are appreciable in the two ways. The first in its content and the latter in its narration.
RĀDHĀMĀDHAVA

Rādhāmādhava is the work modelled after Astapadi of Jayadeva, the great poet. In this Prabandhā the verses are in long metres. There are small prose passages also.

According to Vatakunkur"Sanskrit opinion RM is the first among the works of R.V.P. the dominant sentiment is Bhakti. The skill of the poet in depicting the sentiment in a lucid way is clear from every verse.

This advice of friend is very suitable to the occasion. The fourth verse of the poet is a clear evidence of his skill. The ideas in the first three verses are common to other poets. But the idea of the fourth is found rarely among great poets.

This fourth verse is the crown of the poem. See the next verse:

आलोक्यात्यन्तरीनामतनुपरिभव
दाहतांकोक्कः मे। ली
‘बाले ! लीलारस्ते’ वद, सकाठसखी
लालीतः कवप्रयातः !
तन्द्रा स्वाराज्यांनादाबिष्टे, नवनण्ग
जागरणाल्पान्ते
व्यक्तं सक्तं तवविश्वेतुः हदयमतिहं
सुन्दरे नन्दसुन्दरौ ॥

The use of Alamkāra is very suitable and full of ideas in prose. The following prose is an example.
We do not know whether the Chākyārs ever enacted any of these three Prabandhās. There is no evidence to prove the same. Anyhow they can be appreciated as accomplished literary works.

All the three are abridgements of Puranic Stories and reveals the poets devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. They are also monuments of his poetic excellences.

RM is a small campus giving the story of Kṛṣṇa and Radha and their mutual love. The poet has taken Gitāgovinda as his model. Radha asks her friend to set news from Kṛṣṇa. Both of them so in search of their and finally they get the satisfaction of conjugal love.

RVP generally is in trusted in Śāstraic discussion or in defecating Bhakti in his poem. In both AC and SC the principal sentiment as the theme demand it is Srngara. But here also the poet is aware of the transcendental bliss over and above the conjugal love. Hence he takes them as the embodiment of Sakti. The last verse reads like this –

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साधारणवातः रसा रसायनवातः
राधामाधवतः
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The campū has 33 verses and a few prose passages.

**PRAHLĀDACARITAM**

PC. is perhaps the best among the Prabandhās of RVP. This was successfully presented on the stage on several occasions and is available recorded in videotape.

The story is famous. Prahlāda’s devotion for Viṣṇu and his father Hiranyakasipu’s obstruction to it. Ultimately God rescued the boy in his Nṛṣimha incarnation.

One of his friends pointed out to R.V.P. that the devotional story of the purāṇas is not performed either in Kūttu or Pāṭhakam stages. R.V.P. Being an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu he wanted this story to be performed. Thus he composed Prahlādacaritam in 70 beautiful verses. There are also prose passages with high diction and style.

On completion the work was handed over to them then senior artist Chachu Chākyār. After reading it he opined that it can be well read and relished but not suitable for stage presentation. Then it was given to the Sri. Painkulam Rama Chākyār. Prof. C.K. Raman Nambiar began to teach
him this campū. After a few days he too felt it very difficult to present it to a learned audience.

Then Mani Madhava Chākyār visited Tripunithura to participate in a Kūttu. He knew from Raman Nambiar the fate of the Prabhandâ. He learned under Raman Nambiar and after four days presented the sloka before the scholars. All the pandits including R.V.P. enjoyed the Kūttu and realised that P.C. is a good piece for the stage presentation. Next year Madhava Chākyar presented the whole PC in seven days. When he completed the last sloka on the 7th day many people wanted this to be recorded. However it was realised only in December 1986 when the PC was recorded in a studio at Chalakudy. It has to be recorded here that in his advanced age. Mani Madhava Chākyār came to Tripunithura in 1987 to pay homage to his Guru Parīksit in the Sanskrit College. He presented a few verses of Prahlādacarita on that day. It was his homage to R.V.P. and also the last performance on a public stage.
Reference:


8. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 229, Trivandrum, 1971; also from Trichur.


    1. Trivandrum, 1945.
17. P.K. Narayanan Nampiar, Mantrankam, Kerala sahitya Akademi, 
18. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 175, Trivandrum, 1953.
    Malayalam Script)
24. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 225.
25. P.K. Narayanan Nampiar Mantrākam, Trichur, 1980 PP. 175 –188. (In 
    Malayalam Script)
26. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 249.
27. P.K. Narayanan Nampiar OP. Cit. PP. 151 –152. (In Malayalam 
    Script)

29. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series No. 249.


32. Kārttika Vrata, Jayanthi Mahātmya, Radhāstami Vrata, Vara Vrata, Aṣṭami Rohini, Ekādaśi Vrata, Pūrṇima Vishnu, Pūdana Māhātmya, Vishnupādodaka Mahatmya, Vishnu Parvaka are described in Padma Purāṇa. Related stories are also described in this purāṇa.