THE GREAT TWIN-EPICS OF TAMIL

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KAZHAGAM

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V. KANAKASABHAI.

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BY

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FOREWORD BY

Prof. T. P. MEENAKSHISUNDARANAR

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V. KANAKASABHAI

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We have great pleasure in presenting to the English Reading Lovers of Tamil Literature a short resume and commentary in simple English prose of the two ancient Tamil Epics 'Chilappathikaram' and 'Manimekalai'.

This book is a part of that classic work of the early twentieth Century entitled "The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago" by Sri. V. Kanakasabhai, which was first published in 1904 and which had been long out of print. While engaged in bringing out a new edition of that great work of V. Kanakasabhai for the benefit of the English Reading Lovers of Tamil, we were greatly struck and impressed by the brilliance and completeness of his two chapters on Chilappathikaram and Manimekalai. We therefore decided to publish these two chapters separately in this booklet. They give us a peep into the land that was "Tamil India" eighteen hundred years ago and an insight of its civilisation at that time.

Of the two, Manimekalai is the earlier and undoubtedly the better. It deals with the Buddhist India of those days and the extent to which Buddhism

had spread in Southern India at the beginning of the second century, A. D. and as such it is of great importance and a source of great interest to the Buddhist nations. The author of Chilappathikaram is considered to be a Jain and it naturally follows that every fact relating to the religious, political and social aspects of life of that age is portrayed through the eyes of a Jain. Chilappathikaram has thus a far more universal appeal, as it represents the golden age in South India when every current activity in the world flowed through the land of the Tamils and enriched their civilisation. As a work of art both will compare very favourably with the best in any other language or literature old or new, though for the Tamils they are bound to have an abiding place in their hearts as the two great epics in their language.

We hope this booklet will serve as a useful aid to those who wish in a short time to get acquainted with these two epics and create in the reader a desire to read the originals themselves.

We sincerely thank prof. T. P. Meenakshisundaranar, M. A., B. L., for writing the foreword to the book and Mr. I. D. Thangaswami for allowing us to incorporate the poetic piece "Ilango's Exhortation" from his publication on Chilappathikaram.

FOREWORD

The earliest epic in Tamil is Chilappatikaram. The three divisions of the Tamil literature (Muthamizh) poetry, music and drama are harmoniously combined in this unique production.

The name of the work "Chilappatikaram', meaning the "Role of the Anklet" indicates the theme of its story which revolves round the anklet of the heroine.

The heroine, Kannaki, one of the heroines to be more precise, is the ideal of Tamil womanhood. She represents the ideal wife and the embodiment of chastity. In spite of her beauty and virtues, her husband, enticed by the glamour of an actress deserts her and spends his time in the company of the actress. Kannaki's love and devotion for her husband is not however diminished by her husband's infidelity and she willingly parts with all her valuable jewels at her husband's request, to afford him happiness in the company of the actress, until she is left with only the pair of her anklets.

Finally the husband returns to his wife and Kannaki walks with the anklets in the company of her husband to Madhurai where he intends to start a fresh life with the sale proceeds of one of her anklets. In Madhurai he meets with the king's

Jeweller who only a little while ago stole one of the Queen's anklets similar to the one of the heroine's anklets. When the husband offers his wife's anklet to the king's Jeweller for sale, the latter with the view to save himself, accuses the new comer with the theft of the Queen's anklet before the king. Fate intervenes and the king intending to say "Seize the anklet and the accused for being killed" says "Seize the anklet after killing the thief".

The stranger is beheaded and Kannaki on hearing the news rushes before the king with the other anklet in her hands to vindicate her husband's innocence. She calls on the king to prove the justice of his verdict and states how her husband had one of her own anklets and not that of the Queen. When the king finds that the anklet in her hand was studded with rubbies, while that of the Queen had pearls, the king is smitten with grief at his unjust verdict and drops down dead.

The wrath of the heroine however continues unabated and she utters the curse that the whole city of Mathurai shall be burnt. Far from being the Lady of Benevolence and Virtue, she becomes the lady of indignation incarnate and as the result of her curse the city is burnt. She herself wanders along the banks of Vaigai to Chenkunram or the Red hills in the Chera Country.

An admiring crowd of Kuravas of the hill tribe see her giving up the ghost but she soon is transformed into a Goddess. She becomes a new diety "the Lady or Goddess of the anklet" worshipped by kings and the common folk. The sovereign of the land, Chenguttava Chera paid his homage to the new diety and her faith and her splendour spread to the lands far and near.

Though essentially dealing with the ideal of Hindu womanhood and chastity, the master hand of the author makes the work a national epic of the Tamils. The three kings of the Tamilnad, Chera, Chola and Pandya and their respective kingdoms are vividly portrayed and form its back-ground. As an epic with poetry, music and dance entwined into it and with the wealth of its back-ground and local colour it stands unique and preeminent in the history of the epic poetry of the various nations. Further it is remarkable that its author is a prince of the Chera family, himself a royal prince, singing the glory of an ordinary woman who becomes a Goddess winning the homage of princes and potentates.

The other ancient epic in Tamil is Manimékalai which is really a sequel to the Chilappatikaram as it is the story of the daughter

of the Actress who enticed the husband from the heroine of Chilappatikaram. The art of the public woman and the cult of the vestal virgin combined in Greece to produce the most accomplished womanhood, in spite of its inherent and potential dangers to the society and to the individual. Perhaps, some such institution blossomed forth in all its grandeur and glory, in the Tamil Country, enriched by the Hellenic contact. The Parattai of the Sangam Age cannot be understood otherwise. Mary Magdalene was the finest product of this Hellenic culture and she was made whole and perfect, at the feet of Jesus on the Cross, where she stood transformed into an embodiment of Holy Love - the new spirit vivifying dead beauty. Mathavi the beloved of Kovalan, the husband of Kannaki was one such woman; in her daughter Mani-mekalai the finest product of the Tamil Parattai family, womanhood reaches its perfection and ideal. In spite of the religious bigotry of the author, this epic is great for its poetic beauty and spiritual message. The tragic seriousness of Chilappatikaram is relieved by a sly humour in this epic; for, according to tradition both the epics form a twin epic.

Various problems of history and philosophy find a place in these epics, but neverthless they shine

as the finest poetry. The stories of these two epics have been written in English, true to the original, by the late Mr. V. Kanakasabhai the worthy product of the admixture of the two great cultures—Tamil and English, in his monumental work "The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago". The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevelly, Ltd., is bringing out the long sought for edition of that work. But that work deals with so many problems of Tamil history in which the general reader may not be interested. Therefore, the Publishing House has to be congratulated for issuing the story of the epics separately in this volume.

Madras,
21—7—1956. } T. P. MEENAKSHISUNDARAN.

I

The Story of Chilapp-athikaram

Far more interesting than the Muppal, are the epic poems Chilapp-athikaram and Mani-mekalai, which contain very full and vivid accounts of ancient Tamil Society. The Chilapp-athikaram relates the tragic story of Kovilan and his wife Kannaki, and the Mani-mekalai gives a romantic account of Kovilan's daughter who became a Buddhist nun. The story of the Chilapp-athikaram may be briefly told as follows:—

One of the most flourishing of the ancient cities of Jambudvipa[1] was Pukâr or Kâvirip-paddinam, the great sea-port at the mouth of the river Kâviri. It was a mart of many nations. Caravans from inland cities, far and near, thronged its thorough-fares; and merchant vessels from distant lands, whose people spoke strange tongues, crowded its harbour. Among the merchant princes of this city there was one noted for his deeds of charity, Mânâykan, whose daughter Kannaki was warmly

1. That portion of Asia which is south of the Himalayan plateau was known as Jambudvipa.

praised by all who knew her, for the charms of her person, and the purity of her mind. In the same city, lived another merchant Mâchâttuvan, master of untold wealth, whose son Kovilan was a most accomplished youth, gay and handsome as the God of War. The two merchants having agreed to unite their children in marriage, the wedding of Kannaki and Kovilan was performed with such pomp as was rarely seen even in the proud city of Pukâr. Shortly after their marriage, the young couple were installed by their parents in a spacious mansion furnished with every luxury that wealth could command. A numerous suite of attendants served them, and ministered to their comforts. Kovilan loved his young wife, and called her his darling and his beauty, his peerless pearl and priceless gem. He vowed that she was more graceful than the peacock, that she stepped more prettily than the playful swan ever did, and that her voice was sweeter than that of any parrot. He chided her servant maids for adorning her with jewels and flowers, which could not add to her beauty, and whose weight, he complained, her slender waist could not bear. Beloved by her husband, Kannaki's joy was full, and she entered upon her duties as mistress of his house with infinite delight. To feast her husband's guests, to welcome the ascetics

and Brahmins who visited the house, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked were duties always pleasant to her loving and tender heart. Ever busy in doing good to others, and beloved by all, her days were bright and unclouded; and the first few years of her married life glided away happily.[1]

Karikâl the Great was then the monarch of the Chola kingdom. He had fortified Pukâr and made it his capital. As he was the most powerful and enlightened ruler in Dakshinapatha or Southern India at this period, his friendship was sought by the kings of Avanti, Mâlava and Magadha. His brilliant court was the scene of much revelry, and many an actress sang and danced in the presence of the monarch to amuse him and his courtiers. Mâthavi, a young and beautiful actress, who claimed descent from the celestial actresses in the court of Indra, made her first entry on the stage in the presence of the king, his nobles and the rich men of the city. She sang and danced with such exquisite skill and grace that the monarch awarded her the highest prize given on such occasions, that is, a necklace of 1,008 gold coins. Kovilan who was an accomplished musician, and passionately fond of music, was charmed by her performance and wished to make the acquaintance of the young actress. In

1. Chillap-athikaram, Cantos 1 and 2.

a fit of enthusiastic admiration for the sweet song-stress who ravished his ears, he purchased the prize necklace which was offered for sale, and presented it again to her. Admitted to her presence, he was struck with the beautiful and dazzling form of the actress, which appeared most attractive when least adorned. Her radiant face and sparkling wit were so fascinating that forgetting his faithful wife, he fell in love with the actress, and was unable to quit her society. Mâthavi accepted the young rich merchant as her lover, and day after day he spent in the company of the bewitching actress, and lavished upon her all the wealth amassed by his ancestors.[1] In course of time Mâthavi gave birth to a lovely daughter. On the fifth day after the birth of the child, one thousand dancing girls met at Mâthavi's house, and with great ceremony they blessed the child and named her Manimekalai, as desired by Kovilan, the favourite deity of whose ancestors was Manimekhala, the goddess of the ocean. Kovilan gave away handfuls of gold to the Brahmins who assisted at the ceremony.[2] The birth of the child seemed to strengthen the ties of affection between Mâthavi and Kovilan, and he became more attached to the actress than ever. A few years of the gay and luxurious life he led drained his

1. Ibid., Canto 3.
2. Ibid., Canto XV., 21-41.

resources. Having spent all his patrimony, he began to remove and sell one by one, the jewels of his wife, who willingly parted with them, in order to please her husband whom she continued to love as faithfully as she did in the days when no rival had estranged his affections.

The annual festival in honour of Indra was celebrated with much pomp and splendour in the city of Pukâr. The joyous city put on its gayest appearance during the festivities which lasted eight and twenty days. On the first day of the festival the king attended in person the opening ceremonies. He started from his palace, surrounded by an imposing cavalcade consisting of the chief officers of State, the five great assemblies, the eight groups of attendants, and the nobility and gentry of the city, mounted on horses, elephants or chariots, and proceeded to the banks of the Kâviri. In the presence of the king, the sacred water of the river was filled in golden pots by youths of the royal family, and the procession then marched to the temple of Indra, where the image of the king of gods was bathed with the sacred water amid the acclamations of the multitude, and the flourish of musical instruments.[1] At the close of the festival, the princes and nobles with all their retinue bathed in the sea at the mouth

1. Ibid., Canto 5.

of the river Kâviri. On the last night of one of these festivals, Mâthavi wished to see the spectacle at the beach, of people bathing and sporting in the sea. She decked herself with her magnificent jewels, in the most charming style, and drove in a carriage, accompanied by a few of her female attendants. Kovilan rode on a mule followed by a number of his footmen. They wended their way through the market road to the beach, where were many gay parties bathing in the sea or seated in the open air, and they rested themselves on a sofa, which had been placed by their attendants, within an enclosure of painted canvas, under the shade of a *Punnai* tree, which was then in full blossom. After resting a while, Mâthavi received from the hands of her maid Vasantamâlai, her favorite lute.[1] It was beautifully painted and polished and a garland of fresh flowers was wound round its handle. She tuned the instrument and handed it to her lover, begging to know his wishes. Kovilan who was tempted by the gay scenes around him to give vent to his joyous feelings in song, began to play on the lute, and sang, in a fine melodious voice, a few sonnets in praise of the river Kâviri, and the ancient city of Pukâr. Then he poured forth a number of love songs describing the alluring beauty of a girl of the fisherman tribe,

1. Ibid., Canto VI.

whose eyes were as sharp as arrows in piercing the hearts of men, and who was herself a cruel murderess, for those who set their eyes on her died broken-hearted. Mâthavi, who listened with pleasure to the masterly manner in which Kovilan sang and played on the lute, fancied that the verses were meant to refer to herself, and that her lover was beginning to dislike her. Receiving the lute from her lover's hand, she began to sing in a voice so sweet and enchanting that it soothed and gladdened the hearts of every one who had the good fortune to listen to it. She too sang of the river Kâviri and of the city of Pukâr, and then a few songs which describe the lament of a girl of the fisherman tribe for her absent lover, as follows :—

Pretty flower! bright and blooming,
Oh! how happy art thou sleeping:
While with sleepless eyes and lonely,
Waiting for him I am weeping.

Lovely flower! full of honey,
Art thou dreaming that my lover,
In this moonlight soft and pleasant,
Cometh back into my bower?

The birds have flown away to roost
The glowing sun has set:
But still I wait with streaming eyes
Where last my love I met.

The moon doth shed its light so mild
All over land and sea
This pleasant eve, our trysting time
Doth not my lover see?

The wild pine shades the sandy banks
Where he my love did woo:
Now, all my sports I have forgot,
And all my playmates too.

Though he has gone forsaking me,
I hold him in my heart:
His dear image shall not fade,
Till death my life doth part.

These verses were sung with such deep pathos, that Kovilan who was all attention and intoxicated with the thrilling music of her voice suspected that Mâthavi had set her heart on another man, and wild with jealousy, he quitted her abruptly, observing that it was very late, and went away followed by his attendants. Mâthavi, who was grieved at the strange conduct of her lover, returned home immediately in her carriage.[1]

It was early summer now, a season in which Love reigns supreme in the Tamil-land. The southern breezes which set in at this season carried his messages throughout Love's chosen realm: and the cuckoo which warbled in every flowery grove

1. Ibid., Canto VII.

acted as his trumpeter. Mâthavi who was unhappy owing to the absence of her lover, went up to her summer bed room, in the upper storey of her mansion, and seated on a couch tried to console herself with the charms of music. She took the lute in her hand and essayed to sing, but such was the agitation of her mind that she could not hum more than a few words. She began to play on the lute, and struck a mournful tune; and even in this she failed. Longing to meet Kovilan, she took the thin bud of the *Piththikai*, and dipping it in red cotton paint, wrote a missive to her lover on the fragrant petal of a flower of the wildpine. "Mild summer," she wrote, "who turns the thoughts of all living creatures to Love, is now the prince regent. The silvery moon who appears at sunset frowns at lovers who are parted from each other. And the great monarch Love will not fail to shoot with his flowery darts every maiden who is not united to her lover. Bear these in mind, and have mercy on me." Calling her maid Vasanta-Mâlai, she gave the letter into her hands, bidding her to present it to Kovilan. Vasanta-Mâlai took the epistle accordingly, and meeting Kovilan in the market road, offered it to him. He declined however to read it, and told her "I know your mistress too well. Trained to act any part on the stage, she

is capable of every kind of dissimulation, you may take the letter back to your mistress." Vasanta-Mâlai retraced her steps with grief and informed her mistress that Kovilan had declined to receive her letter: and Mâthavi retired to bed, sorrowfully saying to herself, "He is sure to come in the morning, even if he does not appear to-night."[1]

On that same evening, Kannaki was seated in her mansion alone and gloomy, she was now a prey to melancholy. Her eye lids were not painted; her hair was not combed and she wore no ornament save the marriage badge on her neck.[2]

Devanti, a Brahmin woman who came to console Kannaki, sprinkled grass and rice on her, and blessed her saying "may you regain the love of your husband." "Alas! I fear I shall not enjoy that happiness again," said Kannaki, "I dreamt that my husband took me to a great city, and while we were there, strangers accused us of a grave crime. My husband met with a serious misfortune, and I went to plead his cause before the king. Evil befell the king and his great city; but I and my husband attained a bliss which you would not believe, if I told you." "Your husband does not hate you," rejoined Devanti, "In

1. Ibid,, Canto VIII.
2. Ibid., Canto IV. 47 to 57.

your former birth, you failed to keep a vow. The evil effects of that sin may be removed, if you bathe in the two tanks sacred to the Sun and Moon, at the mouth of the river Kâviri, and worship the God of Love at his temple. We shall go one day and bathe in those tanks."

"It is not proper for me to do so," said Kannaki. A servant-maid then announced that Kovilan had entered the house, and Kannaki hastened to meet her lord. Kovilan entered his bedroom, and drawing his wife near to him, noted her sad look and thin body worn by grief.

"I am ashamed of myself" said he, "I have wasted all the wealth given to me by my parents on a deceitful actress." "There is yet a pair of anklets" said Kannaki smiling, "you can have them." "Listen to me, dear girl," he said, "with these anklets for my capital, I wish to trade again and recover my fortune. I intend going to the famous city of Madura, and thou shalt go with me." Kannaki's joy was great to see her husband come back to her, renouncing the actress, and she was prepared to accompany him to any corner of the world.[1]

Long before daybreak the husband and wife quitted their home without the knowledge of their

1. Ibid Can. IX.

servants. In the dark and still night, they drew the bolt of the outer gate without noise and came out into the street. They passed the temple of Vishnu, and the seven Buddhist Vihâras believed to have been erected by Indra, and approaching the pedestal of polished stone on which Nigrantha monks used to sit and preach their doctrine, they reverently went round it, and walked down the broad road leading to the fort gate. Coming out of the fort they passed through the royal park and reached the bank of the river Kâviri: then turning westwards along the northern bank of the river, they walked on for a distance of about a *kavatham* and arrived at a nunnery of the Nigrantha sect. Here they halted in a grove: and Kannaki who was panting, after her unusual exertion, gave rest to her aching feet. She then asked her husband in her artless way, "where is the ancient city of Madura?"

"It is five, six *kavathams* beyond our country, it is not far," replied Kovilan, laughing at the ignorance of his wife. He ought to have said it was five times six or thirty *kavathams* away: but being afraid that she may be frightened at the distance, he disguised the expression, so that she may believe it was only 5 or 6 *kavathams*. It being daylight now, they both entered the nunnery and

saluted a *Kavunthi*[1] or nun, who was lodging in it. The nun observed with surprise the handsome features and noble appearance of the pair, and enquired why they had quitted their home, and like destitute persons journeyed on foot.

"I have nothing more to say than that I wish to go to Madura to seek my fortune there," said Kovilan.

"It will be no easy task for this delicate lady," said the nun, pointing to "Kannaki to walk over rough roads and through wild woods the long distance you have to go. I beseech you to desist from this adventure: but you seem bent on going to Madura. I too have been for some time past wishing to visit Madura, and to learn the doctrines of Argha as taught by the wise and learned men of that city. I shall therefore accompany you: and we shall start together."

"Reverend nun!" said Kovilan thankfully, "if thou art pleased to go with us, I need not feel any anxiety for the safety of my wife."

The nun dwelt on the dangers and difficulties of the road to Madura, and warned Kovilan specially to be on his guard against causing pain or death to

1. Kanti is the designation of a Nigrantha nun or female devotee.

living creatures, however small or insignificant, as it was a sin denounced as heinous by the Nigranthas. Praying to Argha for a safe journey, she slung her alms-bowl on her shoulder, and taking a bundle of peacock feathers in her hand, she too started on the journey. By short marches they travelled through a fertile country where fields covered with waving corn, luxuriant plantations of the sugarcane, and green woods with hamlets nestling in their shade met their eyes on every side. They forgot the fatigue of their journey, when they heard the roar of floods rushing through sluices and locks into the channels branching from the Kâviri, the joyous chorus of women working in the fields, and the merry songs and shouts of men driving the oxen yoked to their ploughs, or urging the buffaloes which were treading the sheafs of corn reaped from the fields. After travelling for many days they arrived at an island in the middle of the Kâviri, where in a garden which was full of sweet-scented flowers, they met a Nigrantha monk, at whose feet they fell and prayed for his blessing. The sage, who could read by the light of his serene mind the past and future lives of those who stood before him, addressed the nun in the following manner: "Mark my words, thou pious nun! No one can escape the effects of his good or evil deeds. Even like the

seeds which are sown and yield a harvest of their kind, our deeds react upon us. Like lights set upon a plain which go out when the wind blows, our souls go out of our bodies. Only those whose minds have been enlightened by the truths preached by Argha can save themselves from this prison of re-births."

"To the end of my life," replied the Kavunthi reverently, "I will worship none but Argha and believe in no precepts but those revealed in his Agamas." The monk was pleased with the words spoken by the nun and blessed her and her fellow passengers saying, "May you be freed from the bonds of desire!" The travellers then got into a boat and landing on the southern bank of the river entered the city of Uraiyur.[1]

They lodged in a Nigrantha monastery at Uraiyur, and worshipped the resplendent image of Argha, which was placed under a triple umbrella, beneath the shade of an Asoka tree. They stayed one whole day in the monastery, and on the next morning they started with the early dawn, and travelling till sunrise they arrived at a pleasant garden surrounded by cool tanks and verdant meadows. While they were resting in this garden, a Brahmin pilgrim also happened to arrive. He

1. Chilapp-athikaram, Canto X.

said that he was a native of Mankadu in the Chera country; that he had travelled through the Pandyan land and was going to worship the images of Vishnu at Arankam or Venkadam. Kovilan enquired of him the different routes to Madura and the nature of the roads. In reply to him the Brahmin said, "It is a pity you have come with this lady at a season when the fierce rays of the sun dry up and heat the surface of the earth; and travelling is far from pleasant. The road from Uraiyur up to the great tank at Kodumbai[1] lies through rocks and narrow defiles and thence there are three routes to Madura. The route on the right hand will take you through a wild region, where water is scarce, and lawless tribes harass the passengers. On that road you will see the Sirumalai hills, on which every kind of fruit tree grows in abundance. Keeping to the left side of the mountain you will arrive at Madura. If you take instead the route on the left hand, from Kodumbai, you will have to travel through fields and jungles and weary wastes to the mountain, whose summit is crowned with a temple of Vishnu, and whose base is washed by the river Silambu. Near that mountain, there is a valley, which is guarded by a goddess who may give you trouble. Praying to Vishnu for help, you should

1. Now known as Kodumpalur.

pass through this valley and reach Madura. Between these two routes there is a middle path which is more convenient, as it passes through woodlands and hamlets, and you may safely take that road." Having ascertained the easiest route, they pursued their journey to Madura. In the course of their journey, Kannaki having complained for her sore feet and fatigue, one day they had to stop at a Kali temple, in a village inhabited by Vedas.[1] Here they witnessed the weird dance of the priestess of Kali, who, attired like that dread goddess, stood up in the village common, and trembling all over as if she was possessed by a devil, declared in terrific tones that the goddess Kali was incensed, as the Maravar had not offered any sacrifice at her temple, for some time past, and that they should now bestir themselves, and attack the herds of cattle in neighbouring villages.[2] Having learnt that in the land of the Pandyas, there was no fear of robbers or wild beasts on the highways, Kovilan proposed that they should travel at night instead of during the day, as Kannaki was unable to bear the heat of the sun or to walk on the hot ground. The nun having agreed to this plan, they started from the Vedar Village after sunset. Though there was

1. Chilapp-athikaram, Canto XI.
2. Ibid., Canto XII.

a bright moon, the timid Kannaki, afraid to walk out at night, followed close to her husband, resting one hand on his shoulder, while the Kavunthi beguiled the way with many a story which she had learnt from her religious books. Travelling all night, they arrived early in the morning at a Brahmin village. Leaving his wife with the Kavunthi in the garden, he lifted the thorny branches which formed its fence, and went towards a pond. Kausika a Brahmin who approached the pond at the same time, being doubtful as to whether he was Kovilan, exclaimed as follows, pretending to speak to a flowery creeper: "Thou creeper, why art thou faded? Dost thou suffer from the heat of this early summer, like thy namesake the long-eyed Mâthavi,[1] who pines for her absent lover Kovilan?" Hearing these words Kovilan asked Kausika what he meant by his exclamation. Recognizing Kovilan at once that Brahmin informed him that as soon as it was known that he and his wife had left their home, his servants were sent out in all directions to search for him and bring him home. His aged parents were sunk in profound grief and all his relations were unhappy. Mâthavi having come to know of his disappearance was overcome with grief. Hearing of her distress, the Brahmin went to visit

1. Mathavi is also the name of a flowery creeper.

her and she entreated him to carry a letter to her lover, who was dear to her as the apple of her eye. Taking charge of the letter he went to many places, in search of Kovilan, and had the good luck to meet him there. Saying thus, the Brahmin handed to him a roll of palm-leaf. The perfumed leaf reminded him of the fragrant tresses of the actress and with no little tremor he unfolded the palm-leaf and read it. "I fall at thy honoured feet," wrote Mâthavi, "and beg you will graciously read my simple words. I know not any fault on my part which could have led you to quit thy home in the night, with thy gentle wife, and without the knowledge of thy parents. May thy pure and noble heart be pleased to remove our sorrow." He read it with pleasure and felt relieved, as he was now satisfied that his suspicions against Mâthavi were ill-founded. "Make haste" said he to the Brahmin, "and let my parents know that I am safe, and tell them not to grieve for my absence." Returning to the garden where his wife and the nun were staying, he joined a band of musicians, and pleased them by his skilful play on the lute. From them he learnt that Madura was within a few hours' journey and that they could travel without any fear. As on the previous day, the three again travelled at night, and in the early dawn they were delighted to hear the

distant sounds of drums. Walking on, they heard the trumpeting of elephants, the neighing of steeds, the chant of Vedic hymns, and the songs of war-bards coming to their ears in a mingled roar, like the noise of waves on the seashore. Their hearts were elated with joy, and when they approached the classic stream of the Vaigai, the theme of many a poet's song, they felt they were treading on sacred ground. Avoiding the public ferry where a continuous stream of passengers crossed the river on boats whose prows were shapped like the head of a horse or a lion or an elephant, they went to a small ferry, which was less frequented, and crossing over on a raft they reached the southern bank of the river. Keeping to the left of the city, they went round to the eastern gate, and entered a village, which was outside the walls of the city, in the midst of groves of areca and cocoanut palms, where only ascetics and men devoted to religion resided.[1]

Early on the next day when the sound of the morning drum at the palace and at the various temples in the city was heard outside the city walls, Kovilan approached the nun and saluting her reverently, said "Pious nun! Having forsaken the path of virtue I was the cause of much misery to my poor wife, and we have suffered great hardships

1. Chilapp-athikaram. Canto XIII.

in travelling through unknown countries. I shall now go into the city and make the acquaintance of the merchants there. Until I come back, may I leave my wife in thy care?"

"Many have suffered in the past for the woman they loved" replied the nun, "Know you not the story of Rama who obeying the commands of his father, went into exile with his wife, and losing her, was for a long time a prey to intense grief. Another king played at dice and lost his kingdom: then fleeing into a forest with his wife, deserted her at mid-night. You at least are not so unfortunate as those kings. You have still got your wife with you. Be not disheartened, therefore, but go into the city, and enquire where you can find a suitable lodging and return."

Having taken leave of the nun, Kovilan entered the city passing through the gate which was guarded by Yavana soldiers who stood with drawn swords. With wonder he beheld the grand city, its broad streets, and the storied mansions of the opulent classes. Till mid-day he strolled through the market, the merchants' streets and the public squares, and unable to bear the heat of the noon-day sun, he walked back under the shade of the numerous flags which lined the streets.[1] While he

1. Ibid, Canto XIV.

was describing to the nun the grandeur of Madura, the happiness of its population and the power of the Pandyan king, Madalan, a Brahmin pilgrim from Thalaich-Chenkanam, a village near Pukâr, arrived at the grove where they were staying. Kovilan who had known him before saluted him. The Brahmin was surprised to learn that Kovilan had travelled on foot, with his wife, to Madura. He praised the many generous acts done by Kovilan while at Pukâr, and wondered why one, who had been so kind and benevolent to the poor and the unlucky, should himself suffer misfortune. Both he and the nun advised Kovilan to enter the city before sunset and secure suitable quarters among the merchants' houses, as it was not proper for them to stay outside with ascetics and religious mendicants. During their conversation, Mathari, a shepherdess, who was returning to Madura, after worshipping the image of a goddess outside the city, saluted the nun.

"Listen to me, Mathari!" said the nun who thought it best to entrust Kannaki to the care of the shepherdess, "If the merchants of this city come to know the name of the father of this lady's husband, they would hasten to welcome him to their house, and deem it an honour to have him as their guest; but until he makes their acquaintance

and finds a proper lodging I entrust this lady to thy care. Take her to your house, and let her bathe and change her dress. Paint her eyelids, and give her flowers to wear in her air. Take care of her as if she was your own daughter. Brought up in affluence, her soft little feet had seldom touched the bare ground in her native city: and yet in the long journey she has now made she felt not her own fatigue, but grieved that her husband exposed himself to the hot sun, and was ever attentive to his wants. So loving and faithful a wife I have not seen. Take her with you, and do not tarry." Mathari was only glad to render any assistance to so amiable a young lady as Kannaki; and about sunset when the shepherds were returning with herds of lowing cows from their grazing grounds, she accompanied by Kannaki, and followed by a number of shepherdesses, entered the city, and led Kannaki to her house.[1]

Mathari, who was really proud to have such noble guests as Kannaki and her husband, vacated for their use a neat little cottage, which was fenced round, and the walls of which were painted with red earth. She assisted Kannaki in bathing and changing her dress, and introducing her daughter, said 'Fair lady! my daughter Ayyai shall be thy

1. Ibid., Canto XV.

maid-servant, and we shall see that thou and thy husband are in want of nothing while you stay here.' On the next morning, she provided new vessels for cooking, fine white rice, vegetables such as the tender fruits of the mango, pomegranate and plantain, and milk fresh drawn from her cows. Kannaki set to work at once to prepare the morning meal. She sliced the fruits carefully, and Ayyai assisted her in lighting the oven. She cooked the rice and vegetables to the best of her knowledge, and as she exposed herself to the heat of the oven, her eyes became red and drops of sweat trickled down her face. Having finished the cooking, she invited her husband to take his meals, and placed a small mat, prettily made of white dry grass, for his seat. After he had washed his hands and feet and taken his seat on the mat, she sprinkled water and cleansed the floor in front of his seat, and spreading out a tender plantain leaf on the clean floor, she served upon the leaf the food prepared by her. Kovilan offered the usual prayers which are prescribed to the merchant caste, and then ate the food set before him. When he had refreshed himself, and taken his seat apart, Kannaki offered him betel leaves and arecanuts to chew. Inviting her to come near him, Kovilan said, "How much our aged parents must have suffered at the thought that thy

tender feet could not walk over the rough paths we have travelled? Is this all a dream or the effect of my sins? I shudder at the thought what fate yet awaits us. Will heaven yet smile on a sinner like me, who loved the company of idlers and rakes, who scorned the advice of my elders, who failed in my duty to my parents, and caused no little pain to so young and virtuous a wife as yourself? Never did I pause to think what evil course I pursued: and yet you readily followed me when I asked you to venture on this distant journey. Alas! what have you done?"

"Your revered parents," replied Kannaki," whenever they visited me, and found me receiving them with a smiling face, praised my patience, and consoled me with kind words, as they knew that heavy sorrow weighed down my heart and that I neglected even the household duties in which I had once taken great pleasure. Because I did not express my grief, and tried to conceal it from them, they appeared all the more distressed. Though you led a life which no one liked, I had not the heart to refuse even your slightest wish and I could not but follow you when you asked me to do so."

"You left your dear parents, and your devoted servants and friends, and with only your virtues for your safeguard, you followed me and

shared my sorrows. You have been indeed a ministering angel to me in my distress. Let me now take one of your anklets for sale, and until I return, stay you here and be not afraid that I leave you alone," said Kovilan, and embracing her tenderly, he took one of her anklets, and left the cottage. Tears dropped down his manly cheeks, but he brushed them aside before any one could notice it; and with staggering steps he walked through the shepherd street and passed on through the road where courtezans reside and reached the market road. He met there a man coming up the road, followed by a number of workmen and distinguished by his dress which consisted of a long coat in addition to the usual dress of a Tamil. Learning that he was the chief jeweller to the Pandyan king, he approached the goldsmith and enquired "Can you value an anklet fit to be worn by the queen?"

"Your servant" replied the jeweller saluting Kovilan with both his hands, "may not be able to estimate the value correctly, but he manufactures crowns and other jewels for the king."

Kovilan took the jewel out of the cloth in which he had folded it, and showed it to the goldsmith, who was amazed to find it to be a superb anklet set with emeralds and diamonds and engraved

most beautifully. "None but the queen is worthy of wearing this jewel," exclaimed he, "Stay here near my humble abode, I shall inform the king and let you know his wishes." Kovilan took his seat accordingly within the enclosure of a temple adjoining the goldsmith's house. The goldsmith thought to himself, "this jewel resembles exactly the queen's anklet which I have stolen; I may therefore accuse this stranger of having stolen it, before the king finds any reason to suspect me of the theft" and went direct to the palace. He approached the king as he was about to enter the queen's apartments, and falling at the king's feet reported as follows:— "The thief who without a crowbar or a shovel, but with only the help of his incantations, caused the palace guards to fall asleep, and stole the queen's anklet: and who eluded the vigilant search of the city guards hitherto, is now in my little cottage." The king called some of the guards and commanded them to see if the anklet is in the thief's hands, and if it is, to kill the thief and bring the jewel. The goldsmith, glad to find that his scheme succeeded so well, led the guards to Kovilan's presence, and told him, "These soldiers have come to see the anklet under the orders of the king." Kovilan showed the jewel to them. They looked at the jewel and at Kovilan, and taking the goldsmith aside, said

"This man's appearance is noble: he certainly is not a thief."

"Thieves are armed with spells and drugs," said the cunning goldsmith "if you delay carrying out the king's orders, he may make himself invisible by this incantations, or he may throw you into a profound sleep by the use of his drugs. In any case, you will incur the displeasure of the king and suffer punishment."

"Have any of you," he further asked them," traced that thief, who during the day sat at the palace gate, attired like the courier of a foreign king, and after nightfall entered the palace in the disguise of a servant maid and walking along the shadow of the pillars, found his way into the bedroom of the king's brother and removed the necklace from the prince's person: and who, when the prince awoke and drew his sword to cut down the thief, defended himself with the scabbard, and disappeared dexterously behind a pillar, leaving the prince to wrestle with that pillar of stone." "Thieves are extremely cunning," said one of the soldiers, "I remember on a dark and rainy night, when I was going my rounds in the city, there appeared before me suddenly a burglar armed with a crowbar, and prowling like a hungry tiger. I drew my sword, but he snatched it from my hands and in the dark-

ness of the night I found neither him nor my sword again. Comrades! we must decide quickly what to do: or we shall be surely punished by the king." Scarcely had he ceased speaking when another soldier, an illiterate youth, drew his sword, and with one stroke of the shining blade beheaded Kovilan. His body dropped down and the crimson blood gushed out on the earth.[1]

Meanwhile, in the shepherd's quarter of the city, the shepherd lasses held a sacred dance for the good of their cattle and for the amusement of Kannaki. One of the girls personated Krishna, their national hero, another represented Baladeva, his elder brother, and a third appeared as the shepherdess, who was the favourite mistress of Krishna. Seven of the shepherd lasses stood in a ring clasping each other's hands, and danced and sang merrily for some hours.[2] When the dance was over, one of the lasses went with flowers, incense and sandal to bathe in the Vaigai river, and to worship the feet of the God Vishnu. She heard a rumour in the city that Kovilan had been killed, and hurried back to Kannaki's lodging. She whispered to her neighbours what she had heard, but stood mute in Kannaki's presence, unwilling to

1. Ibid., Canto XVI.
2. Ibid., Canto XVII.

break the sad news to her. Kannaki who had been eagerly waiting for the return of her husband, enquired of her "what is it, friend, that my neighbours whisper? It is long since my husband went out, and I am alarmed about his safety."

"Your husband," replied the shepherdess, "has been killed, because he had stolen an anklet from the palace."

Kannaki who heard these words, burst into tears and sank to the ground crying "Oh my husband! my husband!" Wild with anguish, she stood up again and cried out "Listen to me all ye girls who danced the Kuravai! Thou Sun, who knowest all that takes place on this wide earth! be my witness. Is my husband a thief?"

"He is no thief," said a voice in the air, "this city is doomed to be destroyed by fire."[1]

Taking the other anklet in her hand, she walked out of the shepherd's quarter, with tears streaming from her eyes. She told the people that followed her that her husband was not a thief, and that he had taken for sale one of her own anklets and had been unjustly killed. As she went sobbing and crying through the streets, men and women rushed out of their houses, and gazed pathetically at

1. Ibid., Canto XVIII.

her, expressing their consternation and horror for the unjust execution of her husband. The sun had set when she approached the place where her husband lay a corpse. She embraced her husband's body and was shocked to find it cold. She fell down weeping by the side of the corpse, and her lament was heard throughout the long night.

"See'st thou my sorrow," cried she, "alas! thy handsome body now rolls in the dust. Alone and friendless, I am weeping by thy side, in the dark night, and thy body lies on the bare earth. Tears flow from my eyes, when I see blood dropping from thy wound, and thy body covered with dust."

In the frenzy of her despair, she again embraced the body of her husband, and fancied that he stood up and wiped the tears from her face, and as she clasped his feet he told her to remain, and his spirit ascended to heaven. She had hoped to be the faithful companion of his life, to be the partner of his joy and sorrow and to solace his grief, but these hopes were now dashed to the ground. She thought of her dream which had come to pass all too soon. She had no wish to live; but one burning passion now possessed her, and it was to prove her husband's innocence, and curse the wicked king who had caused his death.[1]

1. Ibid., Canto XIX.

During the same night, the Pandyan queen had frightful dreams and saw bad omens. She hastened, therefore, on the next morning to the king's presence, surrounded by the dwarfs, eunuchs, hunchbacks and women who were her usual attendants. She found the king already seated on his throne and related to him her dream. While she was relating it, Kannaki appeared at the palace gate, "Thou guard!" said she addressing the sentinel at the gate, "Thou guard who servest the stupid and senseless king who knows not his duty to his subjects! Say to your king that a woman who has lost her husband is come, carrying an anklet in her hand."

One of the guards went to the royal presence and making the usual obeisance, addressed the king: "Long life to our king of Korkai! Long life to the lord of the Pothiya hill! Long life to the Cheliya! Long life to the soverign of the southern region! Long life to the Panchava that never stoops to an unjust deed! Furious as the goddess Durga or Kali, a woman who has lost her husband is at the palace gate and seeks an audience, holding a golden anklet in her hand."

"Let her come, bring her here," said the king. Led by the guard Kannaki entered the hall, where the king was seated on the throne with his queen.

Her long flowing hair hung loose and in disorder; her body was covered with dust, and tears flowed fast down her cheeks. The king, who was moved with pity at the sight of her, enquired graciously "Who art thou maiden, that appearest before me bathed in tears?"

"Rash king! I have to speak to you," began Kannaki, utterly unable to control her anger, her voice broken by sobs "I come from Pukâr, the kings of which city are famous for their impartial justice. One of them cut off the flesh from his own body, to save a dove: another drove his chariot over his dear son, because he had killed a calf. My name is Kannaki, and I am the widow of Kovilan, the son of that well-known merchant Mâchâthuvan, who came to thy city to earn a livelihood, and was killed under your orders, when he went to sell one of my anklets."

"Lady," responded the king, "it is no injustice to kill a thief: but it is the right of the ruler of a country."

"Thou erring king of Korkai! my anklets are filled with diamonds," said Kannaki. "Well hast thou spoken," exclaimed the king, "our anklets are filled with pearls. Bring the anklet and let us examine it."

The anklet was placed before the king, and as Kannaki broke it, the diamonds which were in it,

spattered out, some striking even the king's face. The king was unnerved, when he saw the sparkling gems. He was now convinced that he had been deceived by his jeweller.

"No king am I," said he with deep humility and remorse, "who believed the words of my goldsmith. I am the thief: I have done an act which sullies the fair fame of the long line of kings who ruled the southern land. Better for me is it to die than to bear this disgrace," and swooned on the throne. The Pandyan queen fell at the feet of Kannaki, praying for pardon, knowing that she could offer no consolation to a woman whose husband had been killed.[1] "This king shall die and his palace shall be destroyed by fire," said Kannaki in the bitterness of her anguish, and invoked the wrath of the god of fire. The palace was soon enveloped in flames. The guards were astonished to find dense smoke issuing from the palace gates. Elephants and horses burst from their stables and rushing out of the palace, escaped from the fire. The high priest and ministers and other officers of state hastened to the palace not knowing that the king and queen had died, and tried in vain to put down the flames.[2]

1. Ibid., Canto XX.
2. Ibid., Canto XXI and XXII.

The goddess of Madura then appeared to the vision of Kannaki and beseeched her to appease her wrath and save the city from total destruction. "Your husband was killed," said the goddess, "by the effect of the sin he had committed in a former birth. Vasu and Kumara, kings of Simhapura and Kapilapura respectively, in the Kalinga country, were once waging a fierce war with each other, and none approached their cities within a distance of 6 *Kavathams*. Sangaman, a merchant, greedy of large profits, secretly entered Simhapura with his wife, during the war, and was selling his goods, when Bharata, an officer in the service of king Vasu, seized Sangama and reporting to the king that he was a spy, had him unjustly executed. That Bharata was reborn as Kovilan and suffered for his former sin."

Kannaki broke her bracelets at the temple of Durga, and went out of the city by the western gate, saying to herself, "With my husband I entered this city by the eastern gate, and alone I go out, by the western gate." The unhappy widow found no rest by day or by night. Distracted with grief and unable to eat or sleep, she walked along the northern bank of the Vaigai river and ascended the hills sacred to Murugan. There in the midst of the villages inhabited by Kuravas, on the fourteenth

day after the death of Kovilan, her pure spirit, which had harboured not a single evil thought, but had drunk deep of the cup of misery in this life, ascended to heaven.[1]

When the sad news of the execution of Kovilan and the departure of Kannaki reached the ears of the nun, she was so over-whelmed with grief that she declined all food and died soon afterwards. The Brahmin pilgrim, Mâdalan, conveyed the news to Pukâr on his way to his native village. Kovilan's father was so shocked with the tragic fate of his son that he renounced the world and took the vow of a Buddhist monk; and his mother died broken-hearted. Kannaki's father gave away all his property in charity and joined the ranks of Ajivaka ascetics; and her mother died of grief. The actress Mâthavi, who heard of these events, vowed that she would lead a religious life, and devoted her daughter Mani-mêkalai also to the life of a Buddhist nun.

From that memorable day on which Kovilan was beheaded, there was no rain in the Pandyan kingdom; and famine, fever and small-pox smote the people sorely. Verri-vel-Cheliya, who held his court at Korkai, believing that these misfortunes were brought on by the curse of Kannaki, sacrificed one thousand goldsmiths at her altar and performed

1. Ibid., Canto XXIII.

festivals in her honor. Copious showers of rain then fell and famine and pestilence disappeared from the kingdom. Kosar, king of Kongu, Gajabâhu, king of Lanka, and Perunk-killi, the Chola, erected temples and performed festivals in her honor, and their kingdoms were blest with never-failing rain and abundant crops.

The Chera king Chenkudduvan conducted an expedition personally to the banks of the Ganges, and with the help of a Karnas, kings of Magadha, obtained stone from the Himalayas, bathed it in the Ganges and brought it to his capital Vanji, where it was fashioned into a beautiful image of Kannaki. He consecrated the image with grand ceremony in the presence of the kings of Kongu, and Malava and of Gajabâhu, king of Lanka.

In conclusion the author points the moral of the tale that the laws of morality are inexorable: no prayer, no sacrifice, can atone for our sins; we must ourselves suffer the reaction of our deeds. "Beware, therefore, ye people of this world! youth and riches and our life are fleeting. Waste not your days: but take heed in time, and acquire the merit of good deeds, which alone will help you in your future life!"

ILANGO'S EXHORTATION

[I. D. Tangaswami, B.A.]

No victim be to pleasure or to pain;
Know God exists and them who know respect;
From lying shrink and calumny avoid;
Abstain from taste of flesh and kill no life;
Do charity, and penance due support;
Ingratitude and wicked friends eschew;
Commit no perjury and stick to truth;
Resort to places where the righteous meet,
And from unrighteous men's resort retreat;
Strange wives love not and dying lives protect;
Domestic good promote, and bad condemn;
Drink not, nor steal, nor lust, nor falsehoods
And indiscreet and trivial talks love not. [speak,
Since fleeting are your body, wealth and youth,
Ye men on earth, seek ye while yet ye live,
These aids untiringly with all your strength
Eternal bliss hereafter to obtain.

II

The Story of Mani-mekalai

The Mani-mêkalai, or more properly, [1]Mani-mêkalai-thuravu, as it is named by the author himself, is an epic poem describing the circumstances under which Mani-mêkalai, the daughter of Kovilan renounced the world and took the vows of a Buddhist nun. The work is specially valuable as a record of the extent to which Buddhism had spread in Southern India, Ceylon and Sumatra, in the early part of the second century A.D.: and its value is enhanced by the fact that it is much older than the Chinese works of Fa Hian and Hwen Thsang, and the Pali chronicles Dipawanso and Mahawanso of Ceylon. It is, I believe, the earliest record extant in any language, with the exception of the Buddhist sacred texts, which furnishes information regarding the objects of worship, the peculiar beliefs and superstitions, and the abstruse philosophy of the followers of Buddha. We learn from the poem that Buddhist monks were numerous in the Tamil-land, and that some of

1. Mr. V. Saminatha Iyer, Tamil Pandit of the Kumbakonam College, has lately published an excellent edition of this poem with explanatory notes.

them, at least, claimed wonderful powers, such as the ability to know the past and foretell the future; and that they believed in charms and incantations, and in the existence of spirits which could communicate with human beings. The author, Cheeththalaich-châttanar, who appears to have been a learned and zealous Buddhist, following the traditions then current regarding the journeys of Buddha through the air, and his knowledge of previous births, describes the heroine of the poem also, as travelling through the air and performing various other miracles. I shall now give briefly the story of the Mani-mêkalai, reserving the references to Buddhism till I come to describe the religions which prevailed in Tamilakam.

The yearly festival held in the city of Pukâr in honor of Indra, the king of the celestials, was drawing near. Ever since the festival had been founded by the Chola king, Thodi-thod-chembiyan, renowned as the hero who destroyed the wondrous hanging castles, it was performed most punctiliously by successive Cholas. In accordance with the time-honoured custom, the reigning king Killivalavan issued orders for the commencement of the opening ceremonies. A brilliant band of warriors, mounted on horses, chariots and elephants, and foot soldiers armed with shining swords, started from

the temple of Indra, escorting the big drums of the temple which were placed on an elephant, and marched through the main streets of Kaviri-paddinam, announcing with beat of drum the approach of the grand festival. "Sweep the streets and squares" shouted the public-crier who proclaimed the royal commands "and cover them with fresh sand. Plant along the streets sugar-canes and pretty creepers and plantain trees and areca-palms bearing bunches of fruits. Hang out flags and banners. Arrange in front of your houses lamps borne by statues and vases filled with water. Adorn the pillars with strings of pearls and garlands, and set up ornamented gateways. Ye Brahmins! perform your services in all your temples, from the great shrine of Siva to the small fanes of the local deities. Ye preachers of virtue! attend the pavilions erected for you. Ye teachers of the religious sects! ascent the public halls of debate. Let there be no fight, no brawl during the eight and twenty days of the great festival, when even the gods will visit this city in disguise, and mix with mortal men! May there be abundant rain and rich harvests! May our great city prosper for ever! May our sovereign ever wield his sceptre with justice!"[1]

1. Mani-mekalai, Canto 1.

Chitrapati who heard this announcement with a pang of regret, knowing that her daughter Mâthavi and grand-daughter Mani-mêkalai will not prepare as usual to take part in the festivities, called her daughter's maid-servant, Vayanta-mâlai, and bid her tell Mâthavi what her friends thought of her entry into a convent. The maid went to the Buddhist convent where Mâthavi was seated in a hall, with her daughter Mani-mêkalai, stringing flowers, and touched with pity at the altered appearance of the once gay actress, told her how people ridiculed the absurd idea of an accomplished courtezan like her becoming a nun.

"Alas! my maid," replied Mâthavi mournfully "cursed is my soul which did not quit this body the moment I heard of the unhappy fate of my lover. The married women of this land will, on the death of their husbands, die instantly unable to bear their grief, or willingly give up their lives on their husbands' funeral pyre, or by fasts and prayers seek to rejoin their husbands, in their future births. Unlike them, the saintly widow of my lover, furious with wrath at the unjust execution of her husband, devoted to the flames the great city of Madura. My daughter Mani-mêkalai, who stands in the relation of a daughter to that chaste widow, shall never lead a wicked or worthless life, but all her lifetime

she shall be a zealous devotee to virtue. Listen to me further, my maid! I visited the Buddhist monastery in this city, and falling at the feet of the venerable abbot, related to him the sad story of my lover. He consoled my afflicted mind, revealing to me the noble truths that :

> Those who are born suffer endless sorrow.
> Those who are not born rest in bliss.
> It is desire that causeth birth.
> Those who have no desire cease to be born.

He explained to me, besides, the five kinds of purity which lead to salvation. Tell my mother Chitrâpati and her friends that I have resolved to follow his advice." Hearing these words, Vayanta-mâlai returned home with a heavy heart, like one who had dropped a precious gem in the sea.[1]

Mani-mêkalai who had been closely listening to the conversation between her mother and her maid, was moved to tears when she thought of the tragical fate of her father and step-mother. Her tears flowed fast, and falling on the garland which she was preparing, spoilt its brilliancy. Mâthavi, who saw that her daughter was weeping, comforted her, and wiping the tears from her eyes with her dainty fingers, observed, "This garland is now

1. Ibid., Canto 1.

unfit for an offering, as it is bedewed with your tears. I wish you will go and gather fresh flowers." "Will you allow Mani-mêkalai to go out alone?" enquired Sutamati, who was also making a garland to be offered at the monastery. "Her pretty face and dark eyes will surely attract every one who sees her. Beyond the royal park, she may meet the princes of the Chola family and hence it is not safe for her to go either to Champâti-vanam or Kavera-vanam: but there is Uva-vanam which, under the blessing of Buddha, is ever full of flowers, and in it there is a crystal alcove, which contains a sacred seat of Buddha. Your daughter may safely go to that garden, and I shall go with her." Mâthavi having expressed her assent, Mani-mêkalai and Sutamati left the convent, and walked along the chariot road towards Uva-vanam. The festival of Indra having begun, there were crowds of revellers on the public roads. A drunkard stood before a naked Nigrantha monk, who carried a rattan in his hand, a pot slung on his shoulder, and addressed him "Welcome, thou reverend Sir; I worship thy feet. Pray listen to me. The soul which dwells in thy unclean body pines like a prisoner confined in a close cell. Drink therefore of this toddy which is drawn from the spath of the cocoanut palm, and which will give you pleasure

both in this world and see if my words are not true." In another part of the street, a madman, clad in rags and bunches of leaves, daubed with sandal paste, and decked with the flowers of the wild *alari* and *erukkai*, was shouting and dancing and running to and fro, to the great merriment of the rabble. In another quarter, a man was acting the pantomimic play, of the eunuch who danced before the son of Krishna, in Bana's great city. Groups of people strolled in the streets looking at these scenes, or at the children adorned with tiny jewels, who were riding on toy elephants set on wheels, or at the beautiful lifelike paintings on the walls of buildings, representing gods and human beings, and animals of all kinds. As the groups one by one caught sight of the slender and graceful form of Mani-mêkalai, an unspeakable tenderness seemed to light up every face. Struck with her wonderful loveliness they gathered round her, and admired the exquisite beauty of her face and figure. Many of them could not help following her, and expressed their sorrow at the heartless conduct of Mâthavi in devoting her beautiful daughter, in the bloom of youth, to the dull and joyless life of a nun. Both Sutamati and Mani-mêkalai passed these crowds silently, the latter stepping so lightly that her footprint was scarcely visible on the soft ground; and

they entered the Uva-vanam, which stretched before them like a sheet of canvas painted with glowing colours, by a skilful artist. Here the cassia, the laurel, the orange tree, the wild lemon, the screw-pine, the sweet-scented jassamine, the ever-green *asoka*, and the silk-cotton trees with their brilliant scarlet flowers, seemed to vie with each other in the profusion of their blossoms, and presented such a picturesque scenery that Mani-mêkalai and her companion spent a long while wandering through the delightful garden.[1]

While Mani-mêkalai and Sutamati were in the park, a huge elephant had broken out of the royal stables, and rushed through the palace road, the chariot road and the market road, scaring the populace who fled for their lives in every direction. Elephant-keepers and drummers ran after the animal, and with their shouts and beat of drum warned the people to keep out of its way. Udayakumaran, the son of the Chola king Killi-valavan, having heard of the accident, mounted a fleet steed and overtaking the elephant, stopped its mad career, and delivered it into the hands of its keepers. He then got into a chariot and followed by an escort of soldiers, was returning to his palace, through the actresses' street, looking as handsome as a god, when his eyes

1. Ibid.

fell on a merchant of noble rank seated motionless in the mansion of an actress, near a window facing the street apparently in great distress of mind. The prince stopped his chariot opposite the gilded doorway of the house, and enquired "What ails you? Why are you and the actress so dejected?" The merchant accompanied by the actress approached the prince, and making a profound obeisance, wished him a long life, and said "I happened to see just now Mâthavi's charming daughter Mani-mêkalai going to the flower-garden Uva-vanam. Her beauty seems to fade in the close air of the convent like that of a flower shut up in a casket. Her appearance and the recollection of her father's sad death affected me so much that I sat still unable to play on the lute."

"I shall take the lovely girl in my chariot and bring her here," said the prince joyously, and drove towards the park. Stopping his chariot and his attendants at the park gate, he jumped down and entered the park alone, scanning with his eager eyes every nook and corner of the shady groves. Mani-mêkalai who heard the tinkling bells of the prince's chariot, as it came near the park, told Sutamati, in her sweet voice, "I have heard Chitrâpati and Vayantamâlai informing my mother that Prince Udayakumara had set his heart on me. The bells

we hear appear to be those of his chariot. What shall I do?" Sutamati was very much frightened, and told Mani-mêkalai to enter at once the crystal grove, and to conceal herself in the central chamber. She then stood at a distance, within sight of the building: and the prince who came up to her a little later, said "Though you are standing alone, I know quite well why you are here. Tell me why has Mani-mêkalai come out of the convent. Is she old enough to feel the passion of love?"

"How can I, a woman, advise a prince who is descended from that illustrious king, who ashamed of his youth, assumed the disguise of an old man and dispensed justice?" said Sutamati, greatly agitated, "Yet shall I speak to thee, valiant prince! Our body is the result of our deeds in former births, and the cause of our deeds in our present birth. Formed of flesh, it decays by age: it is the seat of disease; the haunt of desire; the den of every vice; the hiding place of anger; and in it dwells the mind which is oppressed with grief, distress, despair and lamentation. Therefore, thou noble prince! view this body with contempt" Before Sutamati finished her speech, the youthful Mani-mêkalai came out of her chamber, and stood within the crystal alcove appearing outside like a statue made of coral.

The prince who saw her through the walls of crystal, at first thought her to be a beautiful statue newly placed in the alcove, but afterwards suspecting it to be Mani-mêkalai, attempted to enter the building, and examined it on all sides, but failed, the crystal door being bolted on the inside.

"There are beautiful sculptures in this building, where is your young companion hiding herself?" asked the prince.

"She must indeed be a saint," replied Sutamati, evading an answer, "if she does not wish to see your god-like figure."

"Who can resist surging floods," remarked the prince, "who can conquer love? If she does love me, let her come to me;" and was about to go away, when he turned to Sutamati again and enquired, who she was, and why she accompanied Mani-mêkalai to the park. On hearing her reply, he observed "I shall obtain Mani-mêkalai yet, through Chitrâpati" and left her. As soon as he had gone Mani-mêkalai came out of the alcove, and said "I was not offended with him, although he seemed to think lightly of me as a common harlot, who has no sense of chastity, who has no regard for caste, and who is ready to sell herself for money: but my heart went after this stranger.

Can this be the effect of love?" While they were thus conversing the Goddess Mani-mêkalai assuming the form of a woman residing in the city, visited the garden, and reverently went round the sacred seat praying to Buddha.[1]

The sun had now set, and the full moon rose in all its effulgence, and shed its soft silvery light on the park. In the bright moonlight, the goddess met Sutamati and Mani-mêkalai and enquired why they were staying in the park after nightfall. Sutamati related to her the meeting between herself and Udaya-kumâran, and the goddess said, "The prince is deeply in love with Mani-mêkalai and although he left you here, deeming it improper to press his suit in this park, which is assigned to Buddhist devotees, he will not fail to meet you on the public road outside the park. If you leave this garden by the gate in the western wall, you will find, near the public cemetery, a large monastery where many monks reside; and you will be safe from all danger, even if you stay there during the whole night." She then gave a long account of the origin of the monastery which was called Chakra-vâlak-koddam. Sutamati fell asleep during her recital, and watching the opportunity, the goddess took hold of Mani-mêkalai and lifting her into the air carried her to Mani-

1. Ibid., Canto V.

pallavam, an island thirty *yojanas* south of Kavirip-paddinam.[1]

Meanwhile Prince Udaya-kumâran who returned to his palace from Uva-vanam, remained sleepless, tossing in his bed thinking of Mani-mêkalai, and devising plans to obtain possession of her. The goddess Mani-mêkalai appeared to his startled vision and said, "Thou son of the king! if the king fails in his duty, the planets will not move in their orbits: if the planets do not keep in their usual course, seasonable showers will not fall on the earth: if the rains fail, men will die of famine: and the saying that the life of all human beings is the life of the king will prove to be untrue. Do not therefore seek to ruin a girl who has devoted herself to a religious life." The goddess then entered Uva-vanam, and awaking Sutamati informed her "Be not afraid; I am the goddess Mani-mêkalai and I came to this city to witness the festival of Indra. As it is now time for your young companion Mani-mêkalai to become a devotee of Buddha, I have removed her to the island of Mani-pallavam where she is quite safe at present. She will there come to know her former birth, and will return to this city on the seventh day. Though she may appear in disguise in this city, she will not forsake you, and many

1. Ibid., Canto VI.

wonderful events will happen here on her return. Inform Mâthavi of my visit, and the holy path into which her daughter has been led. She knows me. Tell her that I am the goddess of the ocean, whose name was given to her daughter as desired by Kovilan. On the day on which the child was named after me, I appeared to Mâthavi in her dream, and told her that her daughter would grow into a most beautiful maiden, and that she would become a most sincere and pious devotee." Having said this, the goddess left her, and flying up in the air disappeared from her view. Grieved at the mysterious disappearance of Mani-mêkalai, Sutamati arose and quitting the park through the western gate, entered the wide portals of the adjacent monastery. As she went in and sat inside the gate, she heard with trembling and fear, a voice from one of the statues sculptured on the gateway, addressing her, "Thou Veerai, daughter of Ravi-varman and wife of King Duchchayan! Thou, who killed thyself on hearing of the death of thy sister Thârai! Thou art now born as Sutamati, daughter of Kausikan of Champai, and come into this town with Mâruta-vekan. On the seventh day from this, your younger sister Lakshmi will return to this city, at midnight, after knowing her previous birth." Sutamati, half dead with fright, left the monastery at early dawn, and

hastened to Mâthavi's residence and related to her the strange occurrences of the previous day; and Mâthavi, who was already dreadfully alarmed about the safety of her daughter, swooned away, overwhelmed with grief.[1]

Mani-mêkalai awoke in the island of Mani-pallavam, and was astonished to find herself alone on a strange sea-shore. The sun was rising above the broad blue sea, spreading its countless rays. The rippling sea-waves threw up on the sandy beach pearl-chanks and pieces of coral: and close by were deep pools, on the margin of which bloomed the lily and the violet. She wondered whether it was a part of Uva-vanam or whether Sutamati had deceived her and brought her to a strange place. She called out "Sutamati! Sutamati! come to me! answer me wherever you are!" But no answer came. No house or human being was seen. As she walked over the hillocks of sand, she found only troops of swans, cranes and sea-ducks swarming on the marshes, and standing in long rows, like opposing armies arrayed on a battle-field. Frightened at the thought that she had been abandoned on a lonely island, she burst into tears; but as she walked on, along the sea-shore

1. Ibid., Canto VII,

bemoaning her helpless condition, she saw a sacred seat of Buddha built of polished crystal.[1]

The young maiden was beside herself with joy at the sight of the sacred seat. With joined hands raised above her head and tears of ecstasy rolling down her cheeks, she walked round the seat thrice, and prostrated her self in front of it. When she stood up again strange memories of her former birth seemed to flash upon her mind, and she spoke as follows :—

" Thou venerable sage Brahma-dharma! who could foretell coming events, I realise today that what thou predicted on the banks of the river Kâyankarai, has come to pass. Thou warned thy brother Attipati, king of Purvadesam in the Gândâhra country, that on the seventh day, a frightful earthquake will destroy his capital city Idavayam, and that it should therefore be vacated. The king proclaimed the impending catastrophe to his subjects, and ordered them to quit the city in all haste, with their cattle, and he too left his palace and encamped with the whole of his army, in a grove near the banks of the river Kâyankarai, on the road to Vasanti, north of his capital. On the day mentioned by you, the city was destroyed by an earthquake as

1. Ibid., Canto VIII.

foretold, and when the grateful sovereign and his subjects crowded at thy feet and praised thee, thou preached the Law to them. I was then born as Lakshmi, the daughter of Ravi-varman, king of Asodhara, and of his wife Amuta-pati; and had married Râhula, son of the king Attipati and of his wife Nilapati, who was the daughter of Sri-dhara, king of Siddhipura. Myself and Râhula also fell at thy feet on that occasion, and thou foretold that Râhula will die on the sixteenth day from the effects of the bite of a venomous snake and that I will ascend his funeral pyre. Thou told me further that I shall be re-born at Kavirip-paddinam, and that when I am in a serious peril, a goddess will remove me at night from that city to an island in the south: and that I shall there worship the sacred seat where Buddha had once sat and preached the law, and purified the hearts of the Naga kings, who had been furiously fighting with each other for possession of the seat. I then beseeched thee to tell me what will be the re-birth of my beloved husband, and thou told me that the goddess who brought me here will point him out to me. Will not that goddess appear before me now ?[1]

The goddess Mani-mêkalai who knew that her namesake had learnt her previous birth at the

1. Ibid., Canto IX.

sacred seat of Buddha, and that she was now a fit person to receive further favours, appeared before her and said "In your former birth, when you were seated with your husband Râhula, in a pleasant grove, a Buddhist saint Sâdhu-chakara who was returning from Ratna-dvipa after 'turning the wheel of Law,' alighted from the clouds in your presence, and you gave him food and water. The effect of that good deed will save you yet from re-births. Your former husband Râhula is now re-born as Udaya-kumâra, whom you met at Uva-vana: and hence your heart was attracted towards him. Târai and Veerai, your elder sisters in your former birth, were both wedded to Thuchchaya, king of Kachchayam in Anga-desa. When they were staying with their husband on the banks of the river Gangai, a Buddhist monk visited them, and at his advice they worshipped the sacred feet of Buddha, on the hill where the Buddha had formerly taken his stand and preached his religion. By virtue of this good deed they are now born as Mâthavi and Sutamati. Before being instructed in the true Law, you shall have to learn the tenets of other religions; and the teachers of those faiths may not be willing to impart instruction to you as you are a young girl. I shall therefore teach thee the incantations which will enable you to assume any form you

like or to fly through the air, wherever you wish to go. Rest assured that you shall attain the true knowledge of Buddha, on the holiest day of the Buddhists." Having said so, she taught the spells to Mani-mêkalai, and ascended to the sky: but returned immediately to the earth and said "I have forgotten to teach you one thing more. This mortal body is sustained by food. Learn therefore the great charm by which you can remain without food." She then taught her the third charm, and then flew away out of sight.[1]

"After the departure of the goddess Mani-mêkalai walked about the island, admiring the strange scenery of the sand hills, flowery groves and glassy lakes. She had hardly gone the distance of a Kâvatham when a Buddhist nun appeared before her, and enquired, "who art thou maiden, that appearest on this island like a shipwrecked passenger?"

"In which birth do you ask?" replied Mani-mêkalai, "In my former birth I was Lakshmi, wife of Prince Râhula, and in this birth, I am Mani-mêkalai, the daughter of the actress Mâthavi. The goddess, whose name I bear, having brought me hither, I have learnt my former birth, by wor-

1. Ibid., Canto X.

shipping the sacred seat of Buddha. May I ask who art thou?"

"Close by this island, in Ratna-dvipa, is the high mountain Samantam, on the top of which are the impressions of the sacred feet of Buddha, the worshippers of which will be freed from the bondage of births. I worshipped the feet and am now returning thence. I guard the sacred seat of Buddha in this island, under the orders of Indra, the king of the celestials and my name is Deeva-thilakai. Opposite the sacred seat is the tank Gomuki, where an alms-bowl which was once the property of Aputra comes up to the surface of the water, once a year, on the birthday of Buddha, that is on the day of the 14th Lunar asterism, in the month of Idapam. Today is that auspicious day, and that alms-bowl is, I believe, destined for your use. Out of that bowl you may give alms to as many as may appear before you, and yet it will ever be full. You may learn further about it from the venerable Buddhist Abbot of your native city."

Mani-mêkalai gladly accompanied Deeva-thilakai, to the tank Gomuki, and as soon as she reverently came round it, and stood near the edge, the alms-bowl sprung out of the water and entered her hands. Overjoyed at this miracle, Mani-mêkalai praised the

Buddha's sacred feet which were conspicuous by the side of the tank, under the shade of a Bodhi tree. Taking leave of Deeva-thilakai Mani-mêkalai quitted the island, carrying the alms-bowl in her hand and ascending into the air, flew through the sky and descended at Kavirip-paddinam, in the presence of her mother, who was counting the days of her separation and anxiously awaiting her arrival. To her mother, and her friend Sutamati, who received her with joy, she related her adventures. "I worship your feet," said she at last, "you who were my elder sisters in our former birth, when we were born as the daughters of Amutapati, who was the wife of king Duchchaya and daughter of king Ravi-varman. You shall, under the guidance of the reverend Abbot of this city, be able to lead a pure life." She then went to the residence of the Buddhist Abbot accompanied by Mâthavi and Sutamati.[1]

They approached the grey-headed old monk, and bowing thrice at his feet, Mani-mêkalai introduced herself, and recounted to him all that had transpired from her meeting with Udaya-kumâra at Uva-vana up to her return from Mani-pallavam. His aged face brightened, and he seemed hardly able to contain his joy. "I met Duchchayan, king

1. Ibid., Canto xi.

of Kachchayam, again, on my way to the sacred hill of Buddha," said he with trembling accents, "and enquired after the welfare of his queens. He wept bitterly and said that Veerai having gone in front of a wild elephant, newly caught, was killed by that animal, and Târai who loved her sister dearly, unable to bear her loss, died by throwing herself from a lofty terrace. How wonderful! Like actors who change their dress and appear again on the stage in new characters, you are re-born and appear before me in your present bodies."[1]

"Listen, thou maiden!" he continued, "to the history of Aputra, whose arms-bowl thou carriest. There was a teacher of the Vedas at Vâranâsi, whose name was Apanchika. His wife Sâli having proved faithless to him, and afraid of punishment, joined a company of pilgrims, who were going to Kumâri, and while returning from Kumâri gave birth to a child and abandoned it in a dark wood. Attracted by the cries of the babe, a cow approached and licked it, and fed it with its milk for seven days. A Brahmin from Vayanankodu happened to pass with his wife by the wood, and hearing the cry of the infant, he searched for the child and found it. Pitying its helpless condition he and his wife carried it to their home. He brought up the

1. Ibid., Canto xii.

child as his own son and taught him the Vedas and other sacred texts. When he grew up into a young man he happened to go into a neighbouring house occupied by a Brahmin, and was surprised and grieved to find a cow which was tied to a post, lowing piteously like a deer caught in a hunter's net. It was decked with flowers and intended to be sacrificed on the next morning. Feeling deep horror for the cruel fate that awaited the cow he determined to save it: and in the midnight he stole the cow and led it out of the village. His theft was however discovered, and the Brahmins chased and arrested him, and thrashing him soundly, asked him to confess why he had stolen the cow. Meanwhile the cow burst from its captors, and having gored the master of the sacrifice, fled into the jungle. The boy prayed to the Brahmins not to beat him, and asked them to tell him why they wanted to kill a harmless cow, which had from the day of its birth done no injury to any one: but had eaten of the green grass growing on meadows, and had given its sweet milk for the use of man.

"Not knowing the sacred books revealed to us by Brahma," said the Brahmins, "you have reviled us. You are verily the son of a beast."

"Asalan was the son of a deer: Siringi was the son of a cow: Vrinji was the son of a tiger:

Kesakambalan was the son of a fox: and these you honor as your sages. Why do you spurn me as the son of a beast?" retorted the youth.

"I know the birth of this boy," said one of the Brahmins, in indignant tones. "He is the son of Sâli, the wife of a Vedic teacher of Vâranâsi, who having behaved in a manner unbecoming a Brahmin woman and afraid of punishment, came away with pilgrims bound to Kumâri, and there gave birth to a child, near a shepherd's village and abandoned it. This boy is that child. Touch him not: he is a bastard."

"I shall tell you the origin of the Brahmins," replied the boy with a scornful laugh. "Were not two of your first patriarchs the sons of Brahma, by a celestial courtezan? Is this not true? How can you then speak ill of Sâli?"

"Astounded at these words, his foster father declined to receive the youth into his house: and the Brahmins set up a hue and cry after him as the thief who had stolen the cow. The youth therefore left the Brahmin village and came to the great city of Dakshina Mathura, where he begged food from door to door, and out of the food so collected he fed the blind and the lame, the old and the infirm, and himself ate the reminder. At

night, he took his bed in the hall outside the temple of Chinta-devi, with his alms-bowl for his pillow; a beggar in all else, but rich in his boundless love for all living creatures.[1]

"On a dark and rainy night, when he lay fast asleep in the temple of Chinta-devi a few beggars who were weary with travelling arrived there, and being very hungry awoke him and asked for food. The poor youth having no food to give was greatly distressed. The goddess Chinta-devi then appeared to him and handed to him a cup saying, 'Grieve not, but take this cup. You will never find it empty though the whole land may be famine-stricken.' The youth praised the goddess and receiving the cup fed the travellers out of it. The wonderful cup was never empty although he fed myriads of poor people who flocked to him, owing to the famine then prevailing in the Pandyan kingdom. Favourable seasons soon followed, and Aputra found that no one came to him for charity. He left Madura and travelled to other towns in search of poor and starving people. He heard from merchants who arrived by sea that there had been no rain in Chavakam, and that the inhabitants of that country were dying from want of food. Hence he resolved to visit Chavakam and relieve the distress

1. Ibid., Canto XIII.

of the people of that land, and went on board a ship bound to Chavakam. As a storm came on durring the voyage the ship anchored at Mani-pallavam, and Aputra went ashore on the island. But during the night, a favourable breeze rose, and the captain set sail, not knowing that Aputra was still on the island. The latter finding that the ship had sailed away, and that the island was uninhabited was plunged in grief. Annoyed at the thought that his wonderful cup will remain useless in his hands, he threw it into the tank Gomuki praying that it should appear once a year on the surface of the tank, and go into the hands of a pure minded and charitable person. Unwilling to feed alone out of the cup which had fed thousands of people, he decided to starve himself to death. I happened to visit Mani-pallavam just then and learnt from his own mouth his unhappy tale.[1]

Aputra was reborn in Chavakam in the hermitage of Man-muka. The king of that country being childless obtained the child from Man-muka and brought him up as heir to his throne. In course of time Aputra succeeded his father, and is at present king of Chavakam. His miraculous cup should not remain useless in your hands, and you should therefore feed the beggars of this city, out of

1. Ibid , Canto XIV.

the cup, for there is no greater charity than that of feeding the poor."

Mani-mêkalai took leave of the monk reverently, and as desired by him wished to begin at once the work of charity. When she appeared in the street with the alms-bowl in her hand, in the attire of a *Bikshuni* or religious mendicant, the people passing in the street gathered round her, wondering why she who was courted by the son of the king should have put on a mendicant's garb.[1] Being a mendicant, she deemed it proper that she should first receive alms from a married woman, and going to the house of Athirai, the wife of a merchant, accepted alms from her in the miraculous cup.[2]

She then commenced giving out food from the cup, and the first person who received food was Kaya-chandikai, wife of a Vidyadhara. She had been suffering with a disease which caused insatiable craving for food, and this strange malady was cured by her eating the meal served out of the cup. She blessed Mani-mêkalai most fervently and desired her to go to the Buddhist monastery and feed the poor who collect there in large numbers.[3]

1. Ibid.. Canto XV.
2. Ibid., Canto XVI.
3. Ibid., Canto XVII.

Having heard that Mani-mêkalai was in the dress of a *Bikshuni* or mendicant in the Buddhist monastery, her grand-mother Chitrapati was in a furious rage. Vowing that she would induce prince Udaya-Kumara to bring back Mani-mêkalai in his golden chariot, she hurried to the prince's palace, accompanied by a few of her servants. Entering the palace, she came into the presence of the Prince who was seated on a throne supported by shining figures of lions, and fanned with chowries by servant maids who were standing on both sides of him. As she bowed low at his feet, the Prince enquired with a smile "Are Mâthavi and Mani-mêkalai still disposed to remain in the monastery?"

"Long life to thee brave Prince," said Chitrâ-pati. "Mani-mêkalai is now in the public hall attached to the monastery outside the city. I pray you will take her with you and enjoy the pleasure of witnessing her skill as an actress."

"When I last saw her in the crystal alcove, she stood with her arms folded on her bosom, and her dark eyes seemed to melt with love. Her coral lips revealed the lustre of her pearly teeth, and her smile thrilled through me. That sweet smile and fairy form entered my heart at once never again to leave it. But what puzzles me yet is that, on the following night, a goddess appeared in my sight and

warned me not to think of her. Was that a phantom of my imagination, or was it a real goddess that warned me so gravely," said the Prince.

"Let not such doubts disturb your mind," replied Chitrapati, "surely, you ought to desist, if Mani-mêkalai was a girl born in wedlock: but she is an actress trained to display her charms on the public stage and to allure and captivate the rich. Need I tell you that it is the duty of a king to bring her back to the profession to which she was born."

Encouraged by Chitrâpati, Udaya-kumâra mounted his chariot, and urging the steeds harnessed to it, arrived in no time at the monastery. He saw Mani-mêkalai appearing in her marvellous beauty, like the divinity of the place, and feeding the poor who flocked to her, out of the alms-bowl in her hand. All his love for her seemed to swell in his heart. Going near her, he addressed her, with a look of passionate and adoring love, "Ah! You siren who has stolen my heart, why do you torment yourself with penance, and lead the life of a mendicant? Dearest maid! tell me why you wish to be a nun?"

"I shall answer thee," said Mani-mêkalai who trembled lest her own heart should be weak enough

to give way to love for him who was her dear Râhulan in a former birth, "If thou hast profitted by the converse of the wise, Listen! Knowing that this body is the seat of suffering: that it suffers in birth, in disease, in old age and in death, I have embraced the life of a nun, what more can a woman tell a valiant prince like thee? If thou feelest the truth of my words, do as thy heart bids thee to do."

She then entered the hut which had been occupied by the mendicant Kaya-chandikai, and repeating the incantation by which she could transform herself, she assumed the form of Kaya-chandikai and returned to the presence of the Prince. He was amazed at the disappearance of Mani-mêkalai. He searched the hut and not finding her there, he vowed that he will not leave that place till he sees again the dear girl whose sweet speech and surpassing beauty have made him a captive.[1]

A voice proceeding from one of the statues of the temple warned him not to make foolish vows. Udaya-kumâra was awe-struck and did not know what further he ought to do to win Mani-mêkalai. The sun had set and the shades of evening were growing darker. He quitted the temple therefore reluctantly, sighing as his attempt to take Mani-

1. Ibit., Canto XVIII.

mêkalai with him was unsuccessful. Being certain that the Prince would not leave her if she appeared in her own form, Mani-mêkalai determined to continue in the disguise of the mendicant Kaya-chandikai. She was anxious to continue her work of charity, and deeming it proper that she should not wait till the poor seek her assistance, but should herself search for them and relieve their distress, she went to the City Jail where criminals were confined. With great pleasure she entered the building where the unhappy prisoners were ill-fed and pinched with hunger: and began to feed them to their hearts' content. The warders were astonished to see that she had only one cup in her hand but was able to feed hundreds out of that single cup. They thought it such a wonder that they should report it at once to the king and proceeded to the palace. The Chola king Ma-van-killi had then gone out for a walk in the royal park with his queen Cheerthy, who was the daughter of a king descended from the illustrious Mahabali. Followed by the queen's attendants, the king and the queen stepped slowly along the well-laid-out walks admiring the charming scenes. They were delighted to see, in a cool spot, a peacock spreading its gorgeous tail and dancing on the green turf, while the cuckoo warbled and the

honey bees hummed on the wide spreading branches overhead. In a shady bower a female monkey was seated on a swing and the male was swinging it. The king and queen and her ladies burst out laughing at this queer sight, and their merry laughter rang through the park. They invited the deer and mountain goats to come near them; and the king pointed out to the queen, the quails and hares that fled through the shrubberies, frightened at their approach. They ascended the artificial hills and looked at the waterfalls. They enjoyed the balmy breeze blowing around the cool grottoes and romantic fountains, and wandered through labyrinths. Tired with the excursion, the royal party then returned to the palace, and the king entered the throne hall. The guards having announced that the warders of the City Jail were waiting for an audience, the king commanded that they should be admitted. They came and, standing at a distance, made a profound obeisance, and said "Long life to thee, Mighty King Ma-van-killi! thou whose army, led by thy son, routed the forces of the Pandya and Chera in a battle at Kâriyâru! Know great king that a maiden who wandered in this city as a beggar has now visited the jail and fed countless people out of a single cup! May your Royal Highness reign for ever!"

"Let her come to me, I would be glad to see her," said the king eager to see the maid. The guards led her into the royal presence, and she exclaimed, "Wise king! may thou be ever merciful!"

"Thou pious maiden! Who art thou," asked the king, "and whence is this miraculous cup?"

"I am the daughter of a Vidyadhara," replied the maiden, "I have lived in this city for some time past. This cup which was given to me by a goddess has wonderful properties. It has cured insatiable hunger; and it will feed any number of people. May Your Majesty prosper for ever."

"What can I do for the young maiden," enquired the king pleased with her demeanour.

Emboldened by the king's courteous enquiry, she said, "Let the City Jail be assigned for a public charity hall, may thou be blessed for ever!"

The monarch graciously acceded to her prayer.[1] The prisoners were set free and Buddhist monks occupied the prison and used it as a charity hall and hospital. These news soon reached the ears of Udaya-kumara who was still infatuated with the love of Mani-mêkalai. He determined now to seize her wherever she may be found outside the

1. Ibid.. Canto XIX.

monastery, and to convey her to his palace in his chariot. With this intention, he entered the monastery. Kanchanan, the husband of Kaya-chandikai, who had in the meantime come to Pukâr in search of his wife, found Mani-mèakalai in the disguise of Kaya-chandikai, and believing her to be his own wife, he went up to her and fondly asked whether she has been cured of her disease, and wondered from which God she had obtained the miraculous cup. But Mani-mêkalai did not care to converse with him: she met prince Udaya-kumâra however, and to him she addressed a few words of wisdom. "Mark this aged matron, thou Prince!" said she pointing to an old woman "her tresses which were once raven black are now turned grey: her shining forehead is now wrinkled: her arched brows are now shrunk like dry shrimps: the eyes bright as the lotus are now dim and dropping rheum: her pearl-like teeth are now decayed and lustreless; her coral lips have lost their colour: such is woman's beauty" she spoke in this strain and tried to turn the prince's thoughts from the fleeting objects of worldly desire, to things of eternal moment for his spiritual welfare. Kaya-chandikai's husband, who followed Mani-mêkalai, was fired with jealousy at seeing his wife indifferent to himself, but anxious to engage the attention of the prince. He

resolved therefore to watch her conduct further and concealed himself in a dark corner of the temple. Udaya-kumâra was now convinced that Mani-mêkalai herself was in the disguise of Kaya-chandikai, but could not understand why Kanchanan dogged her steps, and he too made up his mind to observe their behaviour at night. He returned therefore quietly to his palace and at midnight came out alone and entered the temple. The perfumes on his person however spread through the temple and revealed his presence to Kanchanan who was awake. Finding that it was the Prince who stole into the temple at that late hour, his worst fears regarding his wife's constancy were confirmed. He got up wild with jealousy and drawing his sword beheaded the Prince upon the spot. He then attempted to enter the room where Mani-mêkalai was asleep; but a voice from one of the images warned him not to enter the apartment. It said, "Your wife Kaya-chandikai, cured of her disease, went in search of you and died on the Vindhya hills. Although Udaya-kumâra has now paid his life as a penalty for his former sins, you have committed a great sin in murdering him, and the effect of this sin will not leave you." Hearing these words, Kanchanan left the temple gloomy and disheartened.[1] Mani-mêkalâi who had

1. Ibit., Canto XX.

awoke and overheard the words of warning uttered by the spirit, rushed out of her room, crying in tones of deep anguish, "Oh my beloved! for whom I mounted the funeral pyre, when you died of a snake-bite in your former birth; for whom my heart yearned when I saw you first in the Uvavana: for whom I assumed the disguise of Kayachandikai to instruct you in wisdom and to lead you in the path of virtue. Alas! have you fallen a victim to the sword of the jealous Vidyadhara?" Crying thus, she was about to approach the corpse of her lover, when she heard the voice of the same spirit cautioning her, "Don't go, don't go, young maiden!" said the spirit. "He was your husband and you were his wife in many former births. Do not give way to your passions, you who seek release from the prison house of re-births!"

"I worship thee, wise spirit!" said Manimêkalai, "knowest thou why he was bitten by a snake in his former birth, and now killed by the sword of the Vidyadhara? If you do know it, tell me graciously so that it may console my sorrowing heart."

"Listen to me maiden!" the spirit replied. "In your former birth, when Brahma-dharma was preaching the Law, you wished to feast him on a certain day, and asked your cook to be ready by early dawn. But when he came in the morning

and tripped and fell on the cooking utensils and broke them, enraged at his carelessness, your husband killed the cook. It is that sin that still haunts you. I shall now tell you what is to happen to you in the future. Hearing of the murder of his son, the king will cast you into prison, but the queen will intercede for you, and releasing you from jail, will keep you with her. The venerable Buddhist monk will then plead for you with the queen, and you will be set at liberty. You will then go to Aputra, who is now king of Chavakam, and with him you will again visit Mani-pallavam. Leaving that island, you will in the guise of a monk visit Vanji, and there learn the tenets of other religions. You will then proceed to Kanchi and feed the poor during a famine in that city. There you will meet the Buddhist abbot and from him you will learn the Buddhist doctrine and become a nun. In future births, you will be born as a man in Uttara Magadha and eventually become one of the foremost and favorite disciples of Buddha." Knowing her future, Mani-mêkalai was greatly relieved in mind and deeply thankful to the spirit.[1]

On the following morning, the visitors to the temple of Champa-pati saw the corpse of Udaya-

1. Ibid., Canto XXI.

kumâra and reported it to the monks of Chakra-valak-koddam. They questioned Mani-mêkalai, and having ascertained from her, how and by whom he had been killed, they concealed the prince's body in a separate room and proceeded to the palace. Having obtained permission through the guards, they appeared before the Chola king who was seated on his throne, majestic like Indra. "Hail monarch! may thy reign be prosperous! may all thy days be happy!" said one of the monks, "even in former days, many men have died in this city for the women they loved. When Parasurama was killing all the kings of Jambu-dvipa, in days of old, Kanthan then reigning at Pukâr, deemed it prudent to conceal himself and left the kingdom in charge of his illegitimate son, Kakanthan, who being the son of a courtezan could not succeed to the crown, and therefore would not be attacked by Parasurama. Kakanthan's son, having made an immodest proposal to the wife of a Brahmin who was returning alone through the city gate, after bathing in the Kâveri, was killed by his father. Another son of the same king was also killed by the father, for having insulted similarly a chaste and beautiful woman who was the daughter of a merchant.

"Is there any misfortune of the kind which has occurred now?" enquired the king: and the

monk related to him that Prince Udaya-kumâra had been of late courting Mani-mêkalai although she had become a nun: that to avoid him she assumed the shape of Kaya-chandikai: and that the husband of the latter killed the prince out of jealousy, as he attempted to enter his wife's apartment at mid-night. The king was shocked and grieved to hear of the melancholy end of his son, and looking at his prime minister, Choliya-enâti, said, "The punishment that I should have meted out to my wayward son, has been inflicted by Kanchanan. Let the prince's body be cremated at once and the daughter of the actress be confined in prison." [1]

The Queen, Raja-maha-devi, bereaved of her beloved prince was disconsolate. She was however bent on taking revenge on Mani-mêkalai for having been the cause of her son's death, and said to the king that it was unjust to confine in prison a pious and intelligent maiden like Mani-mêkalai. The king having consented to her release, she sent for Mani-mêkalai and directed her to lodge with her in the palace. She then plotted to disgrace Mani-mêkalai, and inviting an illiterate youth gave him a handful of gold coins, and told him to seduce Mani-mêkalai, whom she also tried to render unconscious by administering drugs. But Mani-

1. Ibid., Canto XXII.

mêkalai was unaffected by the drugs, and assumed the form of a man, when the youth came to her; and he fled out of the city, afraid that the Queen had attempted to entrap him in some dangerous intrigue. The Queen then shut up Mani-mêkalai in a room, on the pretence that she was unwell, and gave her no food. Mani-mêkalai repeated the incantation which could save her from hunger, and remained as lively as ever. Disconcerted in all her attempts, and astonished to find that Mani-mêkalai was not in the least affected by want of food, the queen was now convinced that she was a virtuous and saintly character. She prayed for Mani-mêkalai's pardon for having persecuted her under the belief that she was the cause of her son's death. Mani-mêkalai who was ready to forgive her said, "When you were Queen Nilapati in your former birth, your son Râhula died, bitten by a venomous snake, and I who was then his wife gave up my life on his funeral pyre. Your son had in a fit of rage killed his cook in his previous birth, and the effect of this sin reacted on him now and he was murdered by the Vinchayan." She related further to the Queen all the events that occurred since she met prince Udaya-kumâra at Uva-vana and explained to her how she was able to preserve her life, with the help of

the spells taught to her by the Goddess of the ocean, notwithstanding the persecutions of the Queen. "I could have with the aid of my spells, gone out of the prison, but I did not do so; because I wished to stay and console you, who are the mother of my departed lover. Those only know true happiness who never cease to love all sentiment beings." Consoled with these words, the Queen rose and made a profound obeisance to Mani-mêkalai, but the latter would not allow her to do so. "You are the mother of my husband in a former birth: and now you are the great Queen of the Monarch of this land. It is not proper that you should bow to me," she said and bowed low to her in return.[1]

Chitrâpati who had heard of the murder of Prince Udaya-kumâra and of the imprisonment of her grand-daughter Mani-mêkalai and her subsequent release, went to the palace and falling at the feet of the Queen represented to her all her misfortunes, and implored that Mani-mêkalai be restored to her. But the Queen informed her that Mani-mêkalai hated intensely the life of a courtezan, and would not therefore reside with her hereafter. Meantime Mâthavi accompanied by the Buddhist abbot also sought an audience of the

1. Ibid., Canto XXIII.

Queen. When they saw the venerable monk, the Queen and her attendants rose and went forward to receive him. The Queen greeted him respectfully, and having let him to a seat, washed his feet, and courteously said, "It is my good fortune that you are pleased to pay me this visit, although this short walk must have given your aged feet no little pain. May you be blessed with health for many years to come!"

"Listen to me Queen!" said the monk "although my life is devoted to religion, I am now like the setting sun." He then began an eloquent exposition of teachings of Buddha regarding the cause of birth, ignorance, good and evil deeds and their consequences. He exhorted the Queen and all who listened to him to keep in the path of virtue: and turning to Mani-mêkalai, he said "you young maid, who know your former birth! you shall have to learn first the doctrines of other creeds, and then I shall teach you the principles of Buddhism." As he rose to depart, Mani-mêkalai bowing at his feet, said "If I stay any longer in this city, every one will curse me as one who caused the death of the king's son. I shall therefore visit the country of Aputra: thence I shall go to Manipallavam, and to Vanji where a temple has been erected to Kannaki." Looking at her mother and

grandmother, she said, "my dear relatives! be not concerned about my safety," and left them. Proceeding to the temple of Champa-pati, she worshipped the Goddess, and flying through the air, descended in a grove in Chavakam,[1] outside the great city of the king, who is a decendant of Indra. She saluted a monk, who was living in that grove, and asked "what is the name of this city and who is its ruler?" The monk replied "This is Naga-puram, and the reigning king is Punya-raja, son of Bhoomichandra. From the day of the birth of this king, the rain has never failed, and harvests have been plentiful, and no pestilence has visited this country."[2]

Soon after the king happened to visit the monk Dharma-sravaka, with his family, to listen to

1. Chavaka or Chavaka-dvipa is the island of Sumatra. The king of Chavaka appears to have ruled over also Java and the small islands adjacent to Sumatra. Ptolemy speaks of the Greater and Lesser Chavaka, referring to Sumatra and Java. I have not been able to identify Nagapura, because the information available regarding Sumatra is at present very scanty. The most important seaport on the East-Coast which traded formerly with the Coromandel Coast is Sri Indrapura. It is the capital of a kingdom. See J. Anderson's Acheen and Coast of Sumatra, pp. 231 and 172. Dr. B. Heyney's Account of India and Sumatra, pp. 395 and 396. That Buddhism and Brahminism spread to Sumatra and Java, at a very early period, is attested beyond a doubt by extensive remains of ancient temples and sculptures on these islands.

2. Ibid., Canto XXIV.

his preaching of the Law. Surprised to find a young and beautiful maiden in the company of the monk, he enquired "who is this maiden of matchless beauty, who seems to be a mendicant and listens to the preaching of the Dharma?" One of the king's officers replied, "There is none equal to this maiden in all Jambu-dvipa. I learnt the history of this maid when I went in a ship to Kavirip-paddinam and paid a friendly visit to the Chola-king Killivalavan. The Buddhist monk then told me all about this maid. She is now come here from that city."

"The alms-bowl which once belonged to you is now in my hands," said Mani-mêkalai to the great astonishment of the king. "You do not remember your former birth, nor do you know your present birth. Unless you worship the seat of Buddha at Mani-pallavam you cannot understand the nature of this prison of re-births. I would advise you to come there." She then quitted the city, and flew through the air to Mani-pallavam. The king returned to his palace and learnt from his foster mother, Queen Amara-sundari, that he was not her son but was born in the hermitage of the Buddhist monk, and that the late king Bhoomichandra obtained him from the monk, and, brought him up as his own son. Having thus ascertained the truth of Mani-mêkalai's statement, he was anxious to lay

down the crown, and to lead the life of a recluse. He disclosed his intention to his minister Janamitra, who being alarmed at the sudden change which had come over the monarch's mind, said, "My king ! may thou live for ever! Before you were born, this kingdom suffered from severe famine for twelve long years, mothers abandoned their babes, and myriads of people died of starvation. Like rain in the midst of scorching summer, you were born, and from that time forward showers have fallen in due season, crops have been abundant, and none felt the want of food. If you leave this country, I fear our prosperity will vanish and famine will again appear in the land. Tenderness to other lives is the first duty preached by the great Buddha. You seem to forget this duty which you owe to your subjects."

"Anyhow I am so eager to visit Mani-pallavam that I will not be satisfied unless I go there. You ought to look after the Government and the palace for the period of a month," said the king, and commanded at once that arrangements be made for his voyage. As soon as a ship was ready, he went on board, and with favourable winds, the ship arrived at Mani-pallavam. Mani-mêkalai received the king with sincere pleasure, and took him to the sacred seat of Buddha. The king reverently

went round the seat and worshipped it, and at once, his former birth came to his recollection as clear as if it had been reflected in a mirror. "I know my former birth and my sorrow is removed," exclaimed the king, "Thou Goddess of Learning! of Dakshina-Mathura in the Tamil-land: on a rainy night when a number of beggars came to me, at thy shrine, for food, and I was at a loss to find meals for them, you were pleased to place in my hands a miraculous cup out of which any number of people could be fed. Ever in my future births I shall worship thee as I have done in the past." He then left the seat with Mani-mêkalai and rested in the shade of a *Punnai* tree. Deepa-thilakai, the guardian deity of the sacred seat, appeared before them and accosted the king. "Welcome! thou pious man who brought the wonderful cup and died on this island. Behold the skeleton of thy former body which lies at the foot of yonder tree, under a heap of sand thrown up by the waves of the sea." She then addressed Mani-mêkalai as follows: "Thou good maid, who now holds the miraculous cup in thy hand! your native city has been destroyed by an eruption of the sea. I shall tell you the cause of the calamity. Peeli-valai, the daughter of the king of Nâga-nâd, visited this island with her son, to worship the Buddha's

seat, which had been placed here by Indra. When she was staying here, a ship belonging to a merchant of Kavirip-paddinam happened to anchor at the island. The princess having ascertained that the ship was to sail to Kavirip-paddinam, entrusted to the merchant's care her son, to be taken to his father, the Chola-king Killi-valavan. The merchant received the prince with great pleasure on board his ship, and sailed immediately. But violent winds wrecked the ship on an adjacent coast at midnight, and the merchant and some of the crew who escaped reported the sad occurrence to the king. Killi-valavan went in search of his son and neglected to perform the annual festival in honor of Indra. The goddess of the ocean enraged at this insult to the king of gods, sent a huge sea-wave, which submerged Kavirip-paddinam. The venerable Buddhist monk accompanied by Mâthavi and Sutamati has gone to Vanchi, and you should go there and meet them." The goddess then departed, and the king desirous of seeing the body in which he was previously born, scooped out the sand at the spot indicated by the goddess and discovered a skeleton in perfect order. At the sight of this skeleton, the king fainted, and Mani-mêkalai comforted him by telling him that she

came to his City and invited him to the island, in the hope that after learning his former birth, he will be the model of a pious and good king, and establish his fame throughout the many islands over which he rules. "If kings themselves wish to turn monks who will help the poor?" she said. "Remember! true charity is to give food and clothing and shelter to living beings."

"Whether in my own country, or in other lands, I shall perform the charity which you have indicated. You have reformed me by giving me a knowledge of my former births. How can I part from you who have been so kind to me?" replied the king.

"Grieve not for this parting. Your kingdom calls for thee and your presence is needed there. Return therefore at once on board your ship. I shall go to Vanchi" said Mani-mêkalai and flew into the air.[1]

She arrived at Vanchi and visited the temple erected in honor of her father Kovilan and step-mother Kannaki.[2] Having worshipped them she changed her form to that of a monk, and inspected every temple and hall and platform where men devoted to religion were congregated. She sought

1. Ibid., Canto XXV. 2. Ibid., Canto XXVI.

instruction from the professors of the Vedic, Saiva, Vaishnava, Ajivaka, Nirgrantha, Sankya, Vaiseshika and Lokayata religions.[1] She met Kovilan's father who had become a Buddhist monk, and from him she learnt that the Buddhist abbot of Pukâr had left Vanchi and gone to Kanchi. Her grandfather advised her to go to Kanchi and feed the poor of that city, as a famine was raging in that part of the country. She took her miraculous cup and flew through the air to Kanchi, and visited the Buddhist Chaitya which had been built by the king Killi, the younger brother of Killi-valavan. Her arrival having been reported to the king by his officers, he visited her accompanied by all his ministers. "Thou pious maid!" said the king "my kingdom groans under a severe drought, and I am glad therefore that thou hast appeared with this wonderful cup. I have built a tank and planted a grove just like those at Mani-pallavam," and pointed out the place to her. At her request, the king built a sacred seat for Buddha, and temples for the goddesses Deepathilakai and Mani-mêkalai. She then fed all the deformed and aged and destitute persons who came to her. The Buddhist monk arrived later on, with Mâthavi and her friend Sutamati: and Manimêkalai received them with every mark of respect

1. Ibid., Canto XXVII.

and feasted them.[1] Then she sat at the feet of the venerable abbot and learnt the doctrines of Buddha.[2] When she was convinced that the doctrines were true, and was prepared to take refuge in the threefold gem, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the monk initiated her further in the duties of a nun, and she was admitted into the order, with due ceremony, amidst a grand display of lights.[3]

1. Ibid., Canto XXVIII.
2. Ibid., Canto XXIX.
3. Ibid., Canto XXX.

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