KOVALAN AND KANNAKI

(THE STORY OF THE 'SILAPPADHIKARAM')

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CONTENTS

		PAGE NO.
INTRODUCTION	..	iii
CHAPTER I.	THE MARRIAGE OF KOVALAN AND KANNAKI ..	1
,, II.	CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON ..	9
,, III.	THE STORM BURSTS ..	13
,, IV.	THE BIRTH OF MANIMEKHALAI ..	18
,, V.	A DESOLATE WIFE ..	27
,, VI.	CHITRAPATI'S WILES ..	32
,, VII.	SUNSET ON THE SEA-SHORE ..	38
,, VIII.	FORGIVENESS DIVINE ..	41
,, IX.	SOUTHWARD HO! ..	48
,, X.	ARRIVAL AT MADURA ..	54
,, XI.	ATROCIOUS INJUSTICE ..	62
,, XII.	FRANTIC GRIEF ..	65
,, XIII.	TERRIBLE REVENGE ..	68
,, XIV.	THE GODDESS OF CHASTITY ..	73

INTRODUCTION

The moving and highly dramatic story of "Kovalan and Kannaki" is contained in the famous Tamil epic, *Silappadhikaram* dating from about the second century A. D. It and its sequel, *Manimekhalai*, are the two most celebrated of the five Tamil Epics. From the day they were published, till to-day, the Tamils have been rightly proud of these two Epics. The *Manimekhalai* is more abstruse and philosophical, as it treats of a beautiful young maiden who prefers love divine to human love, and enters a monastery at an age when maidens of her age would be entering wedlock. The *Silappadhikaram*, on the other hand, treats of the married life of Kovalan and Kannaki, and then grapples with the problem of the eternal triangle caused by the entrance of Madhavi into Kovalan's life, almost to the entire exclusion of Kannaki. That phase passes, and Kovalan returns to Kannaki, and is forgiven. Both then set out for Madura to start life anew, and meet with tragedy in its grimmest aspect, Kovalan is executed unjustly: Kannaki proves his innocence to the King. The King and Queen die of shock; and Madura is consigned to flames.

There, perhaps, a Western Dramatist might have ended the story. But, in India, where tragedy is the commonest thing in real life, it is considered bad art to end a story in a tragedy, leaving the forces of evil to triumph, and the audience in tears. So, there is the happy ending, and the ultimate triumph of good. Kovalan and Kannaki are escorted to Heaven by Indra himself, and are for ever happy; the Pandyan King too is an honoured guest in Heaven; Kannaki is worshipped as the Goddess of Chastity, and a fine temple constructed for her with an idol, carved out of a genuine Himalayan slab, installed therein.

The *Silappadhikaram* is written by a master; its Tamil is sweet and forcible; it has got several musical pieces, though we have perhaps lost the key to them; and the dramatic force is real and gripping. As a love story, it need not fear comparison with the greatest love stories of the world, like Nala and Damayanti, Satyavan and Savitri, Romeo and Juliet, or Abelard and Heloise. Unlike the heroines in those other stories, Kannaki had, in Kovalan, a faithless lover who forgot her for years and lived with another. Yet, such is the Hindu ideal that, instead of her love waning, Kannaki's love for Kovalan actually increases. She has for her God only Kovalan and refuses to worship any other God even to restore Kovalan to her! It is this unselfish love, based on a fixed religio-ethic principle, and refusing to treat love as a thing based on reciprociiy like an article of merchandise, that is the peculiar contribution of India to the love literature of the world, and this lesson is driven home to the reader the more effectively by this love-story being about a couple of the trading community. When her idol, Kovalan, is unjustly killed, Kannaki takes terrible revenge, with the fanaticism of a devotee whose idol has been desecrated and broken.

The Patni-cult (the worship of the chaste wife), thus started had a run of over a thousand years, undiluted with any cult, and survives even now in the Droupadi-Amman cult with the fire-walking ceremonies, and the Bhagavati cult of Malabar. The Bhagavati of the famous temple at Cranganore in Cochin State is single-breasted, like Kannaki after the great fire, and the *Bharani*, the anniversary of the Madura fire, is celebrated by tens of thousands there. This tenacious survival of the Patni-cult on the West Coast is, perhaps, one of the many arguments in favour of Senguttuvan's Capital, Vanjikkaruvur, having been Tiruvanjikkalam on the West Coast, rather than Karur in Trichinopoly District, as contended by some scholars.

The Drama "Kovalan" is still popular on the Tamil stage though the story is distorted and mangled, and deprived of much of its terrible force and dramatic effect. Madhavi is shown as an ordinary dancing-girl, instead of the grand romantic figure in the Epic; and Kannaki is shown as a helpless cast-away wife, instead of the heroic self-sacrificing woman with very great force of will and character.

In re-telling the story for the benefit of the English-reading public, my intention has been to give them some idea of the great Epic tale, and also of Tamil life and ideals. It will be noticed that the tale bears evidence of Brahminical, Jain and Buddhist influence, though the core and spirit of it are certainly Tamil. It is remarkable that while Sanskrit heroes and heroines are mostly Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the hero and heroine here are Vaisyas and merchants. The Tamils always concerned themselves more with the common people, and were more democratic in the real sense, than the Aryans who were obsessed with their four-fold caste-system with its unpardonable preference for the first two castes who monopolised almost everything great or good in this world, or the other world, and even in the world of fiction.

The Epic reveals happy relations between all the castes, tribes and sects. One will search in vain for religious or communal bitterness in the *Silappadhikaram* or *Manimekhalai*. Brahmins, Ajivakas, Jains, Buddhists, Animists, Heretics and Atheists hob-nob one another. Most people go to all temples, to whichever sect they may happen to belong. Jain preachers preached non-violence in one place; Buddhists turned the Wheel of Dharma in another; Brahmins chanted their Vedas and performed their sacrifices in a third; Maravas offered animal sacrifices in a fourth.

Beneficent Siva, Dancing Krishna, Jovial Balarama, Genial Sastha, Sporting Skanda, Pompous Indra, Scorching Surya, and Cool Chandra had their temples side by side with those of Teerthankaras, and Arhats and Sakya Muni. Even the followers of these Gods exchanged few words of bitterness. The usual thing they said, when they differed, were, "You go your way; we go ours," as Kavundi told the Brahmin Madalan.

The standard of living was high among the rich; the food, the dress, the ornaments were all rich and costly. Dancing, singing, painting, architecture and other fine arts were well developed. The Kings were powerful, but were easily accessible to all persons with a grievance. Their sense of justice was very high, and the subjects were, on the whole, happy. The Brahmins were respected, but were not allowed to dominate the country, or to dictate to others, as in later

days. The caste-system was not rigid, as now, and pressed much more lightly on the lower strata, being far more elastic.

Miracles were believed in, and dreams about future occurrences were held to be almost inevitable. Dancing-girls were numerous, and highly accomplished; and even Kings, Princes, Brahmins, and married men freely resorted to them, without any social stigma being attached to it. The Epic has much to say about the Goddess of Chastity, and nothing at all about the God of Chastity, a concept probably unheard of in those days. In that respect, the Tamil author lined up with his Sanskrit brother who too talked of *Pativratas* (faithful wives), but never of *Patnivratas* (faithful husbands). Kannaki's burning Madura to ashes has its parallel, in Sanskrit, in Damayanti's burning the lustful forester to ashes. The foisting of the false theft case on Kovalan has a parallel, in Sanskrit, in the foisting of the murder case on Charudatta in *Mrichchakati*. The stories showing the effect of *Karma* and of Re-birth have many parallels in Sanskrit.

The general ideal of Dharma is the same as in Sanskrit, namely, that of the Hindus, including therein Buddhists and Jains also. This common Hindu ideal was the creation of all the races, tribes and cultures of India, and not of one race, whether of the North or South, East or West. This common Hindu culture had been evolved even by the time of the earliest Sanskrit or Tamil books. A curious feature of this culture is the graded morality according to one's status in life and rank, the higher ones being expected to be more sensitive to moral ideas. Thus, while the Vaisya, Kovalan, on realising the injustice he has done to Kannaki, merely sheds tears and implores her forgiveness, Nedum Cheliyan, the Kshatriya King, on realising the injustice he has done to Kovalan, dies of shock.

I have filled in certain details about which the Epic is silent. These are however, clearly implied in certain passages in the Epic, and are in consonance with its spirit. The morality of the *Kural* was largely followed in Tamil Nadu in those days, and I have, therefore, drawn on the *Kural* in some places. As at least one verse from the *Kural* (Verse 55) has been bodily quoted in the *Silappadhikaram* and the *Manimekhalai*, there is no question of anachronism in doing this.

It is interesting to note that, even 1800 years ago, there was a smouldering antagonism between the "Aryans" of the North, and the "Dravidians" of the South. Senguttuvan, the Chera King, was told of the contemptuous words used by the Aryan princes regarding the Tamils, and a terrible war, in which thousands lost their lives, was the result! The title of the Pandyan King Nedum Cheliyan, *Aryapadaitandia*, means "The Conqueror of the Aryas," and speaks for itself. Karikala, the Chola King, too undertook an expedition to the Himalayas, and carved his Tiger Emblem there, clearly an echo of a war with some Aryan prince. So, none need regard the present Aryan-Dravidian animosity as a growth of recent times, or as a by-product of the Hindi or anti-Hindi movement. It is as old as the hills. Only, now, the real meaning is twisted, and the South itself sought to be involved in internecine strife, instead of all Southerners being ranged against all Northerners, and the struggle itself ends in words and jibes, whereas in olden times it was responsible for rivers of blood and hills of slain. It will be noticed that the Brahmin Madalan was one with the non-Brahmin Senguttuvan in the war against the arrogant Aryans.

After I had finished writing this story, Sri Ramachandra Dikshitar's excellent translation of the *Silappadhikaram* came out. I have gone through it before revising the story for the Press, and safely recommend it to all those who want to have an accurate knowledge of the contents of the *Silappadhikaram* but are unable to do so in the original Tamil.

In conclusion, I trust that this book will make Tamils take a genuine pride in their own past, and show it in the only legitimate way possible, namely, by enriching their mother-tongue with modern *Silappadhikarams* and *Manimekhalais*; and will also make them shed their fear that Sanskrit and Hindi will ever succeed in depriving Tamil of its pride of place in Tamil Nadu, any more than the *Ganges* and *Jumna* can replace the waters of the *Kaveri* for the irrigation of the Southern fields. I trust, too, that this book will help people outside Tamil Nadu to understand the Tamils and their culture better.

A. S. P. AYYAR.

CHAPTER I

THE MARRIAGE OF KOVALAN AND KANNAKI

EIGHTEEN hundred years ago, the city of Kaverippoompattinam, or Puhar, was the capital of the powerful Chola King claiming descent from the Sun(1) and Sibi,(2) and having the dreaded Tiger Flag on his war chariot. It lay like a queen on the estuary of the Kaveri, and had an enormous trade with the lands to the east, north, south and west. It was the emporium for the whole Chola country which stretched from the Tirupati Hills in the north to the Vellar river in the south, from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the confines of the Chera Kingdom on the west. The great King Karikala immensely increased its fame, beauty and prosperity. He built fine palaces and temples, with wonderful gardens and parks. He put up the famous floodbanks on the Kaveri for a hundred miles, constructed a big dam and innumerable irrigation canals with the labour of his own subjects and of 12,000 prisoners of war taken from Ceylon, and made Tanjore District the granary of the south, and Puhar a busy seaport for the export of grain, in addition to its already thriving trade in pearls and corals. He increased the prestige of the Kingdom and Capital by an expedition to the Himalayas where he carved his Tiger emblem on a range named thereafter the 'Chola range,' reached after crossing a pass named by him the 'Chola Pass;' by defeating the Nagas and annexing Negapatam; by defeating the Chera King at the battle of Venni; and by a successful invasion of Ceylon. In addition to the already existing Indra Festival, he instituted the Festival of the First Freshes in the Kaveri, and made the gay city of Puhar even more famous for its joyous and care-free life.

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1. Some Kings of ancient India claimed to be descended from the Sun: others from the Moon; some others from the Fire; and still others from the Ganges.

2. Sibi was a great King noted for justice and self-sacrifice. He saved a dove from an eagle, which had seized it for food, by giving the eagle his own flesh equal in weight to the dove.

The city had a diameter of three miles from one end to the other. It was divided into two broad divisions, the Maruvurpakkam, adjoining the harbour, where the tall terraced houses of prosperous foreigners, and the crowded bazaars and godowns, were located. Sailors from distant lands were to be seen there. The bazaars were full of silks, corals, pearls, gold, gems, sandal, and myrrh, besides 18 different kinds of grain. Washermen, carpenters, blacksmiths, sculptors, potters, jewellers, wine-sellers, fishermen, cobblers, tailors, and musicians and dealers in salt, mutton, oil, bronze, copper, cork and cloth—all had their separate streets. Hawkers went about selling paints, bathing powders, cool pastes, flowers, incense and scents.

In the fashionable part of the city, called the Pattinapakkam, separated from the Maruvurpakkam by a big open space where the daily market was held, were the King's street, the car street and the nice shops, besides the broad street where the Tamil merchant-princes lived in their lordly mansions, and the streets of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, landlords, astrologers, physicians, workers in precious stones and famous courtesans and dancers.

In the middle of the city, at the big cross-roads, stood the *Bhuta-chatukkam* or temple of the *City Daemon*, who was supposed to roar out at midnight his threat, which could be heard for ten miles, to bind with his rope and devour all false ascetics, adulterers, thieves, traitors and perjurers. In the open market place were heaped up thousands of bundles of goods with marks indicative of their weight and value and the names of the owners. There was no gate or lock or watchman for these, but the *City Daemon* was supposed to have the power of making any thief go round and round the place with the stolen goods on his head till daybreak when the king's officers would come round, catch him and put him to death. There were other temples too in the city. One was to *Manivannan* or Vishnu in his Anantasayana posture of mystic sleep on the Universal Serpent in the Sea of Milk.(3) The rest were dedicated to Siva, Indra, Korravvai (Goddess of Victory), Seyon or Murugan, Mayon or Krishna, and Balarama. There were seven Buddhist Viharas and a Bodhi tree, all of which were reputed to have been erected by Indra.(4) There was also

3. The Milky Way, looking like a huge serpent.

4. The God of Rain.

a fine *Silatala*, or Jain temple, with a sacred Asoka tree with its golden flowers.

In this great city, there lived a celebrated merchant-prince named Manaikkan.(5) His ships and merchandise were on all the seas. His bounty was as unbounded and spontaneous as that of the clouds. He and his wife, Andal, lived in utmost luxury in one of the big mansions on the banks of the Kaveri. For a long time, they had one regret, that they had no child. But, after a special prayer to Agni, the God of Fire, accompanied by much poor feeding and innumerable gifts, they got a beautiful daughter called Kannaki, of the colour of beaten gold. When she was in her fourteenth year, she was the talk of the whole town. She was universally acknowledged to be equal to the goddess Lakshmi in beauty and grace, and to the model wife Arundhati in modesty and in domestic virtues.

In Puhar lived also another great merchant-prince called Masathuvan,(6) the owner of innumerable caravans going to every part of the peninsula. He had been raised to the noblest rank of the hereditary aristocracy by Karikala for his unstinted charity to the poor during a severe famine before the construction of the floodbank and the canals. He had a handsome and accomplished son called Kovalan,(7) who was just about to complete his sixteenth year. Everyone in the town compared the youthful Kovalan to the god Subrahmanya(8) incarnate.

All the match-makers in the town prophesied that Kovalan and Kannaki would be married, and expatiated on the unique excellence of both. Kovalan's friends told him about Kannaki, and said that she was the only girl fit for him; and Kannaki's friends told her about Kovalan, and said that he was the one man in all Puhar fit to wed her. The two thus naturally began to have a great curiosity to see each other. One day, during the Festival of the First Freshes, they had a vision of each other for a few seconds through the clever manœuvres of their friends, and instantly fell in love, though they did not speak about it to their parents.

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5. Maha Nayaka or Great Captain
6. Maha Satva or Man of great riches.
7. The equivalent of the Sanskrit name 'Gopala' or Krishna.
8. The son of Siva.

Seeing Kannaki about to complete the age of 14, before which age a Vaisya maiden ought to be married according to the Scriptures, her mother, Andal, began to get worried, and to nurse a secret grievance against Manaikkan who did not appear to be bestirring himself at all about it. So, one evening, when she was asked by him why she was looking depressed, she replied, rather crossly, "What is there for me to dance about?", and he retorted "You have no sense", meaning that she was not grateful for the many good things vouchsafed to them by the gods. Her grievance against him was increased by this fling in the presence of the servants, and she retired to her own room in anger.

Manaikkan went to the bedroom that night after his dinner, and waited for her. Not seeing her come for a long time, he sent her maid for her. He had also, curiously enough, been thinking of getting Kannaki's marriage fixed up, and wanted to consult his wife about it.

Andal went to the bedroom and asked her husband, "Why have you sent for me?".

"I want to consult you on an important matter," said he. "Come and sit by my side."

"I have no sense. What is the use of consulting me?" asked she.

"Oh, don't be angry. I said that in fun. I want to talk to you about our Kannaki's marriage," said he.

"Kannaki's marriage!" said Andal, nestling to his side. "That is what has been upsetting me for so many days."

"Oh, you silly thing!" said Manaikkan, clasping her to his bosom, "Why didn't you tell me? Am I not also worrying over the very same thing all these days? This evening, when the Perunkudiars(9) met to arrange for the forthcoming Guild Dinner, Masathuvan took me aside, and, in the course of casual conversation, gave me a broad hint that he would be glad of an alliance with us. Of course, I gave him no inkling of

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9. Bigwigs; literally, men of big families or mansions.

my opinion in the matter till I had consulted you. His boy, Kovalan, is well spoken of, and seems to be a suitable match for our daughter."

"An ideal match, if you ask me. Settle it at once. Don't lose a moment," said Andal. "In fact, you could have agreed to it without waiting to consult me."

"Oh, no, how could I agree without knowing what you thought about it? Besides, in all such matters, there should be no suspicion of undue eagerness on our part. Granted that Kovalan is a very desirable son-in-law, our Kannaki is an even more desirable daughter-in-law."

"That is so," said Andal. "But, see Masathuvan to-morrow, which is a specially auspicious Friday, and settle the match."

"I will," said Manaikkan.

Then he and his wife spent the happiest night for many years, talking of future plans for their only girl. It was almost dawn before they went to sleep.

The next morning, Manaikkan called on Masathuvan and broached the marriage proposal. Masathuvan jumped at the offer. But, he suggested that it was better that the proposed bride and bridegroom should see each other so that the marrige might be settled with their consent, or at least without their objection. "You know, Manaikkan," said he. "In these matters, it is as well that they should be consulted." "I have not the least objection," said Manaikkan, "though I don't anticipate any criticism from either side."

Kovalan and Kannaki were sent for. They were merely asked to go there in order to meet a partner selected for them. They were both in mental trepidation, as they felt that their hearts were already engaged to a partner not disclosed to their parents. It was with the greatest of reluctance that they answered the summons. What was their surprise and joy when they saw that the partner selected for them was the very one chosen by them already, for whom they were pining away in silence and despair! Their transparent joy at the selection did not surprise Masathuvan or Manaikkan who simply took this to be the natural result of such a careful and unexceptionable choice by

them. The young folk having signified their assent, the marriage was fixed up at once for a very early date.

Fair maidens seated on elephants went and invited the elite of the city. The bride and bridegroom were taken in a gorgeous procession round the main streets with enchanting music and a variety of white silk umbrellas. Then, at dusk, they were taken to a wonderful pavilion glimmering with pearls and rubies beneath a canopy of blue silk with fine floral decorations. The pillars of the pavilion were beautified by garlands and adorned with gems and coloured lights. The whole scene was reminiscent of fairy land. When the Moon was approaching the star Rohini, (10) Kovalan walked round the holy fire and performed the *Saptapadi*(11) with the divinely beautiful Kannaki and tied the *Tali*(12) round her neck in the presence of the King and the leading citizens of Puhar. Lovely maidens sang ravishing songs and distributed flowers and spices. Graceful women gave the bridal pair sandal paste, betel and perfumes. Young women with lovely teeth brought lamps, vessels and pots of tender shoots, circling them round the newly wedded pair, they said to them, "May you live a happy and blameless life and never know separation from each other, and may your love be ever waxing, never waning!" They then led them to the luxuriously decorated nuptial chamber and returned.

Kovalan and Kannaki sat on a gem-legged couch, and took in the beauty of the nuptial chamber. They then went out to the terrace where the bed had been spread. Kovalan wore a garland of jasmine flowers, and Kannaki a garland of Kazhuni flowers. Kovalan took his garland and threw it round Kannaki's neck, saying to her,

"Come, my darling, the moon is shining,
Clasp me firm like a golden creeper,
I'm like the moon for Tara(13) pining,
Plunge me not in misery deeper!"

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10. Aldebaran. An auspicious star.
11. The essential ceremony in a Hindu marriage. It consists in the bridegroom's leading the bride seven steps, taking her by the hand.
12. A Hindu marriage ornament.
13. A star considered to be the Moon's sweetheart.

and folded her in a close embrace. She returned it with warmth and said :—

"I met you long ago,
I loved you e'r so well,
My heart was full of woe,
Life without you was hell.
But now that you are here,
And are holding me close,
I have shed all my fear,
And with it all my woes.
You were e'r in my heart,
You dwelt in my bosom,
Oh, may we never part,
For all the lives to come!"

"Amen," said Kovalan. "Embrace me still closer. Like a drunkard's craving for more and more of the foaming wine is my craving for more and more kisses from your lips, kisses sweet as honey and milk mixed in the cup of love! Is the world of the lotus-eyed God(14) sweeter than the tender arms of her that one loveth? All the delights of sight, sound and smell are joined in thee, my darling of the shining bangles and tinkling anklets! How can I think of parting from you any more than Kama(15) can dream of parting from Rati?"(16)

They then lay down on the bed, and he began to paint on her broad shoulders, with sandal-paste, the sugar-cane and the Kamavalli, the emblems of the God of Love. "My darling," said he, embracing her closely, "Kama, Indra and Subrahmanya have all given you their aid in perfecting your charms. The peacock is ashamed to display its beauty in your presence. The swan dare not strut about when you are near. The Kokil's(17) voice is a miserable squeak compared to yours. Oh lady of enchanting bust, lovely tresses, well-shaped waist, flawless

14. Vaikuntha, Vishnu's heaven, an abode of bliss.
15. The God of Love.
16. His wife.
17. The Indian Nightingale.

lips and ravishing eyes! What need have you for any ornaments? What use are scents to one who is so sweet-smelling? Will pearls enhance your beauty, oh pearl among women? Oh thou, more beautiful than the daughter of the hills,(18) or the maid of the sea(19) or the lady of the Veena,(20) my own Kannaki, come and confine me once more in your creeper-like arms!" Kannaki did accordingly, and the happy pair forgot the moonlight and the sky in their absorption in each other.

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18. Parvati, daughter of the Himalayas.
19. Lakshmi, born from the Sea of Milk.
20. Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning and fine arts.

CHAPTER II

CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON,

KOVALAN and Kannaki lived in the family house of Masathuvan for several days, in ecstatic love and deep enjoyment. Then Kovalan's mother established the newly married pair in a separate mansion magnificently furnished, and with plenty of servants, and attendants, so that Kannaki might serve her near and dear ones, ascetics and guests in a befitting fashion. "A newly-married couple," said she, "must have their own separate house to live in, free from interference by elders."

Three years passed, years of ideal happiness and bliss, in which they lived like Kama and Rati, the God and Goddess of Love. Kannaki, by her exemplary discharge of household duties, earned a name throughout the city as a model wife and ideal hostess, and as the feeder of countless hundreds of poor persons. Kovalan became equally well-known as a rich and public-spirited merchant-prince and as a great patron of the arts, and especially of song and dance. He was one of the foremost players on the *yal* (Veena) and the *kuzhal* (flute) and a competent critic of music. He was also a connoisseur of classical and popular dancing. He used to attend all the famous song and dance recitals in the city.

Chitrapati, a well-known dancing-girl, was the chief exponent of song and dance then in Puhar. Crowded were her performances, even the King and princes attending them. Kovalan was, of course, regular in his attendance. Chitrapati had a most beautiful daughter called Madhavi who was a prodigy in singing and dancing. She was considered to be a regular incarnation of her celebrated ancestress, Madhavi, who was the heavenly nymph Urvasi sent down to earth to be born as a dancing-girl owing to a curse of Agastya. At a great dance before Indra, Agastya noticed that Narada was not playing on the Veena to suit the dance of Urvasi and that Urvasi was also not dancing correctly owing to her glancing at Indra's son, Jayanta, with amorous eyes. He then uttered a curse, "May Urvasi be born

as a dancing-girl on earth, and may Jayanta be born as a male bamboo, and may she, and her descendants on earth, dance with this male bamboo as *Talaikkol*(1) at the Indra Festival in Puhar! Thus, instead of his being a hindrance to her dance, Jayanta will help it, and both these irreverent young things shall render proper homage to Indra. As for Narada's neglect, let the lute lose its unrivalled place among stringed instruments, and fear rivals(1-a) hereafter!"

Urvasi had been, therefore, born as the original Madhavi in Puhar. When she was 16, she had become unrivalled in song and dance. Just when she was about to make her debut, the Chola King, Todithod Sembiyan had, at the direction of Sage Agastya, instituted the Indra Festival, lasting for 28 days in order to ward off droughts and calamities, and to get the services of *Bhuta-chatukkam* which, on orders from Indra, promptly caught and punished criminals and sinners. The original Madhavi danced at this first Indra Festival with Jayanta born as the male bamboo as her *Talaikkol*. Then both were released from the curse, and returned to Amaravati, Indra's city. But Madhavi's descendants continued to dance at the Indra Festival every year.

Chitrapati's daughter Madhavi, was such a genius in singing and dancing that even at the age of seven her mother had recognized her unique gifts and had engaged for her the best instructor in the city. By the time she became fourteen, she had become an expert. In dance and song, in grace and form, there was none in all the Kingdom to equal her. She was equally proficient in both schools of dancing, *Desi*(2) and *Margi*,(3) and was also an expert in the science of dancing and dramaturgy.

Kovalan used to see Madhavi's dances and hear her songs on his visits to Chitrapati's house for dance and song recitals. He was carried away by Madhavi's skill and charm and felt himself regretting that Kannaki knew neither song nor dance. "What a country is ours!" thought he, "where such beautiful arts are supposed to be unfit for the home. How much more charming

1. A staff carried by the chief dancer, and serving as a kind of balancing rod.

1. (a) The violin has now become a serious rival to the Veena.

2. Indigenous, or Tamil.

3. Sanskrit classical dances.

would Kannaki have been, had she also learnt to dance and sing like Madhavi!"

At first his passion for Madhavi was purely artistic. It was so innocent that he even took Madhavi one day to his house, so that Kannaki too might see and enjoy her dancing and singing. Madhavi's resplendent beauty was only equalled by her inimitable and all-pervasive charm and unrivalled skill in dance. From the very first, she, who had fallen in love with Kovalan at first sight, was bent on capturing Kovalan; and Kovalan's rapturous eyes, fixed on her every movement, showed to poor Kannaki the great potential danger to her married happiness. "It is only an innocent interest in the dance," said she to herself, unconvincingly. "Nobody else has scented any danger in his interest in her. And why should I? Am I to judge my beloved by more uncharitable standards than others?" Still, the thought kept on recurring till the very dance became to her a physical and mental agony. She heaved a sigh of relief when it was over and Madhavi and Chitrapati had returned home with the valuable pearl necklace presented by Kovalan.

Alone in their luxuriously furnished nuptial chamber that night, she gave her husband the sandal paste and betel. He took them absent-mindedly. "What is my lord thinking about?" asked Kannaki. "Oh, nothing," he said and embraced her with warmth. "I wish our dream will come true soon" said Kannaki. "What dream?" asked he, and tears glistened in Kannaki's eyes. "How stupid of me!" said Kovalan. "Don't weep, darling. You, of course, mean the dream you had about a beautiful baby girl. It all seems so long ago.". "It seems but yesterday to me," said Kannaki sadly. Then she made a supreme effort to get over this jolt in their life's journey, and, embracing Kovalan, said to him, "I have no one except you. You are everything to me, father, mother, brother, husband." Kovalan returned her embrace and held her face close to his, looked into those clear, innocent, loving, trusting eyes and imprinted a burning kiss on those tear-stained lips.

"You have been weeping," said he. "Why?"

"I was weeping with joy," said she.

"No," said he, "these tears are too saltish

for that. Darling, forgive me if I appeared a bit too cold, a bit too much pre-occupied with the evening's dance. It is the fault of this intuitive love of song and dance I have in my blood. Oh, how I wish I had it not!"

"What harm is there in it? I am not jealous. You can enjoy her dance and song as much as you like. I only want you to be happy," said she.

"Darling," said he "You are far too generous and noble. I shall try to deserve your love." He then embraced her once more with warmth, and her anklets tinkled merrily as she responded. "Beautiful anklets those," said he "and of inestimable value."

"My mother gave them to me," said Kannaki. "It was a gift to my family from the great King Todithod Sembiyan, who had Agastya for his priest, and instituted the Indra Festival. It has got priceless rubies inside. My mother told me that these anklets were unique in the world, and that there was no other pair like that in existence."

"Did she also tell you that you were the only Kannaki in existence, and that there was no other?" asked Kovalan, giving her a long and rapturous kiss. He inwardly resolved to avoid Chitrapati's house thereafter.

For some months, he kept away from Chitrapati's house, and even avoided passing along the street in which she lived. Kannaki and he lived very happily. Days passed rapidly in each other's company, and Kannaki almost forgot her initial fear. Masathuvan and his wife spent their whole spare time during the day with the young couple, and nicknamed them "love birds," after the *Chataka* birds in Hindu legend. They were eagerly awaiting the day when a grandchild would arrive, whom they could take home with them for relieving the tedium of long hours.

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CHAPTER III

THE STORM BURSTS

THE storm burst unexpectedly in less than six months. The great Indra Festival was approaching, and Madhavi was to make her debut as a dancer by a dance in the great Hall in the presence of the King himself and was, thereafter, to begin her career as a dancing-girl by choosing a big man for her first favours. This was the talk of the whole town, of young and old, men and women. All Kovalan's friends were going to see her dance, and a Royal invitation, which amounted almost to a command, arrived for Kovalan also. Left to himself, Kovalan would have avoided it, as he felt that his repressed passion for Madhavi, which he had never been able to extinguish, would break forth again with redoubled vigour. But he was now bound to attend, as his absence would have been widely commented on. Alas, there was also the inward urge to see Madhavi once more and hear her enchanting voice and witness her exquisite dance. These two conflicting desires fought for mastery in him. Kannaki was no help at all in this. She was all for Kovalan's attending the dance so that he might have some fun. She believed that he had shaken off his momentary attraction for Madhavi. His ideal behaviour for the last six months had completely destroyed her fears. How could such love as his, so complete, so guileless, so transparently sincere, go with a lingering affection for a dancing-girl, she thought in her simplicity. Alas, she had not seen beautiful mangoes, with the healthiest skin imaginable and yet harbouring worms! Kovalan too did not, of course, tell her of his unsubdued passion for Madhavi. So he could not frankly ask her advice after telling her all the facts.

In this predicament, Kovalan's mind was literally torn into two and he had no peace. As the Saturday, the full-moon day of the month of Chithirai,(1) on which fell the commencing day of the Indra Festival and Madhavi's dance, approached nearer and nearer, he began to experience acute anguish of mind. "My

1. Generally, 15th April to 15th May.

God !" said he to himself, when walking alone in the park musing, " What a fate is mine ! Here is heaven at my feet in the shape of sweet, loving self-sacrificing Kannaki. But, I am hankering after Madhavi. What is there in dance and song that takes away one's senses, and makes one forget one's clear duty ? I would fain avoid this dance if I could. But how can I manage it ? Darling Kannaki urges me to attend it ! I would rather die than cause Kannaki to shed tears. But, alas, I am not master of myself when I watch Madhavi's song and dance. I am her slave. Like a drunkard who realises the evil effects of drink on him, in his sober moments, and yet takes it in great quantities when it is within his reach, I too, who realise the danger of this infatuation, will only die for a glance from Madhavi's eyes, or a smile from her lips, if once I go there. Her sinuous movements will completely knock me out. What shall I do ? "

As he walked along the park distractedly, he found a man about to be speared to death for having given false evidence, and his young wife weeping as if her heart would break. She had also her small baby, and was moaning, " Who will feed my little one after he has gone ?" Kovalan had a flash of lunatic intuition. Here was a way out of his difficulty. He went and offered to the officer in charge to substitute himself for the unfortunate victim. The officer asked him, " What, are you a lunatic ?"; but, on closer scrutiny saw the rich dress and calm face of Kovalan, knew him to be a respectable and sane man, and promptly saluted, and said, " Excuse me, sir, for my unseemly words. I had never heard such an offer before."

" That doesn't matter," said Kovalan, "Will you accept it ?"

" Never," said the officer. " What ! Execute a public-spirited citizen of our land in the place of a wretch who has learnt to speak only that he may make perjured statements in the King's Courts ! What do you take me for, sir ? A lunatic ? I have put in twenty years of unblemished service and won the King's esteem, sir. Your offer does you credit, but he is my man. Here, spear him at once," he shouted, and a sharp cry of pain rose as the executioner did his work.

The victim's wife fell in a swoon. Kovalan had her revived. Then he gave her a bag containing a hundred gold coins to keep herself in comfort, and took down her address for sending

a thousand more gold coins anonymously. The poor woman burst into fresh tears at this princely act of charity, and said, "You have saved my baby from starvation. May you be blessed with a child who will be goodness itself!." The officer watched all this with wonder, and asked Kovalan, "No reward for me, sir, for doing my duty?" "None, to-day, officer," said Kovalan.

"I too have a baby, sir, and am none too rich," said the officer.

"Well, then, take this for the little one," and Kovalan gave him ten gold coins. The officer's face displayed the greatest astonishment and pleasure. "The world is not as bad as I thought, sir," said he. "But, of course, you are one of those who will go bodily to heaven. May you be on the lips of men for hundreds of years!".

The Indra Festival began with a great round of merriments. The streets were crowded with sight-seers and merry-makers. The greatest rush was near the great Hall where Madhavi was to have her dance. The stage was superb. It had two doors. The platform was big, and was made of planks polished like mirrors. Over the stage were placed pictures for worship and inspiration. The lamps illumining the stage were so placed that the pillars did not cast shadows. The canopy was of silk painted with beautiful pictures.

The *Talaikkol* was the central shaft of a splendid white umbrella captured from an Aryan prince in a battle-field in North India by Karikala Chola, and represented Jayanta. It was covered with the purest *jambunada*[1-(a)] gold, and its joints were set with precious stones. It was bathed that morning at the royal palace by Madhavi with Ganges water kept in a golden pitcher. Afterwards, she garlanded it. Then it was worshipped. Thereafter Madhavi handed it over to the Brahmins who blessed it and put it on the state elephant which had a plate of gold and other ornaments on its forehead and was to drag the processional chariot. The King and his five groups of advisors circumambulated the chariot and the elephant to the accompaniment of drums, and cymbals and other musical instru-

1. (*a*) The purest gold.

ments proclaiming victory, and took the *Talaikkol* and handed it over to the state musician and poet sitting in the chariot. Then the chariot and the elephant went round the town in procession amidst excited and cheering crowds and proceeded to the great Hall where they placed the *Talaikkol* in its appointed position.

The musicians with their various instruments took up their allotted. positions. Madhavi, superbly dressed, and adorned with sparkling jewels, entered the Hall, right foot forward, and stayed by the side of the pillar on the right, according to the immemorial custom. Her mother, Chitrapati, her companion, Vasantamala, and others gathered near the pillar on the left, following ancient usage. Then the two kinds of prayers[1] (*b*) were offered, so that virtue might increase and vice disappear. Then all the musical instruments were sounded. The lute, the flute, the mridangam,(2) and the ghatam(3) were in perfect harmony with one another, and the auspicious song with its four parts was sung to the accompaniment of the *Desi*(4) dance. Thereafter the *Vaduku*(5) dance began.

In her quick movements, Madhavi looked like a golden creeper animated with life. Her dance was scientifically correct, æsthetically superb, and perfect in execution. The Chola King admired it greatly, and presented her with the customary green leaf garland and one thousand and eight gold coins. Then he departed in state for his palace.

Madhavi went back to her own mansion with Chitrapati and Vasantamala. Then, as was customary, she handed over a garland to Chellam, her hunchback maid-servant, and asked her to stand in the street in front of her palatial home and call out to the rich merchants and landlords and nobles assembled there as follows :—

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1. (*b*) One to ward off evil, like "Keep us from temptation"; and the other for positive boons, like "Give us this day our daily bread."
2. A Drum.
3. A pot.
4. Indigenous, not imported.
5. Northern : Sanskrit.

"This garland is for sale for 1008 gold coins. He who buys it will be accepted as the lover of beautiful Madhavi."

Vasantamala asked Madhavi, with a wink, "Do you think Kovalan would fall for it?" "I am not without hopes," said Madhavi. "He is only awaiting the announcement by Chellam to rush in," said Chitrapati, smiling.

Chellam went into the street and made the announcement. Kovalan had watched the dance with breathless interest, and had all his old passion increased a thousand-fold by the glances and smiles directed at him slyly by Madhavi. He was swept off his feet bodily, and resolved to be Madhavi's lover, whatever the consequences. The moment he heard Chellam's offer, he rushed forward and plucked the garland from her. He was then swiftly led by Chellam to the gorgeously decorated bedroom of Madhavi.

Madhavi was reclining on her soft bed, spread over with flowers, in semi-deshabille. She wore the flimsiest of silks which showed every line of her figure clearly and to advantage. Her eyes shone with pleasure on seeing the handsome and accomplished Kovalan, the pride of Puhar, come seeking her love. She went to meet him. He garlanded her. She then embraced him with genuine warmth. In the exquisite pleasure of that rapturous embrace, Kovalan felt himself in the seventh heaven of delight, and resolved to be with Madhavi for ever, forgetting his home and faithful wife. The next morning, he did not return home, but took up his residence in a house of his in the Grain Merchants' Street. His mind was, thereafter, wholly taken up with Madhavi. Sleeping or waking, eating or drinking, he thought only of her. He neglected his wife, his trade, and his parents, and spent all his time with Madhavi.

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTH OF MANIMEKHALAI

THREE months after Kovalan and Madhavi began to live together, Madhavi became pregnant. While both of them were highly excited and pleased at the prospect of having a baby, Chitrapati was by no means pleased. She thought that it was too early for Madhavi to have a baby.

"After having a child, her figure will not be quite the same. Her movements will not be so supple. A child is an axe laid at the root of its mother's youth and beauty," said she to Madhavi's lady-in-waiting, Vasantamala.

"But, what can be done now ?" asked Vasantamala. "We can only minimise the evil by looking after her so well during the pregnancy that she has a safe delivery, and emerges out of this ordeal as youthful and vigorous as ever."

"That is so," said Chitrapati, "I was only speaking from my experience after the birth of Madhavi. I was not the same exquisite dancer again."

"But, the event was responsible for the birth of Madhavi who is said to have excelled even you. Kausikar was saying that the only kind of immortality, physical, cultural, literary or artistic, that we poor mortals can have, is the immortality extending through the generations, by handing down the torch of life, and that all other ideas are crude and impracticable," said Vasantamala.

"That may be so. But, I think he says this, as he himself was responsible for my loss of the art of exquisite dancing, and I blamed him. He must have thought over it and produced this theory. It is amazing the way the man weaves out theories to suit his particular acts or failings," said Chitrapati. "But, here he is. Let us ask him about the proper diet for Madhavi, and other things. The man has a lot of old-world wisdom hidden away in his cranium."

Kausikar entered the house. He was a Brahmin of forty-five, with a cultured look. His hair was grey, but it was obvious that he was paying maximum attention to his person and appearance. He had just had a good chew of betel, as his red lips showed.

"What, Kausikar, you have had your betel already, without waiting for Chitrapati to give it to you?" teased Vasantamala.

"I am ready for another," said Kausikar, "How is Madhavi?"

"Look at the brute!" said Chitrapati. "He no longer enquires after my health. These men, Vasantamala, cease to worry about us after we reach a certain age."

"Oh, no, I protest," said Kausikar. "I can see that you are all right, as you are right in front of me. As darling Madhavi is not here, I enquired after her."

"Don't lie," said Vasantamala. "How can you see from outside appearance what hidden maladies are troubling us?"

"The face reflects all hidden maladies, like a mirror," replied Kausikar.

"Oh, no, there are some maladies which lurk like crocodiles under the waters," said Vasantamala.

"Chitrapati has none such;" said Kausikar, "twenty years' experience of her has put me wise regarding that."

"I knew he would somehow wriggle out of it," said Chitrapati. Then turning to Kausikar, she said, "Now, I want to consult you on some important things. Madhavi is in the family way."

"I thought so," said Kausikar enthusiastically, "Her appearance was changed the last time I saw her. I thought she had a slightly maternal look."

"Oh, you and your theories!" said Chitrapati. "Honestly," said Kausikar, "I thought that our Madhavi was in the family way. You don't know the physiological changes that come about during this period."

"We know better than you, for we experience them first-hand, and not, like you, through worm-eaten palm-leaves written by persons with second-hand knowledge," said Chitrapati.

"Our knowledge is not really second-hand. The doctor knows more about the disease than the man suffering from it," said Kausikar.

"So, you have the impudence to call pregnancy a disease!" said Chitrapati.

"Oh, no, I only gave an illustration," said Kausikar, "Far from being a disease, it is the most healthy thing on earth. When a pregnant woman looks after herself properly, there is no more danger to her health by confinement than, say, by eating or drinking."

"Now we come to the point. What should she do to keep fit, and to ensure a safe delivery?" asked Chitrapati.

"She should keep her mind free from worry, and drink two glasses of milk and four glasses of fresh water daily."

"Why so much water?" asked Vasantamala.

"For herself and baby," said he.

"Baby! Why, sir, it is only two months since—."

"Yes, but the baby is already as big as my thumb, and is provided with every limb, including toes and fingers."

"What!" exclaimed both the women at once.

"Yes, that is so, and this is one of the things which you women, who bring forth the babies, do not know," said Kausikar.

"But, how can such a baby take food?" asked Vasantamala.

"God has given it the means to do so. You know the umbilical cord which we cut off after birth. That connects the baby with its mother, and gives the best food and air, leaving the mother only the remainder," said Kausikar.

"How wonderful!" exclaimed both.

"The greater wonder is that the baby does not begin to move till the sixth month, and yet takes its food, air and water regularly from the very time it begins to grow," said Kausikar.

"Can we say of what sex it will be?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, when it is born," said Kausikar, at which the others laughed.

"But, some astrologers predict it correctly beforehand," said Vasantamala, "How is this done?"

"By taking a gambling chance in this fifty-fifty business. Once an astrologer put two chits, 'Male' and 'Female,' on both sides of the lintel, and, after the male baby was born, took out the 'male' chit with gusto and impressed the assembled crowd immensely. Anxious to learn the art, I approached him for instruction, and he told me about the two-tickets system. I did not practise it, as most parents want the information at once, and will not wait till the event has come off," said Kausikar.

"Do you think the sex of the baby can be determined at will?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, by Gods. Man cannot do it."

"What do you think the sex of the child of Madhavi will be?" asked Chitrapati.

"Female, as Madhavi is the stronger character."

"So, you confess that Chitrapati's was the stronger character than yours?" asked Vasantamala.

"What doubt is there? If I were the stronger character, I would never have come here at all, but would have married a second time and lived the life of a house-holder."

"A great compliment to me," said Chitrapati.

"We are both past the age of compliments," said he. "We can afford to speak the truth."

"Well, continue your discourse about Madhavi's diet," said Chitrapati.

"Let her eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and abstain from meat and wine," said he.

"You gave the same ascetic advice to me," said Chitrapati.

"And see what a fine baby you brought forth, and how unscathed you emerged out of your confinement!"

"But I was no longer the same exquisite dancer."

"Oh, yes, you were. Nobody saw the difference, till Madhavi began to dance, and then, by comparison, your dance suffered," said he.

"Any more advice for Madhavi?"

"After the sixth month, let her sleep in your room. Allow Kovalan only to talk to her."

"It will be somewhat difficult, but I shall manage it. Anyhow, this is a new piece of advice; you did not give it in my case."

"It is none the less sound. Doctors may not take some of the bitter pills they prescribe for their patients, but that is not saying that the pills themselves are not good," said he.

"You old fox!" said Chitrapati, "Anything more?"

"Just a little delicate detail for your ears alone," said he. He took her aside, and said, "Do not forget to make Kovalan give away now properties sufficient to maintain both mother and child in luxury for their whole life-time. Cases have been known where the infatuation of a man ceases after a child is born, and he goes hunting after a new maiden."

"I shall do that. Indeed, I have done something already. But, you did not forsake me for another woman as you fear that Kovalan may do in the case of Madhavi," said Chitrapati.

"No. But, I had not the infinite resources of Kovalan, and never had any others competing for me."

"Oh, you underrate yourself," said Chitrapati.

"That is the first time I hear such an accusation hurled at me," replied Kausikar.

Then, both again joined Vasantamala.

"What does the child inherit from each parent?" asked Vasantamala.

"It gets the skin, the flesh and the blood from its mother, and the bones, sinews and marrow from its father. Madhavi's skin should have shown you that," said Kausikar.

"What about the peculiar cravings during pregnancy?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, it is a time when women develop peculiar and whimsical desires and habits. Some eat uncooked rice. Some want rare fruits. Others want their husbands always by their side. As far as possible, satisfy such cravings, since there is nothing so bad for the mother and child as a frustrated desire," said he.

Madhavi came out just then.

"What things are you talking about?" said she.

"We didn't know you were listening," said Kausikar.

"I listened to every bit of it except what you told my mother after taking her aside," said Madhavi.

"Well, then, half my problem is solved," said Chitrapati.

"But, is the little being only as big as a thumb, now, and is here, and yet not moving?" asked Madhavi.

"Without a doubt," said Kausikar.

"It is astonishing," said Madhavi.

"Even the great sages found it so astonishing that they have described the God in us as of the size of a thumb, and as not moving in most of us, but still there," said Kausikar.

"Oh, that is the meaning of your favourite song about the Great Being of the size of a thumb?" asked Chitrapati.

"What else?" said Kausikar.

Then he went away on some urgent business of his, after adjuring Madhavi to abide by all his instructions, adding "After a certain stage, my dear, we have to curb our own desires for the sake of the welfare of our progeny."

Madhavi told Kovalan everything that Kausikar had said that day, and specially about the being of no greater size than the thumb, who was growing inside her and levying a tribute of the best food, air and water. Kovalan too was vastly interested in

all this. Nothing like this had happened to Kannaki, and the pride of a would-be father swelled in his breast. He resolved to do everything as Kausikar had wanted. Half his talk with Madhavi thereafter was about the little thumb inside her.

In the sixth month the baby began to move, and Madhavi showed the separate heart-beat of the little one to Kovalan, who was never tired of feeling it. "The world is mysterious," said he. "Fancy this little one living there and moving about!" Madhavi used to refer to these movements as the somersaults of Mr. Thumb, and used to take great delight in showing Kovalan those fascinating turns which interested him so hugely that he would keep awake for hours to catch one of them on the move.

As the months passed, Kovalan's pride and excitement ran fever-high. He had watched his baby grow inside the womb from day to day, and was all eagerness for it to arrive in the world of men.

In this period, he signed away documents conveying more than half his entire properties to Madhavi and the expected baby. He was also, in addition, daily loading evey inmate of the household with presents. Many were the ceremonies he got performed in holy places for the safe delivery of Madhavi. Countless were the gifts to the poor and the needy made for the same purpose. He scrupulously adhered to the directions given by Kausikar, even though Madhavi herself protested at their ascetic and stringent nature. "I can never deny myself too much," said he. "Your health and that of the baby are far more important to me than any momentary satisfaction."

At last the labour pains began. Expert midwives were called in. The house was filled with women ready to help. Kovalan sat daily outside the room, ready to get anything required, and with his nerves highly strung. The labour was prolonged and lasted for full two days. Finally, when the little one arrived, there was only a tiny squeal, just to show that life was not extinct. She had almost been drowned in the bag of waters during the prolonged delivery. Skilled midwives and housewives soon bathed her and made her squeal aloud. Then they put her on a gold winnowing fan, covered with costly silks, and exhibited her to her delighted father.

The babe was most beautiful. The very midwives fell in love with her. The proud parents were hysterical with joy. Kovalan gave away vast quantities of paddy, sugar, plantains and gold coins to Brahmins, relatives, and poor people, in honour of the advent of this new member. He resolved to name the girl 'Manimekhalai', as an ancestor of his had been shipwrecked and thrown into the sea, and been finally saved after two days in the water by the grace of the goddess Manimekhalai. "This baby too hovered between life and death for two days," said he, "and was about to be drowned in the bag of waters."

Six days of rapture followed, when Kovalan did not even think of Kannaki for a second. But, on the seventh day, a red spot appeared on the baby's chest, and all were anxious about her life. Kovalan and Madhavi prayed to the goddess Manimekhalai for her life. In the darkness of the night, they heard the goddess say, "You have named her after me. So, she must be brought up pure and untainted, Take her to Kannaki. If she takes the babe in her arms and kisses it, it will be rid of all danger." Kovalan was in a fix. Would Kannaki take her rival's baby in her arms and kiss it? But he had implicit confidence in Kannaki's goodness, and, so, sent word to Kannaki if he could send the babe to her.

Visalakshi and Marakadam, Kannaki's lady-in-waiting and nurse, asked Kannaki not to accede to this request, or at least to make it a condition that Kovalan should thereafter leave Madhavi and return to her. Kannaki chided them, and said "Am I so degraded as to impose conditions for saving a babe, or to get my husband back to me against his will? No, ask the baby to be brought to me. It is half mine, as it is my lord's. I love to see it, and would even keep it with me, as a priceless gift from my lord, if allowed."

So, Kovalan sent Manimekhalai to Kannaki. Kannaki was enraptured at the sight of the beauteous babe, and took it in her arms with overflowing love, and kissed it on both its cheeks. The babe lay happy in her arms.

"Can you say that it is not my babe?" she asked Visalakshi and Marakadam who crowded round, "It has only my lord's features, and none of her mother's."

"It is a fascinating child," agreed Visalakshi, "though God alone knows what her future will be."

"I too know it," said Kannaki. "This child will grow up pure and noble, and will be a lamp unto the world."

The other two were struck by the air of conviction and finality in her words. Kovalan's man took the baby back. Kannaki told him about her wish to see the baby every day, if possible.

Manimekhalai was all right from that day. Madhavi and Chitrapati, who had heard the whole story at Kannaki's house from Kovalan's man, resolved not to send the babe there again. "If we do so, she will be lost to us. She is a worthy descendant of this glorious family of beautiful dancers," said Chitrapati. "She is sure to win the affections of the Prince when she grows up. If we allow her to associate with Kannaki, she will grow up to be one of those flowers blushing unseen in the myriad homes of the householders."

Kannaki sent for Manimekhalai once or twice thereafter, but desisted, on receiving cold refusals. "After all, she is not my babe, and I have no right to ask for her," said she to herself sadly. "Why did not God deem it fit to bless me with a child during those three years of my happy married life? Like a flowering plant in an abandoned mansion, I am doomed to remain even without a child to console me, in loneliness and misery. What a frail thing is the human heart! How it depends on others, and on things outside, for even its spiritual solace! And, again, how mysterious is life! This connection of my lord with Madhavi was execrated by me. But out of this evil thing has resulted this babe which has stormed my heart at once. How I wish it were mine! But it is the destiny of ill-fated ones, like me, to have evils piled up on one another. Madhavi took away not only my lord, but also his baby! May the baby, however, be happy all her life, and grow to be a lamp unto the world, as I feel sure she will!"

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CHAPTER V

A DESOLATE WIFE

THEREAFTER, Kannaki's life was one of unrelieved sorrow and growing poverty. Kovalan, the only interest in her life, her god, her lord, her all, was wholly absorbed in Madhavi and Manimekhalai, and did not give her even a thought. For some months after the sending of Manimekhalai, she awaited at least such messages. But they never came. Only messengers for more and more money arrived.

Poor Kannaki began to waste away with grief. The bloom disappeared from her cheeks, the joy from her face, the spring from her gait. She could not even entertain ascetics and guests, as her lord was absent. She could have gone back to her parents, but, she refused to do so. One day, she told Visalakshi, "My life is breaking down between the two heavy loads of love and despair."

"My lady, you are bent down with grief," said Visalakshi.

"I try to hide my grief, but the more it is suppressed, the more it gushes out when the hold is relaxed temporarily. One would have thought that it would have been spent out by these months of constant grief. But, no, like a fountain, it is ever full, however much is taken away from it. To conceal my grief from you is beyond me. But to disclose it even to my lord is unthinkable, and bespeaks a complaining mind unworthy of a true wife. Much less can I dream of telling it to my parents. Besides, why pass on one's sorrow?" said Kannaki.

She never uttered one word of reproach about Kovalan at any time. But, Visalakshi now made bold to reproach Kovalan. "What use are learning, skill in arts, wealth and good looks if a loving heart and consideration for one's near and dear ones do not go along with them? Are they not, like the beautiful skin and teeth of a tiger, mere death for the innocent ones, like you?" asked she.

Kannaki at once stopped her. "Don't utter a word of reproach about him," said she. "I will not hear it."

"But, you are withering away, my lady, because of the injustice done to you by him."

"No, my dear," said Kannaki. "I am unfortunate, and destined not to enjoy the heavenly happiness I had hoped for, owing to my sins in former births. But I do not blame my lord on my own account. Nor has my love for him diminished a jot. Instead, like money invested with a reliable person, it has kept on increasing. Even his living with Madhavi cannot affect his worth. A lotus is as beautiful when clinging to the mud as when floating on the waters."

"I see you often grieving for him. If what you say is true, why grieve for him?" asked Visalakshi.

"Because he wastes so much pure love on a courtesan who is only after his money, and cares not a jot for his love or good qualities, and will leave him the moment he is sucked dry," said Kannaki.

"And what a stream of wealth is being drained by her!" said Visalakshi. "Can you tell me why, even after getting all this wealth and love, such women remain unaffected by the least sentiment of love or gratitude or attachment?"

"Oh, that is easily understandable. A magnet attracts only iron, and not more valuable metals like gold and silver; so, too, a courtesan is only attracted by gold, and not by far more valuable things like love or virtue," said Kannaki.

"How true!" said Visalakshi. "Why not write about this to your lord?"

"As if he will see the truth of it! Caught in her net, he will be as merry as a lord of elephants who has entered a trap but is blissfully eating the sugarcane put there as bait. No, this infatuation must run its course, and wear itself out, like drunkenness or madness or the long fever."

"But who can say how long it will last?" asked Visalakshi.

"Or, whether it will be over at all," said Kannaki. "It all depends on Fate."

"It will be over in some years," said Marakadam, who had been listening quietly, "Even your wealth, my lady, cannot last very long at the rate at which it is being drained away."

"Whatever happens, may the gods protect my lord from misery of any kind! May he be happy!" said Kannaki.

"You are not even going to the temples or receiving the ladies, your friends, as before. You are living in misery, and yet blessing the author of your misery. I cannot understand it at all," said Marakadam.

"It is easy to understand, Marakadam. All other blessings are nought if the wife lacketh in wifely virtues. What is there in life grander than a woman who is strong in the strength of her chastity? It is said that the woman who worships no other god but her husband, can make even the rain-clouds obey her commands."

"If that be so, you must be able to make your husband return to you soon," said Marakadam.

"I hope so," said Kannaki.

"Nothing will be so sweet to you as a re-union?" said Visalakshi.

"What doubt is there, my dear? Even last night I lay in his embrace. The cruel morning broke, and showed it to be a hoax. But, still, the heart rejoiced in even that dream. There is none so poor as one whose love is unreturned. But, it is utter bankruptcy to lose all hope. So, I live in the hope that one day he will return. Spurned by her, with aching heart, when he comes, I must cheer him up. That is the only reason why I continue to live.

He is my lovéd one.
I love him ever so well:
Life with him was such fun,
How much I cannot tell,
I wish he would come back
And bring with him that joy
I now so sadly lack."

"So, cheer up, as you have that hope, my lady," said Visalakshi.

"But, that is not my only grief. My lord has not favoured me with a child. Had I at least his image to gaze upon, there would have been some ray of light in my dark life. There is no blessing like that of having a child. The sages say, 'Behold the woman who has begotten a worthy son! Her place is high in the world of the gods.' An honourable home is a blessing. But its crowning glory is a worthy offspring. Children are our veritable riches. One living child is equal to all good acts, in the satisfaction it gives. Sweeter than nectar is the plain gruel bespattered by one's own children. The touch of children gives to the body a delight that is divine. The ears are enraptured by their sweet speech. 'The flute is sweet, the lute is sweet,' say they who have not heard the prattle of their own children. But, alas, I got but a glimpse of a child, just as I got only a passing vision of my beloved. The only thing that keeps me alive now is the love for my lord."

"Of what use is this love for that unjust one?" asked Visalakshi.

"Say not so. The seat of life is love. Without it a human being is only a mass of bones and flesh tied up in a bag of skin. Those that love not, live only for themselves. Those that love, their very bones are for the use of others. Say not that love is to be given only to those that return it, or to the righteous ones alone. That will make this divine thing as common as the bazaar goods retailers trade in. Even against the evil-minded ones, love is our only weapon. The person who has plucked out love from the heart can never know peace, joy and prosperity any more than a cocoanut palm whose top has been knocked away by lightning can put forth leaves, buds and fruits again."

Months passed. A continuous stream of messengers from Kovalan used to arrive regularly for money. Kannaki gave them all that Kovalan ever possessed. When it was exhausted, she gave away the wealth given to her by her own parents. When that too was over, she sold one by one her costly jewels, and gave away the proceeds. Three years after Manimekhalai's

birth, she sent away the grieving Visalakshi and Marakadam, in an effort to economise. These two, who adored her, offered to serve her free. But she would have none of it. "Why should I make you suffer?" she asked.

"It is no suffering at all. It is pure joy to be with you. Besides, we have amassed riches during our service here, and it is only fit that we serve without wages for a while," said they.

Kannaki firmly refused this offer, and sent them away. Their request to be allowed to visit her daily was also refused. "I prefer to be alone. I do not want your loving hearts to be afflicted by my sorrow," said Kannaki. "So, please do not call on me till you hear that my lord has come back again." They left in tears. Thereafter, Kannaki lived alone. Clad in old sarees, shorn of all jewels except her bangles and anklets, she lived in that house, cooking her own meals, and living on the simplest and coarsest of foods, waiting for the day when her lord would re-join her, and, meanwhile, meeting every one of his demands for money.

Ten more years passed, each year of poignant sorrow dragging on its weary length as if it were seven years in one. Even then Kovalan did not return. Kannaki's grief was increased by hearing that he was being treated with disrespect, and even positive contempt, by Chitrapati and the maids. But she was helpless, and could only pray for his honour, prosperity and happiness, since he appeared to be content to put up with every insult so long as Madhavi herself did not join in them. So, she continued to live a desolate life, living in the hope of her lord's return, a hope daily becoming slenderer and slenderer, and now almost at vanishing point.

CHAPTER VI

CHITRAPATI'S WILES

IN the early years of his living with Madhavi, Kovalan had been extremely lavish in his presents. The stream of gifts of all kinds he sent Madhavi through her maid Chellam, or gave her in person, was unending, like the flow of the Kaveri. Rare silk sarees, the finest pearls, rubies and diamonds, choice fruits and wines, as well as the rarest cots and beds were sent to Madhavi, while Kannaki lived neglected, wearing her old sarees, and praying to the gods for her husband's welfare.

From the tenth year onwards, the presents ceased to flow so quickly. But, whenever he went empty-handed, he would find the door of Madhavi's room closed, and Chitrapati or Chellam standing outside and telling him of Madhavi's anxiety as to the new saree or jewel she would be requiring for the next day's dance; and he would invariably return to his residence in the Grain-Merchants' street, buy the necessary thing and return with it, and present it to an enraptured Madhavi. "Why could you not have mentioned it to me yesterday?" he used to ask Madhavi, after making the present, and she would reply, "How could I? I love you, and hate to mix up business with love," and he would glow with happiness, and she would embrace him with ardour calling him, "Lord," "husband," and chide herself for it, saying, "Only the wedded wife, Kannaki, has the right to call you so."

He would reply, "You, more than she, for you are the lady of my heart. She is but a faded memory."

But, now, his resources were exhausted. All his hoarded wealth was gone, and there was not a man who would lend him a pie or sell him anything on credit. So, he could not give any presents at all. To his horror, he found Chitrapati and Chellam show visible signs of lack of respect, and even contempt. He thought that he saw even in Madhavi signs of coolness.

Chitrapati had been for some time urging on Madhavi to abandon Kovalan, who had become a pauper, and take on some rich merchant or nobleman. "A pearl necklace leaves the pauper to cling to the neck of some other. So too, a beautiful courtesan," said she.

"See what he has given us," said Madhavi, "All our wealth is his. The property has only been transferred. What had we before he came? And, I love him. So does Manimekhalai. I can't leave him."

"He is not even honest with you," said Chitrapati, "I hear that he has hidden away enormous sums with friends, and even with Kannaki. He is not so simple as he looks. Besides, he is dead against dedicating Manimekhalai to our ancestral profession. Unless we get rid of him, we can't succeed in doing that. And fancy what will happen if we don't do that! The race of Chitrapati and Madhavi extinct! The Royal Dancing-Girl's family gone!"

"Mother, I can't abandon Kovalan entirely. I shall die of grief," said Madhavi.

"You won't, my dear," said Chitrapati. "Even a family woman, like Kannaki, has not died by such abandonment. Try to do without him for a week, and you will get rid of him for your whole life-time."

"If I try honestly for a week and fail, will you allow me to take him back and keep him for ever, even though he has not a pie?" asked Madhavi, as a simple expedient to escape from her pesterings, and also to test the strength of Kovalan's attachment to her. Once, in sleep, she had heard him mutter

"I had a wife beauteous as a star,
I left her and came to you, my dear,
The fine times we had nothing can mar,
In those days my love was without fear."

and had not quite liked it.

"Oh yes," said Chitrapati, "but, of course, you will take some other lover?"

"Certainly not," said Madhavi, "even animals have some interval between dropping old partners and taking on new ones."

"We Dancing-Girls have not," said Chitrapati.

"That shows how degraded we have become," said Madhavi.

"This is almost the language of Manimekhalai," said Chitrapati.

"What wonder! She is my daughter," said Madhavi.

"You were prepared to take on the highest bidder before you took on Kovalan," said her mother.

"I knew he would be the highest bidder," said Madhavi. "Even otherwise, one can be excused for having a lamp before the sun rises, but not after."

"Well, well, we shall not argue over it," said Chitrapati. "After all, it is only an interval of a week. Even to get a suitable new lover it will take much time. And it is always better to keep the field clear before the crop is decided on. So, you get rid of Kovalan from the last day of the 'Indra Festival' which comes off the day after to-morrow."

"But, how, mother?" asked Madhavi. "I would rather die than ask him to leave because he has become a pauper, or because you have heard rumours that he has hidden some of his wealth. Loaded with his presents, how can I say that?"

"It is easy to get rid of him," said Chitrapati. "I know the sort of man he is—vain, conceited, fancying that you love him for his virtues and qualities and not for his money!"

"But I do love him for his own qualities," said Madhavi.

"What qualities?" asked Chitrapati, "Abandoning his virtuous wife, or leaving off his prosperous trade, or allowing his ability to rust by merely cultivating light follies suitable for a gigolo?"

"Mother," exclaimed Madhavi. "But I was responsible for taking him away from Kannaki and keeping him from his trade."

"A dozen persons like you could not have done it if he were not so worthless. Try your charms on Manaikan or Masathuvan, and see. I have tried it in my time, my dear, and failed. Bricks break clods, but not granite," said Chitrapati.

"Well, your plan will at least enable Kovalan to do his duty by Kannaki and his ancestral trade for a week. So, I gladly agree to it," said Madhavi snappishly, "Now suggest your specific device."

"That day before you go out with Kovalan, Chellam will sing that famous song, 'The Dancing-Girl's Farewell to her pauper lover,' beginning with

"Begone, thou pauper, show not thy face
Know you not the motto of our race?
Our heart is always sold
For thrice its weight in gold!"

and he will disappear at double trot, if I have read him aright, as many such have done before."

"Mother, you are mistaken. He will put up even with this insult for my sake," said Madhavi.

"Never. He will depart even as a dog does when it sees a stone being picked up by a man for throwing at it."

"We shall see," said Madhavi.

"Well, if he does not, you sing on the seashore that song about the foreign lover who left at twilight in his chariot and failed to return. One thing you should promise. You must do it in your most convincing tone, as a realistic actress, and must show real pining for the absent lover."

"Right Ho!" said Madhavi, tickled by this piece of forthcoming stage-acting, "I shall do it the more feelingly as there is no such fellow in reality. It will be great fun to tease Kovalan. A week's separation cannot kill him."

The last day of the 'Indra Festival' began with a glorious morning. The whole town was full of merry crowds dressed in their best, dancing and singing and cracking jokes, and enjoying the many pageants, tableaux, processions and juggleries in th

streets. Kovalan woke up that day with an aching heart, as he had nothing left to present Madhavi with, though it was the day for making costly presents. Still, his love was so great, and his trust in her love for him so implicit, that he went to her house, as usual, to take her in the afternoon to the sea-front where the crowds would gather to bathe and make merry.

Chellam accosted him at the gate, asking him, "What rare presents have you brought for Madhavi and Manimekhalai to-day?" He passed her, shame-faced, and met Chitrapati who asked him, "On this day of universal presents, have you come empty-handed to escort the most beautiful woman of our city to the greatest festival of our country?" Humiliated by this rebuke, he went to Madhavi, who had not even dressed. "Madhavi," said he, "forgive me. I have not brought the usual *saree* for the day." Coolly she received this confession, and asked him to wait for her in the hall till she had dressed and was ready. All over her room were scattered dresses and ornaments gifted by others. Not one of the innumerable dresses and ornaments gifted by him during the long years of his courtship was there. Nor had he been asked before to sit in the hall while she dressed. He had always sat in her room while she dressed. All these were Chitrapati's manœuvres, though he did not know this.

He waited sadly in the hall. He felt himself humiliated, insulted, outraged and despised. His mind wandered back over the years of ardent welcome, gushing love, and rapturous kisses. He said to himself, "Truly have the poets said, 'Only the wealthy man is of noble birth, is learned, virtuous, pious, eloquent and handsome. Everything depends on wealth.' Fool that I am, that I did not realise this truth before!" As he sat there, Chellam went in and remarked, "You have forgotten to put on your festive robes and jewels, Sir. Surely, you can't escort our lady in those clothes?" He swallowed this insult too, and said lightly, "Madhavi does not mind it. She values me for my own sake, and not for the sake of my clothes." Chellam retorted, "Does she?", and laughed, adding fuel to the fire of anguish burning in his heart. Chitrapati went there just then, and said to Chellam, "Why don't you lessen the tedium of the wait by singing a song?" Chellam then sang, in a full clear voice,

'The Dancing-Girl's Farewell to her pauper lover.' Kovalan felt the words bite into him. Chitrapati and Chellam saw his discomfiture, and Chellam laughed and asked him, "Now, is that not a funny old song?"

"A bit too realistic, perhaps," said Chitrapati, "but quite interesting and instructive."

Just then, the door of Madhavi's room opened, and his tormentors left him.

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CHAPTER VII

SUNSET ON THE SEASHORE

MADHAVI came out of her room at last in all her resplendent glory. She had bathed her fragrant black hair, soft as silk, till it shone like silk itself. She had tied it up in plaits, and had scented it with real musk. She wore the finest silk *saree* and bodice found in the south country. She had pearl necklaces and gold chains round her neck, a diamond nose-ring, bracelets and bangles of gold, coral and conch on her arms, costly rings on her fingers, emerald and diamond ear-rings, a gold waist-belt adorned with pearls round her waist, and gold anklets and toe-rings. Kovalan saw, to his chagrin, that she was not wearing a single jewel he had gifted her. Deliberately she had put on dresses and ornaments gifted by others. He bent down his head in shame and pain. "Let us go to the seashore as has been our custom on this last day of the 'Indra Festival,' and sit in the private pavilion in the park engaged by me already, and watch the fun and spend the evening in singing till the moon rises. You know it is full moon day," said Madhavi.

Kovalan mounted his mule. Madhavi got into her chariot accompained by Vasantamala. The chariot proceeded seawards, followed by Kovalan on the mule. They passed through the bazaar decorated with arches and towers across the street, and with plantain trees in fruit at the entrance to every big shop. They then went along the central highway to the seafront where innumerable stalls had been set up and an immense crowd had gathered on the sands to bathe in the Somakundam(1) and Suryakundam(2) where the Kaveri met the sea. The bath in these sacred pools was much sought after. as it was said to have the effect of keeping lovers for ever devoted to each other and of preventing separation even for a day. Kovalan longed to bathe in these ponds so as to ensure that he would

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1. Pool of the Moon.
2. Pool of the Sun.

not be separated from Madhavi. But, Madhavi turned down the idea, declaring that it was unthinkable to bathe in such a crowd, and had, instead, taken him to the private pavilion in the park facing the sea, to spend the evening in singing.

After sitting down comfortably in the pavilion, she gave the lute to Kovalan, saying, "Now, sing a song." He took it and sang an ode to the Kaveri, to the great delight of Madhavi. Hail to thee, O Kaveri," sang he. "Pride of our realm and King! Like a faithful wife, you cease not your loving care of the home though our Lord(3) has sported with the waves of the Ganges in the north and of the ocean at Kanyakumari! You walk along listening to the roar of your waters through the sluices, and the songs of the ploughmen, and hear every year the praises of thousands at the Festival of the Freshes." Then, he asked her to sing. She sang a song to the sea as follows:—"How can we know, Oh God of the Sea, the hearts of those lovers who approach us on this beach from behind with presents in their hands, for us, simple maidens of Puhar, who build their sand-castles? When we grow angry and pluck the flowers from our garlands and throw them at the sea, these strangers take these for signs of love returned, and pursue us, saying that they are suffering from a disease which is incurable except by our embrace. They say that we caused their disease and ought to cure them of it. They cry out, 'This open seashore with its foaming waves and shining sand, this moon shining on this moon-like face, this breeze disturbing these lovely tresses, have all conspired to make us sick. You spread the net and caught us, and made us sick. Do not then refuse the cure due to us. Do not kill us with the cruel darts from your eyes. Use those darts as lancets for curing our wounds."

Then, she sang an ode to the Kaveri which ran, "Hail to thee, O Kaveri, gliding along care-free, confident in your lord's keeping on to his correct path as a King, and rendering everlasting service to this land as a mother does to her babe!" Then she sang another ode to the sea, "Oh, God of the Sea, they come to us with pearls to exchange them for our coral lips. They beguile us with promises of marriage, give us bogus

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3. This refers to King Karikala's expedition to North India and Cape Comorin.

rings of gold, ply us with wine, and words more intoxicating than wine, and then, taking their toll of us, depart, never to return. My lover, who met me on this seashore in ecstasy, he has gone, abandoning me. But, though he has forgotten me, I shall not forget him. Oh leaves of the tree under which we met, are you so heartless that you waft in the wind as gaily as ever? What shall I do, Oh Sea? You do not know my woes. Oh Waves, you have destroyed even the ruts made by his chariot-wheel, and have tried to drown his memory, you who pretended to be my friend! Oh Swan, sporting with thy mate, go and tell my lover that his deed is not just. The evening darkness has spread every-where. The sun has gone down from the horizon. The maddening twilight has come, the monster which has swallowed the sun but has not yet ejected the moon! Is this maddening twilight which stabs the heart, found in the country of the deserter? Even the birds have stopped singing, and the waves have stopped roaring. But I shall not forget him who forgot and deserted me. It is in such cruel maddening twilight that my lover departed, forgetting his vow to bide with me for ever. Oh God of the Sea, forgive his false vow, remember me to him, and restore him to me soon."

Kovalan heard this song, and thought to himself, "I sang without any hidden meaning. But she, the cunning one, has sung this song with her mind on some lover whom she still holds dear and wants to take on, dropping me. Now it is clear that she too, and not only Chitrapati and Chellam and Vasantamala, has got tired of me owing to my present poverty. I have outstayed my welcome. Let me depart at least now, while the last shreds of self-respect are still left." He slowly withdrew his hand from her shoulder, and said to her, "Since the day has come to a close, we shall make a move," and rose abruptly. Madhavi did not show any sign of getting up. So he departed quickly from the place. When he had gone out of view, Madhavi also got up. She got into her carriage with a sad heart, along with her maids, and returned home without her lover.

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CHAPTER VIII

FORGIVENESS DIVINE

SAD at heart, sick of life, repenting his folly in leaving his virtuous wife for the sake of a dancing-girl, Kovalan left the pleasure-park and went into the city. On the way, he saw the temple of Siva open, and the lights burning, and worship going on. He entered and worshipped the Lord, uttering a hymn—

Poor and unfortunate am I,
Grief-stricken, with many a sigh,
I know neither hymn nor prayer
Nor story nor invocation rare.
I come, oh Siva, like a child,
Which has gone astray and run wild,
Returning to its mother dear,
Repentant and devoid of fear.
Think not ill of me, Soul of Souls,
My head is burning with hot coals,
By a stroke of Fate I became
A slave of senses, full of blame,
Oh, save me, save me, Lord of Lords,
I seek refuge in Thee, God of Gods!"

He was greatly relieved after this. It seemed to him that the eyes of the idol looked at him with infinite pity and love. A peace descended on his troubled mind. He sat down in the temple-hall listening to a bard who was reciting select verses from the *Kural*(1) of the Sage Tiruvalluvar.(2)

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1. A most remarkable Tamil book dating from the second century A. D. It treats of Dharma (Righteousness). Artha (Wealth) and Kama (Love), and is unique for its terseness and nobility of thought.

2. One of the greatest of Tamil writers, and, indeed, of all writers. Supposed, by tradition, to have been the son of Adi, an Adi-

"The false embrace of a woman who sells herself for money is like holding in one's arms a corpse in a dark room," recited the bard.

"How true!" said Kovalan, and sobbed.

"Who doth herself protect, who doth cherish and nourish him who took her to wife, who keeps her word with glorious fame, who idles never, she is the wife," went on the bard.

"Ah, such a one is Kannaki," muttered Kovalan to himself.

"Double-dealing damsels, drink and dice are befriended only by those who have been cast away by the Goddess of Prosperity," recited the bard.

"I am one such. Woe unto me!" said Kovalan to himself.

"A mess of pottage, though as insipid as plain water, if earned by one's own exertion, is sweet by far," went on the bard.

"Oh, how foolish I was to have left off my trade and depended on my father's wealth!" said Kovalan to himself.

"The straight and beautiful arrow is murderous, and crooked is the sweet lute!" said the bard.

"An apt description of Madhavi and Kannaki as they appeared to me," said Kovalan.

"If a man be poor, every one despises him. If a man be rich, everyone does honour unto him," recited the bard.

"That has been my fate!" exclaimed Kovalan, half audibly.

"An unpropitious fate is a reproach to nobody. Not to put forth human effort, knowing what is wise, is truly a reproach," went on the bard.

Kovalan resolved to put forth an effort, but despaired as to what he could do.

Dravida lady, by a Brahmin called Bhagavan, Adi herself being the daughter of another Adi-Dravida lady by a Brahmin, Recently, Sri M. Raghava Ayyangar has suggested that the tradition is wrong, and that 'Tiruvalluvar' is only the honorific "Sri Vallabha" of some great Tamil Prince or noble who was also a prime minister of a Tamil Kingdom. This theory is supported by the extensive inside knowledge of politics and high society exhibited in the *Kural*, and by the purity and nobility of the Tamil which it would be idle to expect from an Adi-Dravida of those days.

"What lacks he whose wife is worthy, and what, indeed, has he whose wife unworthy is?" went on the bard.

"My wife is perfect. So I lack nothing," exclaimed Kovalan to himself, "Will Kannaki forgive me?" he wondered, "How can I beg of her to forgive me?"

"Begging is just like giving when it is of those who have not known refusing even in dreams," went on the bard.

That made Kovalan resolve to go back to Kannaki, after first going to his residence in the Grain Merchants' bazaar and taking his spare clothes.

He rose and went out of the temple to his temporary residence. There he found Vasantamala waiting for him with a message from Madhavi painted with a paste of red-lac and *agar* on a garland of jasmine, champak, madhavi and other flowers. It ran:—

"Spring is a youthful King apt to commit errors. It is he who brings lovers together at eventide under the auspices of the Moon who too is not flawless. What wonder, then, if lovers commit some error in their folly? Is it to be punished by their mates by going away from them in anger? They are punished by the sharp darts of the Moon whose rays, cool when they were with their mates, become red-hot and insufferable when separated from them."

Kovalan read the message, when Vasantamala held it up for him to read, but refused to receive it, saying, "She knows the eight kinds of dances and poses to perfection, the *Kankooduvari*, performed with love glances from melting eyes which appear to be more real than those of a love-lorn maiden; the *Kanvari*, with the bewitching smiles which attract even stones; the *Ulvari*, performed with the gait of a swan, the dance of a peacock and the lisping words of a parrot; the *Puravari*, with ravishing hip movements which make the spectators possessed with a passion to embrace her; the *Kilarvari*, with captivating bust movements where men are overcome by the beauty of her breasts and tresses; the *Terccivari*, showing to perfection the pangs of separation even when I, her lover, was with her; the *Katcivari*, when she wore a garland with buzzing bees sitting on it and spoke of her sufferings in convincing words to the audience;

and the *Eduttukolvari*, when she fell in a love-swoon on one person after another chosen by her, and they, of course, restored her in turn to her senses and comforted her. All these dances, my dear, are quite natural to Madhavi, the cunning one, because she is after all only a dancing-girl."

Vasantamala went back to Madhavi and told her this. "It is only a love-quarrel as before. If he does not come this night, we shall see him at least to-morrow morning," said Madhavi lightly to her, and sent her away. But, after that, she lay down with a heavy heart on her soft bed, spread with sweet-smelling flowers, sad and sleepless.

That same evening, Devandi, the priestess of Sasta(3) temple outside the city, called on her friend Kannaki. Her history was curious. There had been a Brahmin lady called Malati, of the Kapi *gotra*, whose child had died at birth but who was treating her co-wife's son as her own. One day, when feeding it at her breast, the child choked, hiccoughed and died. Panic-stricken by this, afraid that she would be held guilty of carelessness in handling her co-wife's child, though she loved it as her own, the distracted Malati ran with the dead child to the temples of the Sun and the Moon, of the Kalpaka tree, Airavata, Balarama, Siva, Muruga, Indra, and Satavahana, and to the Jain temple, and besought the deities to restore the dead child to life and relieve her from her great distress. None of them did so. Then she went to the heretic temple of Sasta. There a beautiful woman appeared before her, said to her "No god will grant a boon to one like you who has done no penance; give the corpse to me," and snatched the body from her and took it to *Chakravalakkottam*, the cremation ground, followed by the agonised Malati. In that cremation ground, the goblin Dakini took the child's corpse and devoured it. Malati uttered heart-rending cries. Then Sasta, moved by her sorrow, appeared before her and said, "Do not weep, oh fair lady. Behold your child alive again!" and disappeared, and took the form of the child. Malati snatched it up joyfully and took it back and handed it over to its mother who saw no change at all in her

3. Harihara-putra, the son of Siva and Vishnu. Vishnu was then in the incarnation of Mohini, the Cosmic Enchantress. Sasta or Sattan is a peculiarly Southern God, not much worshipped in the North.

baby. This divine child grew up and married Devandi. He lived with her for some time, and, then, told her the secret, and disappeared into the idol in the Sasta temple, asking her to worship it assiduously thereafter, giving out that her husband had gone on a long pilgrimage to Benares and other places.

Devandi did so. She was attracted by Kannaki about whom she used to remark to herself, "I am a woman wedded to a God. She is a Goddess wedded to a man." She was deeply grieved to hear of Kannaki's distress. On that last day of the 'Indra Festival,' she offered special worship to Sasta, and went with the consecrated offerings to Kannaki, and said to her, "May your husband be restored to you!" Kannaki replied "Even if I get him back, I don't know what would happen. My heart misgives me. I had a terrible dream, oh Devandi. He and I went hand-in-hand to a great city. Some people there foisted a most unjust crime on him. It stung me like a scorpion-bite. I went and protested to the King. The King and the City then suffered a great calamity. Then he and I—don't laugh—achieved un-hoped-for Bliss."

"My dear," said Devandi, "You have not been finally discarded by your husband. He will surely come back. All this suffering of yours is due to your failure to perform a vow in a former birth. If you bathe in the Suryakundam and Somakundam, which are situated where the Kaveri meets the sea, you will be for ever united to your husband and will also attain Heaven. We shall go and bathe there one day."

"No. That will not be proper. My husband is my only God, and I can pray to no other, or be obliged to any other for such a gift," said Kannaki. Thereafter, Devandi left.

Soon afterwards, when Kannaki was sitting inside her house, thinking sadly about Kovalan and her dream, she heard a knock at her door, and, on opening it, saw Kovalan. On seeing him, the very picture of sorrow, she fell at his feet, and burst into tears. Seeing her wasted form, a veritable shadow of her former self, clad in the poorest of *sarees*, Kovalan's heart smote him, and he too burst into tears. Clasping her to his bosom, he said, "By consorting with a woman who makes every false thing appear like truth, I have lost all my ancestral wealth and even yours, and am now

drinking the dregs of humiliation." Comforting him with a fascinating smile, Kannaki said, "Do not grieve. Accept these priceless anklets. Sell them, and, once more, you will have enough riches to make you respected." Kovalan rested his face on her shoulders, and sobbed like a child, and said "Oh, darling, I did not mean that. I have left her and my past for good. I seek refuge in you and you alone, my Kannaki, forgiving like Mother Earth, and generous like the tree which gives its shade to the man who cuts it down!" For long they remained locked in each other's arms and sobbing against each other's bosom. Then, at last, Kovalan said, "The door is open. Shall I close it?"

"Don't," said Kannaki. "Let the whole world see our re-united joy. Now we can begin again gathering the threads of our lives where they were left off."

"Not here," said Kovalan. "I can't remain for even a day here in this town where I have been insulted and dishonoured and made to feel the indignity of being a pauper. I want to go to distant Madura where nobody knows me or my dishonour, and resume my trade and earn a good sum and come back. The only problem is that of capital. Somehow, I shall scrape it up."

"Why worry about it? I have these two priceless anklets. You can easily raise a large sum by selling them," said Kannaki.

"I do not like to sell your remaining jewels. I want to depend on my own resources," said Kovalan.

"What!" said Kannaki. "Have you come back to me, and been re-united to me, only in order to taunt me with having things separate from you?" and wept again.

"Don't weep. I shall do as you desire," said Kovalan, kissing off her tears. "Now, you must grant me leave to go to Madura. I shall be back in a year."

"I shall not live apart from you for a moment hereafter," said Kannaki. "I am also coming with you."

"But, darling, you are not accustomed to walk; and the way is long, and lies through hills, rivers, forests and jungles full of thorns and wild beasts, and wilder men."

"Yot need not dilate on the dangers and troubles ahead. Whatever they are, I am coming with you," said Kannaki.

"Then, let us set out to night, after the moon has set and before the sun rises," said Kovalan, "before anybody knows about it."

CHAPTER IX

SOUTHWARD HO!

IN the dark last watch of the night, Kovalan and Kannaki passed out of the tall outer gate with its automatic latch and carved figures of the goat, yak and swan. They circumambulated the temples of Siva and Vishnu on the way. Then they passed the seven Buddhist Viharas and the lofty *Bodhi* tree with its five branches, folding their palms in silent prayer and supplication. Later on, they passed the Jain temple with its *Asoka* tree, worshipping silently likewise. Then they passed the entrance-gate of the city with its moat and the outer wall with its enclosed lake and groves and gardens, with all kinds of flowers and the royal park.

Proceeding further, they crossed the broad road, with shady trees on both sides, leading to the bathing ghat on the Kaveri. They followed the floodbanks of the river westwards for a league, and entered the grove of flowering trees where the Jain saint Kavundi resided. Kannaki, who was unaccustomed to walk, and was fatigued, asked Kovalan, "How far is Madura?" Kovalan replied, "It is not very far. It is only six times five leagues, my darling."

Both of them went and saluted the saint. Kavundi looked at them closely, and said, "You seem to be high-born people unaccustomed to walking long distances. Why, then, have you begun this weary wandering?" Kovalan replied, "We want to go to Madura to try our fortunes." "The tender feet of this beautiful girl may not stand the sharp and rough gravel on the way. But, what is the use of my saying all that when neither you nor she will listen, and you are already on the move? I too am anxious to visit the famous city of Madura to worship Arivan(1) and to hear the *dharma*(a) preached by the great Jain saints there and get rid of all *adharma*(b). Let us go together," said Kavundi.

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1. The Perfect Being of the Jains.
   (a) Rules of Righteous conduct.
   (b) Unrighteousness.

" With pleasure, I too shall be relieved of my anxiety about this girl " said Kovalan.

" We shall have some difficulty in choosing the way," said Kavundi. " If we choose the shady path lying through the forests, and the jack, ginger and turmeric plantations, for the sake of this tender lady who cannot stand the scorching sun, we shall have to avoid the pits and snares laid by the hunters to catch wild beasts. and risk ripe jack fruits falling down on our heads. If we decide to go along the fields and lowlands, this lady will be frightened by the crabs and water-snakes. We may, in places, tread on worms and other helpless creatures, and crush out their lives. But there is no other path. We can only take steps to avoid these evils."

So saying, she took up her begging bowl and net-bag and bundle of peacock feathers, prayed to the Arhats, Siddhas, Acharyas, Upadhyayas and Sadhus, the five classes of holy Jains, and set out with Kovalan and Kannaki.

They proceeded along the floodbanks of the Kaveri. They noticed various kinds of irrigation, by direct flow from the canals, by bucket, by water-lift, by picottah, and by palm-leaf basket. They saw an endless series of paddy fields and plantain and sugarcane gardens irrigated with the never-failing waters of the Kaveri harnessed by the dam with the sluices constructed by Karikala. They found large numbers of water-fowl, cranes, swans, herons, crows, crabs, fishes, water-snakes, quails and parrots. Wallowing in the miry and unploughed fields did the buffaloes come out with their unwashed hair and red eyes and rub their itching backs against the ricks of grain heaped up in the fields. They found brawny-armed labourers and peasants engaged in cultivation operations. Young women were plucking the weeds in some fields, and were now and then throwing pieces of mud on each other, uttering ribald words in jest. The farm hands were ploughing the fields deep, and singing songs as they went on ploughing. In places some were threshing the paddy, reciting country ballads.

Pointing out these husbandmen to her companions, Kavundi said, " Roam where they will, men must at last stand behind the plough for their food. In spite of everything, husbandry is the

chiefest industry. Husbandmen are the pivot of society ; without them the social wheel will come to a stand-still. They alone are independent ; all the rest are dependent on others. They alone need not only never beg of others for food, but can give immediate relief to beggars. Even those who have renounced desire will have to suffer if the husbandman sits with folded arms. And, yet, the body of the husbandman, who feeds and protects us all, is a receptacle for toils and hardships alone." Kovalan and Kannaki listened with wonder and admiration to these wise words.

They passed villages with tall and well-built houses inhabited by Vedic Brahmins. Smoke from their sacrificial fires hovered over the roofs like clouds, and made the houses appear like fog-covered hills. " No wonder, these Brahmins, by their sacrifices, bring about rain, seeing that the smoke from their sacrificial fires resembles the cloud so much," said Kovalan.

Further on, they saw ancient and prosperous villages of cultivators with the rising fumes of the ovens on which the sugarcane juice was being boiled. They also noticed stacks of paddy looking like hillocks.

They did not travel more than a league a day. After several days journey, they reached Srirangam where the Kaveri was hidden by the city. A Jain saint came there. Kavundi and her companions fell at his feet, and Kavundi cried out, " May all our past sins perish !" The saint ascertained from them where they were going. With his knowledge of the past, present and future, he knew the fate in store for Kovalan and Kannaki at Madura, but, being a sage, who had conquered all attachment and anger, and had cultivated perfect indifference to joys and sorrows, he did not warn them, or ask them to desist from their journey, but simply said, " Oh Kavundi, inexorable are the laws of *Karma*(3). The good and bad effects of one's acts can never be wiped out by another's advice or effort. They shoot forth like sprouts from seeds sown. Bad deeds produce bad *Karma*, and good deeds good *Karma*, just as a margosa seed will produce a margosa(4) tree, and an Asoka seed an Asoka(5) tree,

3. A Hindu doctrine which holds that actions in previous births determine events in this birth.
4. A tree with bitter leaves, flowers and fruits.
5. A tree with beautiful red flowers.

Life is easily extinguished, like an open lamp in a high wind. So, try to acquire a true knowledge of God, and to pile up good *Karma*, and escape from the prison of the body." "I shall never prostrate myself except to God Arivan. Nor shall I join my two hands together to reverence any one other than an expounder of Truth. My head will not suffer any flower to be placed on it except the flower-like feet of Him who walked upon flowers,"(5-*a*) said Kavundi. The sage said to her, "May thy birth-causing bondage cease!" and went away.

Kavundi and her two companions crossed the Kaveri in a boat and went to the Southern shore, and saw the beautiful temple and the wonderful garden surrounding it. Kovalan and Kannaki dallied among the sweet flowers, and looked like Kama and Rati. A rake, going along with a woman he had picked up just then, saw them, and asked Kavundi sarcastically, "Are they Kamadeva and Rati?" Kavundi said, "They are not Gods. They are my children. Go your way!" Resenting the implied contempt in her words, the ribald pair said, "Oh, holy one, Oh knower of the Scriptures! Have you ever heard of the children of the same person becoming husband and wife?" Kannaki heard this piece of ribaldry, and closed her ears. Kavundi cursed the ribald pair to become old jackals, and to roam about in the adjoining thorny jungle. And, soon, two old jackals were seen howling from the jungle, the rake and his sweetheart having suddenly disappeared.

Kovalan and Kannaki said to Kavundi, "Should not faults like theirs be attributed to ignorance, and forgiven, Oh holy one? When will these two be released from this curse?" "Twelve months hence, in the forest-belt outside the fortress wall of Uraiyur," said Kavundi.

Then the three went to Varanam or Uraiyur. "Do you know why this ancient city is called Varanam?" asked Kavundi. "No," said Kovalan and Kannaki, "Tell us." "An aggrieved bird killed its oppressor, an elephant, here," said the saint. "Tell us the story," said Kovalan and Kannaki. "I shall," said Kavundi. "A sparrow couple lived on a big tree in this place which was a forest before. The female had just laid her

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5-*a*. Arivan! the God of Perfect Intelligence.

eggs. The next day, an elephant went that way and took refuge in the shade of that tree from the burning heat of the midday sun. In sheer wantonness, and despite the remonstrances of the sparrow couple, the elephant caught hold of the branch where the sparrow's nest was, and severed it from the tree. All the sparrow's eggs were thrown down and shattered to pieces. The parent sparrows escaped. The mother sparrow bewailed the loss of her eggs most bitterly. The sparrows consulted their friends, a wood-pecker, a bee and a frog ; and the five pitched on a plan to kill the elephant for its callous destruction of the eggs. The bee hovered about the elephant's eyes. Fearing a stinging in the eye, the elephant closed its eyes. The wood-pecker then pecked out one of its eyes. The elephant ran along in pain, closing its other eye also. The wood-pecker then pecked out the other eye too. The blind and maddened elephant ran about. anxious to plunge into a pond and wash its aching and burning eyes. When it was walking on a terrible precipice, with a yawning abyss below, the frog croaked from below. The elephant took the familiar sound to mean the existence of a pond in that direction, blindly rushed thither, fell over the precipice, and was crushed to death. This place where the unjust elephant was killed by the bird it had wronged, was called *Varanam*, and was chosen by the great Chola King, the descendant of Sibi, as his capital, to show his readiness to put down the oppression of the meanest by the strongest."

Kovalan was impressed by this story. He narrated to Kavundi his own sad story. At the end, Kavundi said :

"The mind to wild pleasures inclined
Is by a fierce whirlwind driven,
Therefore, the roving senses bind,
Ere thy life by them is riven."

To his question as to what was the essential thing for salvation, she replied :—

"The pure heart ; without that, all else is nought. With it, nothing more is needed, as every virtue follows."

"Is prayer to Arivan, the Being of Perfect Intelligence, or to the gods, of any use ?" asked he.

"Of course," said she.
"Worship Arivan with yearning
For more and more real learning,
And see how your woes fall from you,
Leaving you fresh as grass with dew!"

"Will good prevail against evil always?" asked Kovalan.

"Certainly," said Kavundi. "Hear this:—

The sun prevails o'er the cloud,
The moon gets o'er the eclipse,
Woman gets o'er her childbirth,
And good prevails o'er evil.
Good conquers evil at last,
As the sun conquers the cloud
And eclipse which hold it fast.
Evil and Thunder are loud,
But they can never prevail,
So, do not for nothing wail."

CHAPTER X

ARRIVAL AT MADURA

KAVUNDI sat under the Asoka tree and worshipped in Jain fashion. Then she delivered a discourse on Right Living. After spending that day there, she and Kovalan and Kannaki left for Madura before daybreak. At sunrise, they reached a *mantapam*(1) situated in the midst of a grove of young trees and adjoining a tank. They met a Brahmin there, and enquired about the Pandya country. He praised the Pandyan King, Nedum Cheliyan, saying, "He has won renown as the conqueror of the Aryas(2). Wearing his garland of margosa leaves and flowers, he has made his Fish Flag respected from the Himalayas to the sea. His adviser is no less than the sage Agastya who lives in the Podiyil Hills.(3) He is a worthy descendant of the famous kings of this line. The garland of Indra sits well on him. He is a glory to the Lunar race. His justice is stern, and lawbreakers have fled the country. His kingdom is prosperous, and the harvests are unfailing."

"May I know which is your native place, and what brought you here, sir?" asked Kovalan.

"I am a native of Mankadu in the Kudamalai(4) Hills. I have been on a pilgrimage to Tirupati, Rameswaram, Kumari, Madura and Srirangam, and have come here after seeing the wonderful image of Vishnu reposing on the couch of the thousand-headed Serpent in the temple in Turuthi(5) jutting out of the widening waves of the Kaveri."

Kovalan then ascertained from him the various routes to Madura. The Brahmin said that the best route lay through

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1. A stone structure used generally for religious purposes.
2. He was known as 'Arya Pataithandia Nedum Cheliyan.'
3. Agastyakootam in the Western Ghats in Travancore and Tinnevelly.
4. A portion of the Western Ghats.
5. Srirangam.

fields, jungles, and desert, past Tirumalkundram, with its wonderful cave and three ponds, called Saravanam, Bhavakarani and Ishtasiddhi, bathing in which would confer respectively worldly knowledge, knowledge of one's deeds in past births, and fulfilment of whatever worldly desires one entertained. He asked Kovalan to beware of deceitful forest nymphs assuming the shape of his friends. He adjured him also to worship the lord Vishnu at Tirumalkundram, and said that he himself was going to other sacred places to worship the feet of the Lord who had measured the whole universe with his feet(6) and the Lord of Bliss.(7) He asked him to repeat constantly the prayers Namasivaya,(8) and Namonarayana,(9) addressed to those two Gods.

Kavundi said to the Brahmin, "We have no wish to go to the cave named by you, or to bathe in those ponds, or to repeat the prayers mentioned by you. Is there anything that cannot be gained by those who lead a life of truth and non-violence? Go your way worshipping the feet of your Gods, and we shall go our own way."

"Do as you like," replied the Brahmin. "There is a limit to what mere man-made truth and non-violence can achieve. None can escape his Fate except with the Grace of the Lord of the Universe."

Kavundi and her companions resumed their journey. At noon, Kavundi and Kannaki became weary and thirsty, and rested under a tree by the road-side. Kovalan went to an adjoining lake to take them some water, and to slake his own thirst.

The forest nymph assumed the form of Vasantamala, and, going to him, fell at his feet, and said "Madhavi is bitter with grief, and is accusing me of having uttered a lie to you about her which made you desert her. She fainted and cried out, 'A courtesan's is the worst of all professions, as the pious and learned shun her like a dreadful disease, and any lie about her

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6. Vishnu as Trivikrama in his incarnation of Vamana.
7. Siva.
8. I bow to Siva.
9. I bow to Narayana (Vishnu).

will be readily believed.' Driven out by her, I have come here," and she shed profuse tears. Remembering the Brahmin's warning, Kovalan uttered an invocation to Sakti,(10) and at once the forest nymph resumed its form, and begged Kovalan's forgiveness for the deceit, implored him not to tell Kannaki or Kavundi about the incident, and went away.

Kovalan slaked his thirst, and took water in a lotus-leaf-cup for Kavundi and Kannaki. Then, the sun being too hot to proceed with the journey, they entered a grove containing the shrine of Aiyai Kumari or Kali, the dreadful deity of the Maravas,(11) who used to pray and sacrifice to her and then go on their merciless plundering expeditions. They went into the shrine and rested there awhile.

When it became dark, there was a sacred dance there. A girl represented the Goddess Kali. She belonged to the priestly sub-sect from which every year a man would sacrifice himself in front of the Goddess as a terrible offering to ensure prosperity for the tribe in its plundering raids. She was dressed in a tiger-skin, and was mounted on a stag with twisted horns. She carried a bow made of heart-wood. Her hair was done up in a matted knot, and was ornamented with a boar's tusk and a small silver crescent moon. Her *tali* was a necklace of tiger's teeth. She stood there in the middle of the worshippers, a living incarnation of the terrible Goddess, while a dancer, Salini, danced as if possessed by the Goddess, and spoke out her inspired words. A crowd of Marava men and women assembled with all kinds of offerings. Salini cried out in anger, "The herds of the towns round about are increasing while your stables are empty, Oh Maravas! The Maravas are becoming meek and peaceful like the law-abiding citizens of the degenerate towns, and no longer rob the wayfarers. This great race of bow-men has degenerated into a timid tribe of coolies! If you want to live care-free, eating mutton chops and drinking the glorious, foaming palm-wine, give your Goddess her dues. Else, she will not send victory to your bows, ye, who live by plunder!"

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10. Parvati.

11. A tribe of robbers.

At Salini's words, a dozen Maravas stepped forward and gashed their foreheads with their swords, and offered the dripping blood to the Goddess. Then Salini said to them, "Your Goddess is pleased at this exhibition of your devotion. Success will befall you in your next raid, a month hence. The iron hand of the great Pandyan, Nedum Cheliyan, will relax, and you will profit immensely." Then, she said, pointing to the surprised and horrified Kannaki, "Here stands the peerless gem of a woman who will become the idol of the entire Tamil country!" Kannaki smiled ironically, and whispered to her husband, "What an absurd statement!"

Finally, the dance ended, after much drinking and singing and cutting of goats and fowl, and prayers to Sakti, Siva and Krishna for the prosperity of the Marava tribe.

When the dance was over, it was past midnight. Kovalan went and suggested to Kavundi that they should travel during the night, to save Kannaki the exhausting marches in the scorching sun, pointing out that, under the just Pandyan, robbers dare not infest the roads. "Here the king holds the rod of punishment high, and even the wild beasts are held in control. The bear will not attack the ant-hill; the tiger is at peace with the deer; even the ever-greedy crocodile behaves itself," said he. Kavundi agreed, and Kovalan went and told Kannaki, "Darling, we shall hereafter march during the nights. The tiger will cross our path, the owl will screech, the bear will roar, but have no fear." Then he began marching with her arm resting on his shoulders.

The next morning, they reached a village inhabited by Brahmins who had fallen away from the ancient Vedic life, and had taken to music and dancing. Kovalan kept his wife and Kavundi in the house of the headman and went for morning ablutions, thinking of the various experiences of his life. On the way, Kausikar, who had been sent by Madhavi in search of Kovalan, met him and said:—"Oh, I have found you at last. Your father and mother are desolate with grief. Your relatives too are plunged in sorrow. Your father's men have gone in different directions in search of you. Puhar has gone mad, like Ayodhya of old after the departure of the great Rama. Madhavi, on learning the news from Vasantamala,

fell into a prolonged swoon. I went to console her. She said to me, 'I prostrate myself at thy feet. Oh, see that I suffer no more from this separation.' She wrote out a message and gave it to me saying, 'Please give this sealed palm-leaf to him who is the apple of my eye.' I have wandered all over the south country and have at last found you. Manimekhalai also sends an oral message, through me, as follows :—'Father, come back, I want you. You were like a god unto me. It is not meet that you should desert me for something my mother did. Even she meant nothing. Come back. Let us all live together—my mother, Kannaki, yourself, and me." Kovalan shed tears and asked, "Is she all right ?" "Yes," said Kausikar, "but heart-broken. Even Madhavi is disconsolate. I have not seen any virtuous wife so shaken by separation from her husband, or any child so heart-broken as Manimekhalai. Here is Madhavi's letter."

He handed over the message. Memories of Madhavi rushed on Kovalan. With trembling heart, he opened the palm-leaf and read, "Lord of my life, I prostrate myself at thy feet. Forgive the senseless words I spoke in jest, simply to test you, words which, ah me, made you leave your parents and town and go wandering with your noble wife all over hill and dale. Everybody blames me for this. Come back, come back to us, and bless us." Kovalan exclaimed, "Verily, she was not in the wrong," and said to Kausikar, "Go and give this palm-leaf to my parents so that they may not find fault with Madhavi, and may also be relieved about their fears regarding me and my beloved Kannaki. I do not like to come back to Puhar as a pauper. I want to rehabilitate myself as a merchant at Madura, and then return. Go and tell this to Madhavi and Manimekhalai. Tell Manimekhalai that it is my desire that she should grow up a virtuous young maiden !"

Kausikar went back to Kaveripattinam. Kovalan returned to Kannaki and Kavundi. He found the Brahmins dancing Durga's Dance of Destruction, and singing suitable songs. He, too, took up the Veena(12) and sang some songs about Durga, astonishing those professionals by his great skill and knowledge.

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12. The Indian lute.

Then the three resumed their journey to Madura. At last, they heard the thundering sounds of the drums in the Siva and Meenakshi temples and in the great palace. They heard too the chanting of the Vedas, and the loud instruction in the schools. The roar of elephants, the neighing of horses, the rumbling of chariots and the tramp of the foot-soldiers also reverberated in the air. The great city was waking up, and the noise began to swell, like the roar of the sea. The Vaigai, with its flowing channel and river-bed gardens, was very attractive. Kovalan cried out, "Oh, this is no stream of water, but is a stream of flowers."

The three crossed the river by one of the less busy ferries, and went to a fragrant grove full of flowers, avoiding the busy ferries with the crowded boats having the figures of the elephant, lion, horse and other animals. They bowed to the City Spirit and the distant temples. Then they crossed the belt of trees and the moat, and passed the penance-groves and paddy-fields and the villas in the suburbs with tanks and gardens of cocoanut, plantain and areca trees, and numerous bamboo water-pandals.(13) They then saw the towers of the great Siva and Meenakshi temples, the Vishnu temple with the Garuda standard, the temple of Balarama with the Plough emblem, and of Subrahmanya with the Peacock-Flag.

Kovalan requested Kavundi to take care of Kannaki till he went round Madura city and fixed up some residence. She agreed. He entered the fort-gate, guarded by the fierce Yavana swordsmen, and wandered through the streets. He spent the whole afternoon going through the city. In the evening, he found the fashionable dancing-girls crowding into the public parks with their rich lovers. As the lights were put on, he saw many young maidens sitting on the terraces with their lovers, decking themselves with garlands of flowers and fresh sandal paste. The bazaars hummed with the rich traffic of Korkai and Tondi, priceless pearls, corals, incense, ivory, spices, gold. silver, gems and all other things. The goldsmiths and cloth-merchants had their own separate streets.

Kovalan returned, and told Kavundi and Kannaki about the splendours of the city. Madalan, a Brahmin of Talai-

13. Pavilions where travellers are given water.

chenganam, arrived there on his return journey from Kanyakumari, and met Kovalan, and told him that he knew him well by repute. He reminded him how he had named his daughter after the Goddess Manimekhalai. He said, "I remember well how you saved that aged and bent Brahmin from the clutches of the rogue-elephant that day, and sat between its tusks firmly, curbing the brute. I remember also how you read the Sanskrit verse left behind by the Brahmin who deserted his wife who had killed the mongoose in error, and made him come back, and made them both glad by giving them much wealth. I remember, too, how on seeing a false witness being about to be executed, and his young wife weeping in heartrending fashion, you offered to be executed in his place. But, oh Gopala, I see evil things about to overtake you, owing to your deeds in your past birth."

"I too fear so," said Kovalan. "I dreamt that a low-caste man, protected by the King, caused me to mount a horned buffalo, and made Kannaki undergo great agony. Later on, I and Kannaki attained the great status of those who have renounced all attachment."

Kavundi and Madalan said to Kovalan and Kannaki, "You two had better leave these suburbs, where only monks and ascetics are allowed to live. Go to the city, and live there." Just then, an old shepherdess, Madari, a follower of Kavundi, came there. Kavundi entrusted Kovalan and Kannaki to Madari.

Madari took them to her house, gave them a refreshing bath, and made her daughter, Aiyai, attend on Kannaki. Kannaki cooked Kovalan's food separately in new vessals supplied by her hostess. Kovalan took his meal. Then, when chewing the delicious betel-leaf given by Kannaki, he said to her, "Darling, my heart is full of despair. Is there any hope for one who has wasted his days in the company of dancing-girls and rakes and debauchees? I have not been dutiful to my aged parents. I have wronged you too, so young in years, but so old in wisdom. Even though I asked you not to leave Puhar for this place, you insisted on coming with me. How courageous you were, in trusting me who came straight from her house!"

"Though you deviated from the right path, my beloved,

I could see clear, since I kept to the path of virtue. I came along with you, knowing that a real change had come over you," said Kannaki.

"You have given up parents, relations, servants, and comforts, and taken as your sole support patience, modesty, suffering and chastity, and have made me happy. Oh purest gold, oh light of the world, oh abode of chastity, oh house of virtue. I must rehabilitate myself, were it only for you. I shall go into the city with one of the anklets that adorn your beautiful legs, and sell it, so that I may start my trade afresh. Remain here till I come back."

He then took one of her anklets, pressed her to his bosom, kissed her tenderly, restrained the tears which involuntarily started from his eyes, and went into Madura city.

CHAPTER XI

ATROCIOUS INJUSTICE

A humped bull went opposite Kovalan as he started. He did not know that it was a bad omen. He walked on, and, in the bazaar, saw a master-goldsmith walking in front, with a coat on and pincers in hand, followed by other goldsmiths at some distance. Thinking that this must be the palace-goldsmith, Kovalan approached him and said, "Sir, can you estimate the price of a rare anklet, suitable for a queen?"

'I can only say that I make crowns and other regalia for kings," said the goldsmith.

Kovalan opened his bundle and handed over the anklet. The goldsmith examined it fascinatedly. His heart beat with joy. A week back, the queen had handed over to him her chest of jewels for picking out a ring of which she had wanted a duplicate to be made. He had stolen one of her priceless anklets then, and had, later on, sold it to a Yavana merchant who had sailed away the very next day. But, the queen missed the jewel in two days, and raised a hue and cry. He had protested his innocence, when questioned by the King, and had stated that some cunning thief must have stolen it, as the Crown Prince's diamond-necklace had been stolen by a man who had passed off as an ambassador from a distant foreign country. Nedum Cheliyan had replied, "Such things occur but once in a life-time. Even then we knew, after the event, who the thief was. Suspicion did not fall on others. In this case, the circumstances show that you alone must have stolen this jewel when the casket was handed over to you. Still, I shall not prejudge your case. I give you a week's time to find out the alleged thief and jewel, and my suspicions regarding you shall remain a secret till then. If you fail to produce the thief and jewel in a week, the case will be ordered to be investigated by the City Prefect, and you know that he will find out the truth as easily as oil is extracted from sesamum." These words had caused panic to the state-goldsmith, and he had been praying daily to his family deity

to show him some way out of this terrible plight of practical certainty of exposure, condemnation and execution. And, as if in answer to those prayers, this stranger from another country had come with an anklet which tallied exactly in size, weight, workmanship and appearance with the stolen one and which would, therefore, be taken to be the very same one by all at the palace except himself.

The wicked goldsmith thought to himself, "I shall keep this man in my house on the pretext of getting an offer for the jewel from the King, and then go to the King and offer to show his guards the thief and the jewel. He will surely send them with me with directions to execute the thief, if caught red-handed, forthwith, as an example to all malefactors. Thus, I shall escape my impending doom." He said to Kovalan, "Sir, this is a priceless jewel. The only person who can buy such a jewel is the Queen. I shall go and tell the King. Please wait with the jewel in my humble abode." Then, he returned the anklet, carefully wrapped, to Kovalan, and led him to his house, dismissing the junior goldsmiths, who were following, with a few words. Kovalan was seated by the goldsmith on a cot in an out-house. Then the goldsmith went to the palace in high spirits. Kovalan too was glad that he had so easily found an enthusiastic admirer of the jewel, and was near to finding a generous purchaser as well.

That day, the Queen had reproached the King with not caring for her as much as before, and, as an instance, had mentioned his failure to recover her stolen anklet. Secretly, she feared that the King was beguiled by the charming dancing-girls who had been entertaining him for a week. So, she had provoked this love-quarrel. Just as the King was emerging from her room, the goldsmith hailed him, prostrated himself before him, and said, "Lord of Justice! I have found out the thief, and have caught him with the anklet, when he had the impudence to come and offer it to me for sale at half its real price. He is now at my house with the stolen jewel. Pray send some guards to seize the jewel and deal with the man suitably." Glad at the recovery of the jewel, and eager to please the Queen by a swift punishment of the thief of her anklet, Nedum Cheliyan forgot the immemorial law of the land, that none

should be punished without a judicial trial, and, calling three palace-guards, said to them, "Go with the goldsmith. If you find the Queen's anklet in that thief's possession, put him to death at once, as a salutary example to such marauders, and bring the anklet here. You know it well, and can easily find out if it is the Queen's, or not."

The goldsmith took the guards with him, saying to himself, "I have accomplished what I desired." Taking them to Kovalan, he said to him, "These have come here to see the anklet at the bidding of the King." Kovalan showed the anklet, and the palace-guards took it to be the same as the Queen's. Still Kovalan did not look like a thief, and they said to the goldsmith in a whisper, "He does not look like a thief." The goldsmith whispered back to them, "What do you know about thieves, you fools? You see our Queen's stolen anklet with him, and yet prate about his looks. Evidently, he has cast his spell on you, as he did that night when he stole it without having to use a crow-bar or burgling rod. You remember the thief who came dressed as an ambassador, and stole our Crown Prince's diamond-necklace in the night. Do you mean to say he looked a thief? Oh, you must read the book on 'The Art of Thieving.' Take care you act quickly before he begins to suspect us and utters incantations and makes himself invisible." At that, a young and impetuous guard said to him, "You are right," and hurled his sword at Kovalan's neck. It almost served the neck, and caused Kovalan to fall down in a pool of blood, mortally wounded.

The guards took the anklet and went to the King along with the goldsmith. The King too thought that the anklet was the Queen's stolen one, and, so, rewarded the goldsmith and guards, and rushed to his Queen, saying, "Darling, here is your anklet. And, yet, you were accusing me of apathy about it." Kopperundevi was delighted beyond words at the recovery of her anklet, and at her husband's great efforts towards it, and was reconciled to him in an instant. The King and Queen then spent some minutes together, after which the King left, and the Queen took her twilight sleep.

CHAPTER XII

FRANTIC GRIEF

MEANWHILE, Kannaki began to have vague misgivings at the failure of Kovalan to return soon. "Even during day-time I am shivering. My heart is restless with grief. I do not see my lord return. Why is he so late about it? Oh, I am getting worried," said she to Aiyai. Aiyai went and told Madari about this. Madari said, "My dear, I too have seen some gruesome portents of impending calamity. The eyes of the big bulls are full of tears. The butter which I tried to melt for taking the ghee to the King's palace to-morrow morning will not melt. The cows are crowding together and bellowing in fear. Their tinkling bells are falling from their necks without cause. Oh, some dreadful calamity is about to happen. Let us avert it by having the *Kuravai* dance, to propitiate Balarama and Krishna."

Several girls were then assembled. They performed the *Kuravai* dance, with many songs about Balarama, Krishna and the *gopis*. (1) There were also songs praising the Pandyan King Nedum Cheliyan, adorned with Indra's garland; the Chola King Karikala, with the golden discus; and the Chera King Senguttuvan who had crossed the ocean and destroyed the Kadambas in their sea-girt island.

When the dance was over, the dancers went and bathed in the *Vaigai*. Then, Madari went to worship Nedumal with flowers, incense, sandal-paste and garlands. There she heard, from some one who had come from the city, the news of Kovalan's slaughter for alleged theft of the Queen's anklet.

She returned home hurriedly, and stood near Kannaki weeping, and unable to speak. She simply said, "Oh, my lady," and broke down. Kannaki said to her, "Friend, speak out! My mind is full of grave forebodings. Even during the day-time, I am shivering from fear for my beloved's safety. I am about to faint from fear of what news you may be trying to keep back from me. So, speak at once."

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1. The shepherdesses of Brindaban.

"The King's officers executed him, charging him with having stolen the Queen's anklet from the palace," blurted out Madari.

On hearing this Kannaki sprang up in a rage, uttering, "What atrocious injustice!" Then she cried out, heart-broken, "Oh, where are you lying down, my beloved? Ah, me!" and fainted.

Recovering, she began raving, "Am I to suffer like other widows and perish in misery because I have lost my husband through the fault of this King? Am I, Oh foolish Goddess of Dharma, to become a widow and go, in despair, to innumerable places of pilgrimage, because you allowed this King to deviate from justice? My husband a thief! Oh Sun, witness of all the deeds in this sea-girt world, was my husband a thief?" Then was heard a voice, "He was not a thief. For his unjust execution, this city will be consumed by flames."

Kannaki took her remaining anklet and said to the shepherdesses, who had crowded round her, "Oh chaste women, living in this terrible city ruled by this unjust King, listen! My husband was not a thief. Unwilling to pay the price of my anklet, the King had him killed; and the anklet was taken away. If I am a chaste woman, you will see me make my husband speak."

She went into the city with the shepherdesses. The residents of Madura crowded round her, and exclaimed, "Our King's Rod of Justice has become crooked! Lost is the glory of Tennavan,(2) of the moonlike Umbrella and Spear! See this goddess-like woman suffer untold agony!" They took her to the place where Kovalan lay killed. She saw him, but he could not see her. The sun set just then, and twilight set in, and she lamented so loudly that the whole city reverberated with her wailings. She, who had received from him a warm embrace and a wreath of flowers that morning, saw him lying in a pool of blood that very evening. She embraced him and bathed him with her tears, exclaiming, "Oh, that your beautiful body should roll in the dust like this in this twilight! Won't you speak a word to your beloved! Are there no good people in this city? Are there no women to protest against such injustice? Is there

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2. The lord of the South: the Pandyan King.

no God in this city to prevent the sharp sword of this unjust king from slaughtering innocents? Oh, my beloved, speak one word to me, just one word!"

Kovalan recovered consciousness, opened his eyes, and said faintly, "Oh, the full-moon face of my beloved has faded!" At once, she clasped his feet, sobbing and wailing. Then Kovalan just gasped out, "Oh my beloved, be here, be here!" and expired, and his soul went up to the heavens, accompanied by a host of gods.

Kannaki said to herself, "Was it real, or was it an illusion? Where shall I go and find out the truth? But, first, my furious wrath must be appeased. I shall seek out the cruel King, and expose his injustice. Then, my beloved's corpse shall be burnt along with this unjust city itself." She then remembered the terrible dream, which she had recounted to Devandi, and shuddered, and said to hereself, "How these evil dreams come true!"

Rising up, she went to the palace in search of the King.

CHAPTER XIII

TERRIBLE REVENGE

NEDUM CHELIYAN'S Queen, Kopperundevi, had horrible dreams during her twilight sleep that evening. She rushed to the King and said, "Great King! I dreamt that your Sceptre and Umbrella fell down. The Bell of Justice at the palace-gate went on ringing, as if some appalling injustice was done. A rainbow appeared in the night, and a meteor by day. Oh, I fear some dreadful calamity, my lord. Such portents are said to have appeared when your great ancestor, Ugra Pandyan, threw his spear at the sea, to stop its erosions at Korkai, and the sea, in revenge, swallowed up the entire Kumari country and the *Pahruli* river. What will happen now, I shudder to think."

Just then, the gate-keeper came and told the King, "Sire, a terrible lady, resembling some fierce Goddess, is waiting at the gate. She is as self-confident as Korravai, the Goddess of Victory, and as terrible as Kali. She has with her a priceless anklet, and her face is stained with tears." "Bring her in," said the King.

Kannaki was brought to the King's presence.

"Oh lady with the tear-stained face, who are you, and what has brought you here?" asked the King.

"I come, Oh rash monarch, from the famous city of Puhar, one of whose Kings(1) gave his flesh to an eagle to save a dove, and another of whose Kings,(2) when a cow pulled the Bell of Justice, had his only son crushed under his own chariot-wheels for rashly running over a calf. From that city, a noble merchant, Kovalan, son of Masathuvan, driven by an evil Fate, came to your realm, and was murdered under your orders while trying to sell one of my anklets. I am his wife. My name is Kannaki."

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1. Sibi.
2. Manuneeti kanda Cholan.

"Lady, how dare you call that a murder? It is the duty of the kings to deal out justice and put thieves to death," said the King.

"To put to death an innocent man is not justice. It is murder, pure and simple," said Kannaki.

"You are his wife, and, so, will go on saying that he was innocent. But, he was caught red-handed with the stolen anklet of my Queen," replied the King.

"*He* was not the anklet-thief. *You* are the anklet-thief," said Kannaki. "To think that you too call yourself a King, like Manu and Sibi, you who lost your reason by the loss of your Queen's anklet, and ordered an innocent man to be killed for a theft he did not commit! Are you not ashamed to sit there, with that woman by your side, pretending to deal out justice, while committing the most unjust murders?"

"How dare you say all this?" asked Nedum Cheliyan, in wrath.

"Because it is the truth," said Kannaki, "and I can prove it."

"Prove it or die," roared the King. "Here is the anklet recovered from your husband," and took it and handed it over to her.

Kannaki examined the anklet, satisfied hereself that it was the one given by her to Kovalan, and said, "It is easy to prove it. What was inside your Queen's anklet?"

"The finest pearls," said the King.

"And inside mine were the purest rubies. See now what this anklet, foolishly contended by you to be your Queen's, contains," and she dashed it against the floor. The purest rubies flew out of the jewel, which broke. At that very instant, the Royal Umbrella fell down, and the King's Rod of Justice became crooked. Kannaki, in terrible anger, threw the other anklet also on the ground, crying out, "See what this too contains!" Rubies flew out of it too.

Nedum Cheliyan exclaimed in agony, "Am I a ruler, I who listened to the lying words of a rascally goldsmith and had an

innocent man put to death! It is *I* who am the thief! I have failed to do justice. Let me die at once!

"Oh God, what have I done in my haste!
Put to death a most innocent man!
How can I attribute it to Fate
As an inferior mortal can?
See, the great Sceptre of Justice bends
In my hands, even as I hold it!
The Lord, through this Goddess-woman sends,
Me and my court retribution fit"

And had a stroke, and died.

The Queen, Kopperundevi, too, fell down on the floor by his side. Clasping his feet, she worshipped them, and said, "Let me follow you, my lord. It is impossible for me to live on without you".

Kannaki said to her, "Oh, great Queen, I am the victim of a cruel Fate. I am not learned. But one thing is certain, that he who does harm to another will surely have to pay for it. Another thing, too, is equally clear, the power of a chaste woman, however helpless to all outward appearance. Hear what some chaste women of my town have done. A noble woman, on being accused of unchastity, called the kitchen and a tree to witness, and the Lord made them bear witness, for her. Another, being asked to protect an image of her husband made on a river-bed with sand, would not leave it despite the oncoming floods, and, lo! the floods encircled her and her husband's image without harming them. King Karikala's daughter rushed into the roaring waters of the estuary of the *Kaveri* to rescue her husband, Vanjikkon,(3) who was being carried away by the waves, and the astonished waves restored him safely to her. Another chaste lady, unable to live separated from her husband, when he had to go overseas, turned herself into a stone image on the seashore, but recovered her own form when her husband returned from his voyage and touched her. A fifth, seeing her co-wife's child, entrusted to her, fall into a well by accident, threw her own child

3. King of Vanji or the Chera country.

into the well after it, so that she might be sure of saving the other child, in her anxiety to save her own, and saved both. A sixth changed her beautiful form into that of a black monkey, on seeing strangers gaze at her when her husband was away, but changed back into her own form when her husband returned. A seventh heard her mother bewail one day her foolish promise to her maid-servant to contract a marriage between their expected children, if they happened to be of opposite sexes, and went straight to the maid-servant's son and clasped his feet as those of her lord and husband, and solved the problem. I, too, am a chaste wife from that same Puhar where these seven women lived and died. You will see that I shall destroy this city by flames as a lesson for this atrocious injustice." When she had finished, she looked and saw that the Queen she was addressing was dead.

Then, she twisted off her left breast with her right hand, and hurled it at Madura city, crying out,

"If chastity can produce fire,
Then let this city burn at once,
To ensure justice for her sons
And satisfy a woman's ire!

"May this city be consigned to flames! May all be burnt except the righteous ones and Brahmins, cows, chaste women, old people and chlldren! This city shall pay for its King's crime and for depriving me of the joy of having a child to be fed at my breast."

At once, Agni, the God of Fire, appeared before Kannaki in the shape of a Brahmin, blue in hue, with a red tuft and milk-white teeth, and said, "I shall carry out your orders." Then he opened his burning mouth, and the city was enveloped in flames.

The Guardian Deities of the city,(4) the Brahmana-bhutam, pearl-white in colour, and with unfolded umbrella, staff, water-bowl, fire-stick and *kusa*(5) grass, Vedas and sacred thread,

4. These four were the deities of the four main castes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, called here Velans or farmers.

5. Sacred grass.

the Kshatriya-bhutam, coral-red in colour, with war-drum, umbrella, feather-fan, flag, goad, spear and rope; the Vaisya-bhutam, brown in colour, with balance, lamp-stand and Veena, water and paddy-seeds; and the Velan-bhutam, sapphire-black in colour, and with plough in hand; all these knew beforehand about the fire, and departed from the four quarters even before it spread into the streets.

The terrible flames burnt down almost the entire city. Dancing-girls in their gaudy dresses, soldiers in their uniforms, merchants in their shops, coolies pushing their hand-carts, were all overtaken by it unexpectedly, and in the middle of their activities, and burnt to cinders. People stood aghast and helpless, like figures in a painting, when overtaken by the all-consuming fire.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE GODDESS OF CHASTITY

EVEN the survivors did not blame Kannaki, as they considered it to be a just retribution for the atrocious injustice done to her and her husband, though they greatly marvelled at the power of her chastity, and called her forthwith *Patnidevi*, "Goddess of Chastity."

As the flames reduced the great city to ashes, **Madhurapati,** the Goddess of the City, wandered hither and thither along the streets and lanes, sorrowful and bewildered. Finally, she appeared before Kannaki, whose victory was greater than that of Sarasvati, Lakshmi or Parvati, and said to her, "Listen to my complaint, Oh lady."

Kannaki asked her, "Who are you who follow me from behind? Are you aware of my great wrong and consequent agony?"

"I am. But, hear me, and then you will understand everything," said Madhurapati. "My ears have heard only Vedic chants in this city till to-day, when they heard the bell of outraged justice ringing. You need not think that Manuneeti-kanda Cholan and Sibi have no counterparts in this Royal line. Once, the great Vedic scholar, **Parasara,** who was given many valuable jewels by the Chera King Kelukuttuvan, passed the village of Tangal, and, being pleased with the Vedic recital of a young Brahmin boy called **Alamarselvan,** son of **Varttikan,** presented him with some of the Chera King's priceless gifts, namely, a sacred thread of pearls and costly bangles and ear-rings. The boy was, later on, falsely accused by the jealous village-officers of having become rich by concealing treasure-trove belonging to the King, and was thrown into prison under the orders of the King. His mother was frantic with grief. In consequence of this injustice, the door of the Kali temple would not open. The King suspected that some unremedied wrong was at the bottom of it, and, on enquiry, came to know of Alamarselvan's unjust imprisonment. At once,

he, who had not bent his knee to any man on earth, prostrated himself before Varttikan, granted Tangal and Vayalur in perpetuity to him tax-free, and released Alamarselvan. The door of the temple opened with a mighty sound heard throughout the city. The King, in joy, ordered a general remission of taxes and the release of all prisoners. He also ordered that, thenceforth, all treasure-trove should belong to the finder, so as to prevent the possibility of such unjust punishment thereafter. In addition, he dismissed the village-officers responsible for this act of injustice.

"But, impelled by Fate, this very monarch has committed atrocious injustice as regards your husband. Hear the reason.

"There was a prediction that on Friday the *Ashtami*(1) day in the dark fortnight of *Adi*(2), when the stars Kartikai and Bharani were in the ascendant, this King of the Pandyas would die, and his city consigned to flames. Thus, Fate has led to the act of injustice you suffered from. But, nothing happens by accident; everything is the result of *Karma*, the effect of actions in previous births. In days of old, there were two agnates, Vasu and Kumara, who ruled over Simhapura and Kapilapura in the Kalinga country. They were always at war. Simhapura had fair and fertile fields surrounded by a thick grove of trees. Kapilapura had impenetrable bamboo forests all round it. Owing to the war, both Kings made an area of twelve miles round their Capitals forbidden territory for all foreign merchants. A foreign merchant called Sangama, anxious to break the blockade and sell his wares, went with his wife and a load of valuable wares, and sold them in Simhapura. Your husband, Kovalan, was in his previous birth, **Bharata,** the highest police officer of Vasu. He suspected the innocent Sangama to be a disguised spy of Kumara, and made a report to that effect to the King who had him executed, implicitly believing Bharata's report. The innocent man's wife, **Neeli,** was frantic with grief, and raved for fourteen days, crying out to the King, the subjects, and, indeed, to all the persons present, "Oh King, is this your justice? Oh Vaisyas, is this your justice? Oh residents of this place, is this your justice?" Thus she raved for fourteen days.

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1. Eighth day of the fortnight.
2. A month from about the 15th July to 15th August.

Then, on the fifteenth day, a particularly sacred day, she climbed up a cliff and jumped down in order to join her husband in heaven. As she jumped to her death, she uttered the following curse : 'He who has inflicted this injury upon my husband shall be overtaken by a similar fate in his next birth. Though innocent, he shall be accused of a heinous crime, when honestly selling his article, and shall be executed off-hand. His wife shall suffer from frantic grief, even as I do, but shall find her peace and join her husband in heaven, from a cliff, after fourteen days.' Now, you see why all these things have happened."

Kannaki listened to this story with wonder and growing understanding. Then, with her consent, Madhurapati released the city from the conflagration.

Kannaki said to herself, "I shall not rest till I join my lord." She went to the temple of Korravai (3) and broke her golden bangles in token of her widowhood. Then she left Madura city by the western gate, exclaiming, "My husband and I entered this city together by the eastern gate. Alas, I am going out, alone, by the western gate." She walked along the flooded banks of the *Vaigai*, like one possessed, reckless of whether there were hills or pits or stones or thorns on her path. Finally, she reached the hill sacred to **Neduvel** (4) and rested in a *Vengai* (5) grove crying out, "Oh, I am a great sinner." Some hill-folk went to where she was. Struck by her beauty and grave dignity, they asked her, "Are you the divine Valli, the consort of Vela?" "No," said she. "I am the unfortunate one who lost her husband by the unjust act of the great Pandyan, and set Madura in flames in my anger. I am waiting to be taken by my husband to heaven." They asked in wonder, "When will this marvel occur?" "In fourteen days," said Kannaki. The astonished hill-folk went to a near spot, and camped there in order to see the miracle. When fourteen days had passed, Indra himself went down to the hill in a divine air-ship with Kovalan, seated Kannaki by the side of Kovalan, and took her to heaven, saluting her as the Goddess of Chastity.

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3. Goddess of Victory ; Durga.
4. Muruga, or Vela, or Andi, or Subrahmanya, or Skanda.
5. The Kinn tree, *Pterocarpus bilobus*.

The simple hill-folk, who saw this, went at once and told their King, the Great Senguttuvan of the Chera country, about this wonderful happening, at his camp on the banks of the *Periyar* 5(*a*) in the vicinity. Sattan, the author of "*Manimekhalai*," was then a guest of Ilango Adigal, the King's brother, who had become a monk in order to falsify a prediction that he would become a king, and thus appease the fears of his elder brother, Senguttuvan. Sattan was present when the hill-folk narrated the marvel to the King. He told the King and the assembled persons the full story of the unjust execution of Kovalan, the death of Nedum Cheliyan and Kopperundevi, and the burning of Madura city. All listened with rapt attention. At last, Senguttuvan said, "It is good that the Great Pandyan died. Thereby, the Sceptre, which had become crooked by his act of injustice, has become straightened." Then, turning to his Queen Ilango-Venmal, he said to her, "One chaste lady fell dead embracing her husband's feet, saying, 'let me follow my lord.' Another, in wrath, set fire to Madura city, showed to the world the power of a chaste woman, and came to our kingdom and ascended bodily to heaven, escorted by her husband and by Indra. Speak, who is the greater one."

"May the Pandyan Queen, whose soul departed before she experienced the pangs of widowhood, enjoy heavenly bliss! Let us duly honour this Goddess of Chastity who ascended bodily to heaven from our land, by constructing a temple for her with a suitable idol," replied Ilango-Venmal.

Senguttuvan consulted his councillors. They said that the idol could be made with a slab taken from the sacred Podiyil hills and washed in the waters of the *Kaveri*, or from the Himalayas and washed in the holy *Ganges*. "It will be nothing grand for us to take a slab from the Podiyil Hills. Let us bring a slab from the mighty Himalayas, the abode of snow, the home of Uma, Gauri, Dakshayani and Sati," said Senguttuvan. His minister, Villavan Kodai, said, "May Your Majesty prosper! Your victories over the Konkanis, Kalingas, Karnatakas, Gangas, Kathis, Bengalis and Kadambas are famous. Your taking your mother to bathe in the *Ganges*, defeating the Aryan hosts, is still more famous. Proclaim a message to all Kings of

5. (*a*) Here, it means the *Bharata* or *Ponnani* river.

Jambudvipa,(6) as follows, by tom-toming in our city : 'We intend to lead a military expedition to the Himalayas merely in order to take a slab of stone to carve the image of a Goddess.' Seal a formal order to that effect with the Tiger, Fish and Bow emblems, the flags of the three Kingdoms of Tamil Nadu, and grant copies to the envoys of all the States of Jambudvipa at our Capital. These envoys will inform their kings speedily."

Senguttuvan did accordingly. The Aryan Kings of North India spoke contemptuously of the three Tamil Kings, and of the Tamils in general, on the occasion of the *swayamvara* of a princess of Kanauj, " It is almost impossible to believe that these puny princelings of the South were able to come North and carve on the Himalayas their emblems, the Bow, the Fish and the Tiger. There were then no kings in North India half as powerful as ourselves. So, these southerners, black as crows, came and crowed over the people here," said they. Several holy men from the Himalayas, who had gone to see Senguttuvan at Vanjikkaruvur, informed him about these contemptuous remarks. Senguttuvan was furious. He assembled his troops, and those of his allies, and marched with a mighty army northwards.

The Nootravarkannar or Satakarnis(7) aided him. They enabled him to cross the *Ganges* safely and comfortably in a fleet of boats. On the northern bank, Senguttuvan defeated a mighty Aryan army led by a regular league of princes, Uttara, Vichitra, Rudra, Bhairava, Chitra, Simha, Dhanurdhara, Sveta, Kanaka and Vijaya, and routed it with terrible slaughter. He gave no quarter, but pursued the fleeing enemy troops and killed thousands of them. Then he and Villavan Kodai marched on to the Himalayas, and had a suitable slab cut for making the image of the Goddess of Chastity.

On his return journey, Senguttuvan held a Durbar on the southern bank of the *Ganges*. The slab was bathed in the holy waters and exhibited. The Brahmin Madalan went there, and said to him, " Oh, great King, I bring you news from Madura and Puhar. Madari, ashamed at not being able to protect the guests entrusted to her by Kavundi, fell into a fire and committed suicide. Kavundi committed *sallekhana*, and starved

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6. India.
7. The Andhras.

herself to death. I went to Kaverippattinam and broke the news to the parents of Kovalan and Kannaki. Masathuvan gave away all his wealth, and entered a Buddhist monastery as a monk, disgusted with the world. His wife, Kovalan's mother, died broken-hearted, like Kannaki's mother. Kannaki's father, also, distributed to the poor everything he had, and entered the Ajivaka Order, and is now engaged in severe penance. Madhavi too was plunged in grief. She shaved her head and entered a Buddhist monastery. She took Manimekhalai too with her and initiated her as a novice."

"What happened to the wicked goldsmith, the root-cause of all this tragedy?" asked Senguttuvan.

"He was burnt in the great fire caused by Kannaki. All the goldsmiths of the town, a thousand in number, were offered up as human sacrifice to the Goddess of Chastity by Ver Cheliyan, the younger brother of Nedum Cheliyan, who has succeeded him, in order to avert a big drought. Rains fell in torrents after this sacrifice," said Madalan.

"How many things have happened since we left the south!" exclaimed Senguttuvan.

"Your Majesty must remember that it is thirty months since you started," replied the Brahmin.

Senguttuvan then weighed himself against gold, and gave it as a gift to Madalan.

He returned with his army and the precious slab, borne on the heads of Kanaka and Vijaya, to the Chera country. He sent a special ambassador, Neelan, to the Pandya and Chola Kings to tell them about his vindicating the honour of Tamil Nadu by chastising the arrogant Aryan Kings for their contemptuous remarks regarding the Tamils. But, the Chola and Pandya kings deprecated his senseless slaughter of a retreating and defeated foe, as unworthy of a Tamil king, and also deplored his disturbing the penance of the holy sages on the banks of the *Ganges* and in the Himalayan valleys with his vainglorious acts of war. When Neelan reported all this, Senguttuvan was angry with the other two Tamil kings for this criticism, and would fain have gone to war with them, but Madalan pacified him. He reminded him of the need to leave off worldly ambitions at his age and to take to prayers and

sacrifices for his soul's salvation, as befitted a great Kshatriya king like him. Senguttuvan then released the Aryan Kings, allotted to them a good mansion to live in, and arranged for a grand Vedic sacrifice to be performed under the auspices of Madalan, on the date of the consecration of the temple.

Then, on an auspicious day, the beautiful image of the Goddess of Chastity, carved out of the Himalayan slab, was installed in a fine temple(8) erected for that purpose in Vanjik-karuvur,(9) the Capital of the Chera Kingdom. All the prisoners were released, and all arrears of taxes remitted. The Vedic sacrifice was in full progress. Then, the idol of Kannaki was decorated with choice ornaments of the most exquisite work-manship and worshipped with flower-offerings.

Devandi, Visalakshi, Marakadam and Aiyai reached the place just then. Devandi told the King, "I am a friend of this Deity born in the Himalayas, and bathed in the *Ganges*, and now honoured and protected by you and the other Tamil Kings." Marakadam said, "I am the nurse of this fair one who did not show her anger even towards Madhavi, and went fearlessly hand-in-hand with her husband into the dreadful forests where even a drink of water could not be had." "I am the companion of this lady who left her house with her husband at once, like a model wife, without a word to her aged parents or nurse or me," said Visalakshi.

"Oh, dear one," said Devandi, addressing Kannaki's idol, "I was a fool. I could not see the meaning of the dream you narrated to me. Your mother and mother-in-law died of grief the moment they heard the news from Madura. Did you hear that, my friend?"

"Did you hear, little mother, about your father and father-in-law renouncing the world?" asked Marakadam.

"Oh, did you hear of the renunciation of Madhavi and Manimekhalai, more wonderful than that of the two elders?" asked Visalakshi.

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8. The famous temple at Cranganore.
9. Most probably, Tiruvanjikkalam, a mile from Cranganore, on the West Coast.

"Do you see this unmarried girl, Aiyai, the daughter of Madari who burnt herself to death because she could not see to the safety of Kovalan entrusted to her by Kavundi?" asked Devandi, pointing to Aiyai.

"Oh, what is this? What is this, this lightning-like figure with golden anklets, waist-belt, bangles and golden-ear-rings? Ah, it is Kannaki in the form of the Goddess of Chastity, showing herself in the air and blessing this ceremony," exclaimed Senguttuvan.

Kannaki showed her divine form to him, and said, "The Pandyan is blameless. He is now an honoured guest of Indra. He is like a father unto me, for he was the cause of my release from earthly bondage."

The maidens of Vanji then worshipped her with songs and dances. Devandi told Senguttuvan how the beautiful Manimekhalai, with coral lips, pearl-like teeth, fascinating breasts, well-rounded thighs, dark silken tresses, melting eyes and shapely feet, and already the most exquisite and natural denseuse of the day, had also entered the monastery. "Madhavi called her and removed her locks, and got her admitted," said she. 'Even the great saint, Aravana Adigal, exclaimed, "I am filled with grief at seeing her change in appearance at such an early age'."

"Oh, what a priceless gem has been thrown into the sea!" exclaimed Senguttuvan.

Devandi then became possessed by Sattan. The garland of flowers in her hair hung loose; her brows began to quiver; her coral lips were trembling; her white teeth formed a strange unearthly smile; her words were not normal; her face perspired; her eyes were red; and her hands were lifted up in a threatening manner. She said, "Among the audience present here are three beautiful girls, all two years old, the twin girls of Arattan Setti, and the little daughter of Sedakkudumbi. Madalan! know me to be Pashandan or Sattan appearing within the person of this Brahmin lady. I gave you a pot of water in a net-bag in the Mangala Devi temple; Sprinkle some of that water on these three girls, and they will forthwith remember their past births."

The astonished Madalan, who had been given a pot like that by the priest in that temple took it and sprinkled some water on those three little girls. At once, one of the daughters of Arattan Setti remembered her previous birth as the mother of Kannaki, and cried out, "Oh my daughter, Oh my darling! Why did you leave me without a word? Come and relieve me of my sorrow." Her twin sister remembered her previous birth as Kovalan's mother, and cried out, "In the darkness of the night you left with darling Kannaki, my son. Come back to me, and console me."

Madalan said, "Because of their equally great attachment to Kannaki in their past birth, they have been born in this birth as twin sisters."

The daughter of Sedakkudumbi remembered her previous birth as Madari, and cried out, "Oh, my dear! I heard the dreadful news at the river. Where did you go thereafter, my darling? Where have you hidden yourself?"

"Because of her devotion to Krishna in her previous birth, and performance of the *kuravai* dance to avert evil from Kannaki, she has now been born as the daughter of this priest of Vishnu's famous shrine at Adakamadam. (10) Good and bad deeds have their repercussions on the kind of re-birth we shall have. Certain it is that those who are born shall die, and that those who die will be reborn. Great King, born through the grace of Siva, pile up good deeds and avoid evil deeds!"

Senguttuvan endowed the temple of the Goddess of Chastity with the greatest munificence. He directed Devandi to offer daily worship in the temple with flowers, perfume and incense. Then he and the Kings of Avanti and Ceylon and the released Aryan princes circumambulated the shrine thrice, and offered their prayers. Gajabahu of Ceylon, the King of Malwa, the ruler of Kongu, and the Aryan Kings prayed to Kannaki, "Please grace our countries also with your Presence, just as you have done on this auspicious day at Imayavaramban's (11) sacrifice." Then a voice was heard, "I have granted the boon." Senguttuvan and other Kings praised the Deity in

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10. Anantasayanam at Trivandrum.

11. Senguttuvan. Literally, he whose frontier is the Himalayas.

pregnant words, and entered the sacrificial hall with Madalan. Devandi became once more god-possessed. She cried out, "Oh ye fortunate ones assembled here, who have heard the Goddess of Chastity speak! Be above pleasure and pain. Know God, and serve those who have known Him. Speak not falsehood. Avoid tale-bearing. Refrain from meat-eating. Abstain from inflicting unnecessary injury on others. Give gifts. Perform penances. Do not give false evidence. Never forget the good done to you. Despise bad friendship. Avoid the unrighteous. Seek the company of the wise and virtuous. Stick to truth always. Avoid other men's wives. Succour the helpless. Abstain from drinking, theft, adultery, falsehood and gay company. Youth, wealth and the body can never be everlasting. So, seek the path leading to Heaven, and cling on to it, ye denizens of the earth!"

Then, the whole assembly sang with one voice the following prayer to the Goddess of Chastity, specially composed for the occasion by Madalan :—

She made the Great city burn,
She made the rains fall in drought,
She made the Great Pandyan learn
The might of faith free from doubt.
Her husband was her only God,
For him she gave up ev'rything
She avenged the death of her lord,
And made poets about her sing.
Let's worship this Goddess Great
Who to Heaven went in State,
Let her, for eternity,
Be the Goddess of Chastity!

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