

THE ANKLET

(BASED ON SILAPPATHIKKRAM)

A Play in Three Acts

(Adapted from the Ancient Tamil Classic)

By

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INTRODUCTION

Silappathikaram is perhaps the greatest - certainly the most popular – of the ancient Tamil epics. It was written in the first or the second century of the Christian era. The tragic story of Kovalan and Kannaki has been told against the background of the culture and civilization of the Tamil people. The fortunes of the individuals are inextricably bound with the destinies of the Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms. Kovalan and Kannaki were born in the Chola capital of Poompuhar, met their destiny in the Pandya capital of Madurai and attained salvation on the lonely hills of the Chera kingdom. The hill tribes, who witnessed the strange phenomena of Kannaki waiting for her husband on top of a lonely hill and flying away with him in a chariot, related the incident to the Chera king who happened to be camping nearby. Other poets and travellers present at that time confirmed the burning of Madurai and of Kannaki's life in Poompuhar. The brother of the king - Ilango - who was a poet of no mean order put the various pieces together to create an epic. It is this linking of the fortunes of a family with the destinies of kingdoms and the portrayal of a whole civilization as well as the dramatic story of the Anklet that has made it an enduring as well as a popular epic.

The picture of Tamil Nadu as portrayed by Silappathikaram is one of great cultural renaissance. Buddhism, Jainism as well as Hinduism existed side by side and vied with each other in philosophical disputation as well as for popular support. There was a degree of religious tolerance that was unknown in later centuries. From the socio-economic point of view, the merchants and seafarers of the Tamil kingdoms traded with the countries of South East Asia and colonized those areas. There were Roman settlements in the port cities of Tamil Nadu particularly in Poompuhar. Art and literature, Music and Drama flourished. People were urbane, sophisticated and prosperous. Particularly in the field of literature, the short and exquisite poems of the Sangam age were giving place to great epics like Silappathikaram, Manimekalai and Jeevaka-Chinthamani.

The story of Kovalan and Kannaki has been acted as a play throughout the ages – in various versions – in the village squares and, later, in theatres until about fifty years ago. The story is known to almost everyone in Tamil Nadu. There are temples in honour of Kannaki both in South India as well as in Sri Lanka. Kannaki is often cited as the supreme example of womanly virtue as well as heroism.

In adapting this great classic to the requirements of the modern stage, I have kept faithfully to the spirit of the original version. However, there is one major departure. And that is, I have brought Kannaki and Madhavi on the stage together at the death of Kovalan, which is according to the popular version. This is because; the dramatic possibilities as well as logic indicate that they should meet. It was inevitable that when Kovalan left her suddenly and disappeared, Madhavi as a true and loyal mistress should go after him and follow him to Madurai. And so, I let them meet for a brief moment before they go their

separate ways – Kannaki to fulfil her destiny and Madhavi to renounce worldly life and become a Jainist nun.

One of the problems that the modern writer faces in adapting an ancient classic to modern requirements is in the treatment of the supernatural. To accept the supernatural – such as Kovalan returning to earth after his death and Kannaki flying away with him in a chariot – is somewhat repugnant to the scientific temper of the modern age. On the other hand, to eliminate the supernatural altogether is impossible. The natural and supernatural are so inextricably inter-woven that any attempt to remove it would be to destroy the literary and artistic merits of the story. Ancient poets are well known for their art of exaggeration. Therefore, in retelling the story all that can be done is to accept super-natural as imaginative or symbolic truth in the interests of the story and then ignore it. What is of universal and lasting interest is not the supernatural, but the conflict of characters and situations which are relevant even today.

Perhaps, a larger audience outside Tamil Nadu will read and enjoy this great story and understand something of the ancient culture of the Tamils.

Coimbatore

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CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

Kannaki	- Daughter of a rich merchant in the city of Puhar.
Devanthi	- Her companion and maid.
Kovalan	- Kannaki's husband
Mathari	- Wife of a cattleherd, Kannaki's hostess in Madurai
Madhavi	- Kovalan mistress, a dancer by profession
Kopperundevi	- Queen of the Pandya Kingdom
Neduncheliyan	- King of the Pandya Kingdom
Minister to the Pandya King	
Leader of the Guards	

ACT ONE

Kannaki's House in the City of Puhar

ACT TWO

The House of the Cattleherd in Madurai
about a month later

ACT THREE

The Palace of the Pandya King the same evening

ACT ONE

Kannaki's house in the ancient city of Puhar at the mouth of the river Kaveri. There are signs of former wealth and affluence. But the present is one of severe austerity. Kannaki, a young woman, is seen sitting on a divan by the window and watching the street. Her mood is one of pensive melancholy. Her companion and maid Devanthi is seen through the window walking towards the house and presently enters the room balancing a big metal pot full of water on her head. She crosses the stage, places the pot of water in a corner.

Kannaki:

What is the gossip by the river this morning?

Devanthi:

There is always idle talk at the bathing ghat
For those who wish to listen.
That is the only place where women congregate
Without the interference of men.
So, you can rest assured
There will be plenty of gossip there.
And to-day being the morning of Indra's festival.
There was more than the usual crowd
And more than the usual talk.

Kannaki:

Is that why you are so late?

Devanthi:

You know I never listen to
Or repeat gossip, madam.

Kannaki:

Don't people ask you questions about me?
Don't they say 'does Kannaki

Still expect her husband to come back to her?
Is she upset about him?
Does she get any help from her parents?
Or is she still proud?
Don't the women ask you these questions
And don't you answer them
With a knowing, superior air?

Devanthi:

You know I would tell them
To mind their own business.
But what is the matter with you to-day, madam?
You seem more agitated than usual.

Kannaki:

I had a strange dream last night.

Devanthi:

What was it about?

Kannaki:

I dreamt that my husband and I
Were united once more
And that we went on a long journey.
We reached an ancient city
And while there, a great calamity befell my husband;
And ever so many things happened,
I can't remember them all.
Then I met him again on top of a lonely hill
In the company of angels
And flew away in a heavenly chariot.
It was so vivid and strange while it lasted
And seemed so real that I was frightened
And it took me some time to realise
It was only a dream.

Devanthi:

What time was it when you had the dream?

Kannaki:

Almost morning.

Devanthi:

Then, you may realise your dream

Sooner than you think.

Kannaki:

But I am so upset about that journey

To a strange city

And the calamity to my husband.

Devanthi:

As for being united with your husband

I have every reason to believe

It will come true soon, if not immediately.

But as for the rest of your dream,

I suggest we go and have a bath this evening

In the sacred waters of 'Sun' tank

And the evil effects will be washed away.

Kannaki:

No, if I cannot win my husband

From another woman's snares by my love

And constancy, or protect him from evil

By the power of my chastity,

Divine assistance is no use.

I shall not invoke it.

Devanthi :

Whether you condescend to invoke

Divine assistance or not,

I think you are going to be united

With your husband shortly.

Kannaki:

Do not raise false hopes in my despairing heart
Devanthi. I have had many dreams
In the past and you have always interpreted them
To my advantage. And I have sat by this window
And watched the street eagerly
Awaiting his arrival until my eyes hurt
And my poor heart ached. And my misery
Was all the greater at the end of the day.
All dreams are false.
I will not even sit by the window to-day.

(She walks towards a corner of the room from where she cannot see the street)

Devanthi:

What I am telling you now is no interpretation
Of a dream. Listen, I met a friend of mine
At the bathing ghat and she told me.....”

Kannaki:

I don't want to hear it! I don't want
To hear it! How often have I told you
Not to listen to vulgar stories
And not to repeat them to me!

Devanthi:

But I wouldn't repeat them
Unless I knew you would be pleased to hear them.

Kannaki:

Alright, tell me what it is.

Devanthi:

Our lord Kovalan and that woman Madhavi
Went to the seashore early this morning
And were heard singing duets.
At first he sang.....”

Kannaki:

I told you I didn't want to hear it.
Are you against me too
That you torture me with such details?

Devanthi:

The story will end well, madam,
Even if it does not seem to begin well.

Kannaki:

Go on then.

Devanthi:

He sang a love song which implied
He was pining for a woman he had lost.
And Madhavi who has always been afraid
That he might leave her some day and come back to you
Thought that perhaps he was thinking of you.
So, in order to make him jealous –
And there is no better method of keeping a man
Tied to the end of your sari –
She too sang as if she were pining for some one else.

Kannaki:

She probably was.

Devanthi:

No madam. Though Madhavi is a dancer
By profession, she loves him truly
And in his heart of hearts
He knows it too. That is why
It is so much more difficult for him to leave her.
But let me tell you the end of the story.

Kannaki:

I wish you would tell me exactly what happened
And leave out all the unpleasant details.

Devanthi:

Well, this is what happened.
He was so annoyed at her singing
That he left her abruptly. You know what men are:
They get so jealous over trifles
And work themselves up to a state over nothing.
And yet, they expect us to forgive them everything.

Kannaki:

Many times he had left her in the past.
Only to return before he could reach my doorstep.

Devanthi:

But this time it is final.
When he parted from her so suddenly,
Madhavi did not know what to do.
She thought he might perhaps be waiting
For her in her house and hurried there.
Not finding him there, she sent him
A letter and a garland of jasmynes
Through her maid, who met him in the streets,
Care – worn and distracted.
But he abused
His erstwhile mistress as faithless
And untrue, spurned her refused to read the letter
Or receive the garland.

Kannaki:

Is it all true or are you merely saying
This to give me temporary solace?
I would rather hear the bitter truth
Than sweet words that are false.

Devanthi:

It is the truth and there is no doubt about it.
There had been talk of a break between them
For some time but I didn't want to tell you

Until there was something definite.

Kannaki:

I thought he was fond of the art of dancing and singing.

Devanthi:

He was. It was her dancing
That attracted him first, and afterwards,
It was the very same dancing that he objected to.
He did not like her to give public exhibitions.
Did not want other men to be captivated by her
Face and figure in the same way that he had been.
When other men discussed her and made jokes
About her, it made him angry and jealous.

Kannaki:

Do you think he will come to me now?
Do not answer 'yes' if you think not.
I do not want to be encouraged.
But tell me what you really think?

Devanthi:

He will and when he does, do not lose him again.

[Kannaki's husband Kovalan is seen walking in the street and approaching the door]

He was come!

[There is a knock on the door; Devanthi goes to answer the knock]

Kannaki:

[Raises her head upwards and prays]

Oh lord, you have answered my prayers
At long last. You have given me my opportunity.
My pleading had not been in vain
And I am grateful to you.

[With determination, as if she has made up her mind over something]

This is the moment I have been waiting for.

Devanthi:

He is here at last!

Kannaki:

Who?

Devanthi:

[Surprised] He, of course! Our master,
Your husband, madam.

Kannaki:

I have no master on this earth.
And as for my husband, I lost him years ago.
I am a widow for all practical purposes.

Devanthi:

That you are certainly not! Your hair is not shaved
And the beautiful, uncombed black locks fall so sadly
Over your forehead. You do not wear white.
The string that was tied round your neck
On your wedding day is still there
And the man who tied it
Is even now waiting at your door
Rubbing one foot against the other with impatience.

[KNOCK]

Kannaki:

Perhaps his impatience is not so much
To see me as to return to his mistress.
It is the festival of Indra to-day
And he may want to surprise her
With another of my ornaments.
Tell him I have none left.
Tell him my arms and neck have been bare
For a long time and my ears and nose

Have not felt the weight of precious stones.
And this string round my neck about
Which you talk so much is of no value
To her who has managed without it all this time.
Tell him I have nothing more to offer.

Devanthi:

Do not be hard on him madam;
He is thoroughly penitent.
There is misery written all over his face.
He has not come with the glib excuses
Of a profligate or the smooth deceiving tongue
Of a clever liar. He has had a sudden
Attack of guilty conscience.
He is now completely awake from his bad dream
That has lasted these five years.
But if you reject him now,
You will lose him for ever.

[KNOCK]

Kannaki:

How dare he cross my pure though humble threshold,
Bringing with him the smell of the scents
That woman has sprinkled on him,
Wearing the clothes tainted by contact
With that woman's bed! Perhaps his
Heart is still hankering after
The indecent orgies of that woman's trade:
Perhaps she has no more need for him
And has probably found someone better,
Weather and this poor man
Who was once my husband had nowhere else to go.
That is why has come here. Send him away.

Devanthi:

Madam, you know that is not possible.
Madhavi loves him with a woman's heart.
True she has taken all his wealth from him.
But it is only to protect him from his own
Foolishness for he is quite capable of losing
It all on the maddest venture. But she will
Not give him up. If he is here it means he
Is tired of her. The moment of her misfortune
Is the turning point of yours. Take it
Madam; do not let it go past you.

Kannaki:

Of course I will not let it go past me
For this is the moment of my revenge.
Do you think I am going to forego it?

Devanthi:

No madam, this is not the moment of your
Revenge. It is the moment of fulfilment,
Of victory if you like,
But certainly not revenge. It is the end
Of your long, lonely vigil
And the beginning of happiness.
Like all wise people, you must be generous
In your moment of victory. We women cannot afford
To be vindictive with our husbands.

Kannaki:

On how many nights when the moon
Shone bright and the galaxy of stars
Shed their divine light on this miserable earth,
I have sat in the moonlit parlour
And watched the billows wash the pebbled shore!
On how many nights I have pined

For my husband when he was enjoying
The embraces of Madhavi! Afraid
Of my own thoughts, yet ashamed to meet
Other people, how many days I have spent
In this miserable room! How often
Have I sat by this window and watched
Other husbands returning from far off lands
With wealth and fame to their waiting wives!
And yet you want me to forgive him!

Devanthi:

Yes, dear child; though I call you madam,
I have been your nurse, companion
In your loneliness and a mother
In your silent grief; I have stood between you
And the malicious gossip of the outside world
Just as I have hidden the full extent of your sorrow
Even from yourself in making you proud
And unbending. But please listen to me now
And be guided by my words. You are
Only a woman. Your heart may bleed
With pain over and over again. But there is nothing
You can do; it is your duty
To suffer in silence, to curse fate
And offer prayers to the family gods.
You may shed tears of sorrow, longing
And bitterness and accept any happiness
That comes your way in all humility.

Kannaki:

I shall never accept such a fate.

Devanthi:

At least accept your husband when he comes to you.

Kannaki:

No, from now on I, too, shall fight.
If I can suffer pain as much
As in the last five years,
I can inflict pain too.

Devanthi:

The best way of inflicting pain on your
Adversary is to take back your husband.

Kannaki:

What do I care for her or her ignoble
Schemes? She will only be too glad
To practice it on someone else.
But what about him?

(KNOCK)

Devanthi:

To hurt him is to hurt yourself.
Are you so fond of pain
That you do not want to part with it?
Have you lost the capacity for happiness?

Kannaki:

I do not know; I am confused
And frightened. What if he should leave me
Again? What if it should be nothing
But a trick of hers, a cruel prank
To get a little more dissipated happiness
Out of my suffering?

Devanthi:

Do not be afraid, madam. The story
Of their quarrel is true.
When he left you last time.
You were young and artless and trusted him
Implicitly. But now, you should be able
To keep him, for your beauty is no less than hers
And you have the advantage of being his wife.

Kannaki:

What do you mean?

Devanthi:

Do not ever let him be confident
About your love. Yield to him
As if it were a boring duty;
Keep him waiting for whatever he wants.....”

Kannaki:

Enough of your advice! Do you think
I will demean myself by practicing tricks
That are worthy of a public dancing girl?

Devanthi:

You will be surprised what we womenfolk
Have to resort to, to keep our husbands
From straying.

Kannaki:

I shall never stoop to such methods.

Devanthi:

You are proud, madam, but not very wise.
May I bring him in before he departs?

Kannaki:

If you bring him in here against my will,
I shall lavish all my stored up anger on him,

Devanthi:

Yes, do that; but afterwards,
Lavish all your stored up love, too.
Abuse him by all means, but abuse him
To his face. At this distance
And with the door shut, he cannot hear

Your words. And my poor repetition of them
Will not compensate for the sincerity
And the beautiful ringing tones of your voice.
Yes, abuse him; do not let a single incident
Escape your notice. Tell him what you think
And even more than you think. Made him feel
Thoroughly miserable, ashamed and abject,
But in the end, forgive him graciously.
A man with a bad conscience
May have a relapse to his old habits
If you let him harbour it too long.

Kannaki:

Tell me, is he really miserable?
Does he look ill?

Devanthi:

He tells me that his misery
Can be obliterated by the sight of your face
And his illness cured by your soothing words.

Kannaki:

I have waited for this moment so long,
Oh, ever so long. Sitting on my
Unsoiled bridal couch, I have thought
And planned this moment over and over again
In my imagination. I have worked out
The scene in its minutest details,
To the last inflexion of my voice
To each syllable. I knew he would return
One day like a beggar coming for alms.
My greatest pleasure was to reject him.
To make him suffer all the shame and loneliness.
The indignities that have been inflicted on me.
Now the moment is here, my plans

Have gone astray. I am confused;
I do not know what to say or do.
I thought I was strong and proud
And inflexible; but I am weak like any other woman
Who weeps over losing her husband
To the wiles of another. Help me
At this moment Devanthi; tell me what to do.
But let it be in keeping
With my dignity and my love.

Devanthi:

Your dignity is not lost in accepting
Your husband when he returns with remorse
For his past, madam. It is your sacred duty.

Kannaki:

If you say so, let him come.

Devanthi:

He can't come in with you looking like that.
Comb your hair and straighten your sari.
You don't want him to think
You have been pining for him
All this time. Let your grief
Not be too evident. Have a spot
On your forehead and I will get you some flowers.

[Devanthi hurriedly helps with Kannaki's toilet]

Kannaki:

Hurry up Devanthi. What if he should get
Impatient of waiting and leave?

Devanthi:

It wouldn't do him any harm
To be kept waiting for another five minutes.
After all you have waited five years!

Kannaki:

Oh, I am so happy!

Devanthi:

Let not your happiness be too spontaneous, madam.

Your anger as well as your happiness

Should be deliberate and measured

In the correct proportions to suit the occasion.

Keep a firm hold on your emotions.

A little sarcasm followed by anger

And virtuous indignation, interspersed

By a few well chosen sobs; and when he is

Really miserable, a final melting away in a flood

Of tears and love. That is what will make him

Your slave for a long time to come.

[Devanthi goes to the front door to bring Kovalan in]

Kannaki:

As if emotions could be measured

Like a bag of rice!

[All the same, she prepares to receive her husband methodically]

Kannaki:

What brings you here my lord?

Kovalan:

A guilty conscience and a broken heart;

Repentance for my folly, remorse for my past;

The awakened love for my dear wife, dormant so long

But never extinguished; and empty hands.

Kannaki:

I can see the empty hands.

Kovalan:

Cannot you feel the anguish in my heart?
Should I tear it open to prove to you
My shame and my misery? Can you not see
The sorrow in my face or hear it in my voice?

Kannaki:

Your voice and face have been trained
By an expert actress and dancer, my lord.
And I hear you are not a bad singer yourself
Though I have never had a chance to know.
But I am not an expert in such things;
Therefore I cannot judge.

Kovalan:

While others made their name in commerce
Like my worthy father, or became
Ministers to the king by their wit and wisdom,
Or earned eternal glory in the service of their land,
I was a mere man of fashion.
Flattered by the idle, scorned by the virtuous,
Blinded by the abysmal darkness of an unholy passion,
I could not see the light. Drunk
With the devilish beauty of a faithless whore,
Caught in the coils of her cunning design,
I have been asleep; my heart was drunk,
My conscience chained to the passion fancy
Of a transitory love
That robbed me of my honour and my wealth.

Kannaki:

If your mind is as confused
As your figures of speech,
I think you had better go back.

Kovalan:

I have come to you a broken, but a wiser man;
The confusion is what is past,
Like the drunkenness and the darkness;
The morning light is here, my mind
Is sad but clear. Do not spurn me now, my wife;
After all I am your husband.

Kannaki:

Yes, you are my husband who promised me
Before the assembled nobles of this state,
Before the rising sun and the morning star,
Before the holy fire, before the world,
Before the unseen power that watches all our deeds,
To take me as your lawful wedded wife
And to live in domestic bliss. And yet,
You left me to the shame and loneliness
Of a neglected wife. You spurned me then,
Have you the face to ask me not to spurn you now?
Or, perhaps, it is only a ruse;
Perhaps you have come to see if I have
Any ornaments left for your mistress.
If that were so, I have an anklet here
That my mother gave me on my wedding day
Saying that I was not to part with it
Except as a last resort to save my life
Or that of my husband. I have
No other ornament except the wedding string
Which even you cannot remove except
By your death. So, take this anklet, go
And for ever do not cross my door.

[Devanthi comes in bringing a tray]

What is it?

Devanthi:

I have brought some flowers, fruit, rose water
And sandal wood paste, for our lord may be tired
And need refreshing.

Kannaki:

Take them away you fool!

Devanthi:

[Frightened] Yes madam. *[She takes the tray away]*

Kovalan:

How can you be so cruel? Your face
Has the softness of a morning rose
And yet your heart is hard.

Kannaki:

Yes, my heart is hard and getting harder, still,
For I have had to protect it against grief,
Against the malicious gossip of the world,
Against the sly glances of unwelcome persons
As I walked down the street alone.
I have not waited with love and tenderness
For my husband to return from across the seas
Like other wives. When storms broke
Over the ocean and it rose in a mighty roar
To dash against the shores, I was not afraid
Like other wives were, for the safety of their loved ones.
I was glad that the heavens were dark
And the waves were angry so that you would not be able
To go to the beach with your mistress.
But when the seas were calm and the sky was cloudless
And the gentle southern breeze brought the ships to harbour
It was then that I was sorry, for I could see
The other wives dressed in all their finery.
With scents and sandalwood paste
Go to the shore and meet their husbands.
It was then that I cried for I had no husband to welcome.

Kovalan:

My own remorse has pierced my heart
A thousand times more deeply
Than all the cruel words that you can say.
If it were possible to retrace my steps,
I should do it gladly even if it cost me
My life. But the past can never be retraced
Or obliterated. What is done
Can never be undone. Time can only go forward.
I merely ask forgiveness for the past,
Pity for the present, your love
And affection for the future.

Kannaki:

My heart is dried of all pity and of love,
Only its broken edge is used is sharpen
The keenness of my grief. There is nothing
But bitterness and the black depths
Of sorrow and suffering. Do not probe
My heart any deeper. Go back
To her from whom you have come.

Kovalan:

If that is your last word, then all hope is lost.

Kannaki:

Who am I? Only a discarded wife,
Superseded by one more cunning, more beautiful than I,
Trained in all the arts of making men her slaves.
Nature had no beauty for me, spring no charm;
The white heat of the sun or winter's biting cold
Have left me indifferent in this miserable room.
Life had assured me no joy, and death
Will bring no grief; thoughts of love have no thrill
And sweet words give no relief.
Laughter has no excitement and fond affection gives no peace.

My eyes no longer wink in silent merriment,
My bosom holds no warmth, my heart
No pity and my mind no hope. I feel
Only the acute pain of parting and separation
And bleed even at the touch of friendly hands.
That is the kind of woman I have become.
Can you love such a woman after having known Madhavi?

Kovalan:

Torture me as much as you like;
Aim your poisonous darts into my deepest wounds;
Only, relent and let me stay, for I love you still.

Kannaki:

If we are to be reconciled, and live
As man and wife.....”

Kovalan:

Then, I still have hope; but do not keep me
In suspense too long.....”

Kannaki:

I said, ‘if we are to be reconciled’,
Then we must purge ourselves of the past
And start afresh, clear our minds
Of all poison that has eaten into our souls,
Reveal to each other the deepest wounds, expose
The venom to the light of each other’s searching eyes
And dispose of it for all time to come.
Only then can we start a new life
Protecting each other from our weaknesses,
Making allowances for our follies, guarding
Against evil that is inherent in us all.
I must understand the heights of your folly

And the depths of my shame. Only then
Can we lead a new life untainted
By what has gone before.

Kovalan:

Listen then, I was a simple youth when I married you,
Dreaming of love, of flowers in spring,
Of moonlit nights on the sandy beach with my beloved,
Watching the departing ships from our quiet nook.
Had you given me time, flattered me
For my silly escapades, satisfied my foolish manly pride
By pretending that I was strong and you were weak,
Then I might have grown to what you wanted me to be
In time. But you, in your youthful wisdom
Were a hard task master, you wanted me
To be greater than I was. I yearned for a woman
To love and to protect, to feel superior to
And to please. But you were the exacting leader,
I, the reluctant follower, ready to desert
At the first opportunity.

Kannaki:

And the dancer Madhavi was your opportunity?
Tell me, how did you get to know her
In the first place?

Kovalan:

Do you want me to recount.
My folly? Can we not bury it?

Kannaki:

If you can survive living if folly,
You can surely survive recounting it.
I want the whole truth.

Kovalan:

When I left our home on that fateful day,
I heard the king's drummer announcing
The inaugural performance of a new and accomplished dancer

Named Madhavi in the Hall of the Nobles
And in the presence of the king himself.
I went into the specially decorated hall
Intending to spend only a few minutes.
I came out at the end a few hours later
With my senses poisoned by her evil charms –
As were many other young men –
And my mind enslaved by her devilish art.
The king had presented her with a garland
And when it was offered for sale,
I bought it rashly for a thousand and eight gold pieces
As my tribute to her art.

Kannaki:

Didn't you know that if you bought
That garland, you became her lover?

Kovalan:

I was weak and I was captivated.
Life with her was going to be a service
To the noblest art of dancing, I thought.
It was all going to be music, poetry,
I imagined with none of the sordid realities
To be faced. What a fool I was!

Kannaki:

And wasn't it all poetry and music?

Kovalan:

It was for a while; or at least,
She made me believe so in order to keep me there
Till my wealth was exhausted.
But when she started complaining about cheating
By the servants, about tradesmen overcharging
For everything and when she started
Practicing new dances with her teacher,
I got bored. After a time,
Even the moon became just as dull.....”

Kannaki:

As when you were with me?

Kovalan:

No, as anywhere else, I am wise now.

Kannaki:

And why did you leave her?

Kovalan:

It took me some time to find out
Her real nature. Slowly I realised
She was but a cheap dancing girl whose body
Was for sale to the highest bidder,
For though she was supposed to be my wife
For all practical purposes, she would not
Give up her dancing and I was left
Alone many times while she went
To practice her charms on other men.

Kannaki:

So you too suffered; my poor husband!

Kovalan:

Yes.

Kannaki:

But you suffered the agonies of jealous heart,
My lord, not those of a guilty conscience.
Is it with such a story
That you come to me for forgiveness?

Kovalan:

You are playing with me, Kannaki.
Is this why you have asked me to repeat
Everything that has caused me so much pain,
That I may suffer all the more?

Kannaki:

Then why did you not return to me
The moment you realised your folly?

Kovalan:

Realization was the beginning of my suffering
That I hope will end to-day.
For there was no one whom I could blame.
Abuse or criticize to satisfy my conscience.
There was no peg on which to hang my excuses, no faith
To sustain my weakness, no hope to urge me forward,
No confidence in myself. And I was alone.
For I was ashamed of the past, afraid
Of the future, afraid of what was in store,
I lived eternally in the present.
Sinking lower, involving myself
More deeply than before
I lived in the hour,
In the second, in the fleeting moment of pain
And unholy desire. And as a result,
I have no illusions left. But wisdom
Has come too late, for all our wealth
Has been spent in acquiring it.

Kannaki:

Devanthi! Devanthi!

[Devanthi comes in]

Devanthi:

Did you call me, madam?

Kannaki:

How long you are with those refreshments!

Devanthi:

[Brightening up] I shall bring them instantly, madam.

Kovalan:

Does that mean I am forgiven?

Kannaki:

What is there to forgive my lord?
I am your wife, bound to you by sacred ties
That even death cannot sever. You accepted
Me once when I was young, beautiful and wealthy.
I am still young, but my beauty has been ravaged
By my grief and my wealth by your folly.
It is for you to accept me as I am now.

Kovalan:

I accept with joy! But say I am forgiven.

Kannaki:

You are if that will ease your conscience.

Kovalan:

Now that I have a faithful and chaste wife,
Who loves me, I shall do great things. You shall
Inspire me and I shall earn fame and wealth
As once you expected me to do. The days
Of my youthful playfulness are over;
I shall start life anew.

Kannaki:

Our parents' names are known and respected
Across the seven seas, but we have lost all.
We cannot afford to live in this city
And be talked about by everyone, laughed at
In secret, sympathized with by our friends,
Patronized by our blood relations; let not
Our parents' names be dragged in the dust.

Kovalan:

Let us obliterate the past,
For it is but a memory, an unhappy burden
Weighing heavily on the future and which
We cannot afford to carry all our lives.
Let us leave this accursed town

And start afresh as you said
In the ancient city of Madurai,
The city, famous for its learning and its wealth.

Kannaki:

But it is so far away my lord.
Cannot you choose somewhere nearer?

Kovalan:

No place is too far for me to get away
From the scene of our misfortune.

Kannaki:

I, the only daughter of a merchant prince
To go wandering by foot into strange lands,
In search of wealth? To leave my home,
My friends and those who once were friends,
To leave all this, or store it in the background of my mind
To fade away slowly like a gradual death

Kovalan:

Do not be afraid, my wife. I shall
Work hard; necessity and your sufferings
Will urge me on to greater deeds
Though affluence failed to accomplish it.

Kannaki:

There is no need to work hard; I still have
That anklet I was telling you about. It is
Most valuable and will fetch a good price.
With that as capital, you can engage yourself
In some small business and with your skill
And our turn of luck, we shall be rich again

Kovalan:

Yes, and then if you are still homesick
We shall return as honoured citizens.
My folly would by then have been forgotten
And we should be welcomed back.

Devanthi:

Here are the refreshments, madam; I hope
I haven't kept you waiting long.

Kannaki:

Devanthi, we are going on a long journey
Before dawn tomorrow, prepare yourself.

Devanthi:

Yes, madam; I shall be prepared.

Kovalan:

To Madurai then, and to our fortune.

Kannaki:

Oh, that awful dream!

Kovalan:

What did you say?

Kannaki:

Nothing my lord.

ACT TWO

About a month later. The house of a cattle herd in the city of Madurai where Kannaki has taken shelter. The room is not on a grand scale but there are signs of hard work and happiness and contentment Clay pots and brass utensils for milk and butter are piled in the corners. Against a pillar is a butter churner. There is a bright coloured mat on the floor on which Kannaki is sitting. Mathari, the wife of the cattle herd, comes into the room.

Mathari:

Are you rested after your long and tiresome journey?
Did you sleep well? We are only poor folk
Who live by selling milk and butter and curds
But you come from among the richest in your land;
The comforts that we can provide for such as you
Are only few. Do not mind the austerities
Of a peasant's home and our happiness
Will more than compensate for our lack of luxuries.

Kannaki:

I am but a stranger to you all, and yet
You have taken me into your home
And ministered to my every need.
I have shared my thoughts with you,
My past trials and tribulations
And my future hopes and fears.
You are more than a mother to me
For I have not shared these with her,
Too ashamed, I have run away and she knows not
Where I am.

Mathari:

It is often true
That you can tell the most intimate secrets
To utter strangers while you cannot

Repeat them to your loved ones,
For strangers take you as you are
While relations judge you by your past.
But do not be afraid; your secrets are
As safe with me as in the innermost recess
Of your own heart.

Kannaki:

To have provided us with a shelter alone
Would have been extremely kind, but you
Have given me comfort and solace for my mind as well.
My limbs tired through walking in the forests
And over the hills for a month, no longer ache;
My mind is at peace and I feel
Thoroughly refreshed, I am now ready
To help you in your domestic tasks.

Mathari:

You will do no such thing. I will not have it said
That we extracted work from a noble lady
In return for shelter. But where is your husband?

Kannaki:

He was gone into the city to sell
My precious anklet and to see
What scope there is in trade
In some necessary commodity. He knows
The Greeks and Romans settled on our shores
And their ways, and could easily
Deal with them in selling them your surplus goods.

Mathari:

Your troubles are now, my dear,
You are in a country where philosophers
Are wise, the king is just, the land
Is prosperous and the people honest and true.
Therefore the rains do not fail, the harvests

Are bountiful and our granaries, always full.
Your husband will have all the facilities
Of honest trade, for our king welcomes
Foreign merchants to this city
So that they may see and praise
The fame and glory of his capital.
Soon you will have a house of your own
And all the luxuries to which you were born.
With perhaps the added bliss of children.

Kannaki:

You are so kind and encouraging
That I have already forgotten the pangs
Of leaving my home. The miseries of my past
Already seem like long forgotten ghosts
That once haunted my mind.

Mathari:

I must now go out for a little while
To deliver some milk, but meanwhile
My daughters will come and entertain you
With songs and dances so that you may forget
The absence of your husband.

[Mathari lifts a pot of milk and carries it on her head as she goes out]

[Devanathi comes in with a basket]

Devanathi:

These people in the market speak
Such a funny language, use such queer expressions
And yet they laugh at me for speaking properly.

Kannaki:

Language changes from place to place you
Know.

Devanthi:

And their clothes and their manners
Are simply frightful. They wear
The most old fashioned things and strut about
As if they were the leaders of fashion.

Kannaki:

So you don't like the people of Madurai?

Devanthi:

I wouldn't go so far as to say that.
But they do seem to think rather a lot
Of themselves and with no reason.
Take our hostess for example. She is only the wife
Of a cowherd and in our town
She would not even be allowed to speak to you.
And yet, she treats you as if you were
One of themselves.

Kannaki:

Don't forget she has given us shelter
And has been very kind to us.

Devanthi:

I am sure we could have done better.
For ourselves somewhere else.

Kannaki:

You are very ungrateful, Devanthi.

Devanthi:

You trust these foreigners too much madam,
I could not sleep all last night because
You told her about having that anklet
And I thought they might be after it.
You never know with these people.

Kannaki:

Give up idle talk and listen to me;
I am uneasy about my lord, Devanthi.
He is upright, brave and honest, but inexperienced
In the arts of negotiation. In a strange city
Where none knows him or whose son
He is, he may be easily cheated.

Devanthi:

Don't worry madam, he is more than a match
For all these foreigners; he can
Easily manage them and teach them a few tricks
Of their own trade whatever that may be.

Kannaki:

It is so long since he left and he should have been
Back before now. And while I wait
I look for evil signs lurking everywhere.
The oil in that lamp has gone dry, the flowers
That he gave me have faded, the fruit
Has gone bad since this morning; all these
Are signs I find difficult to ignore.

Devanthi:

They are not evil signs madam, but the result
Of passing time. The lamp has gone out because
Our hostess failed to replenish the oil;
The flowers have faded in the heat of the day
The fruit was over-ripe even yesterday.
Do not look for danger where there is none.
Your husband will return safely.

Kannaki:

It is that dream that has come true so far
In such detail that assails my mind.
Oh, that I had awakened

After the first part or at least
Taken your advice and bathed
In the sacred waters of the sun tank!

Devanthi:

I wish you had.

Kannaki:

I was proud then; I had nothing
But pride to sustain me in my unhappiness;
But now our that I have a husband to care for
I have no more pride, only anxiety
For his welfare.

Devanthi:

If it is written in the book of fate
That a thing shall happen, none can change it.
I can hear the girls coming
To entertain you. Do go and watch
Their dancing and forget your doubts.
I shall join you soon madam.

[Kannaki goes out. Music is heard in the back ground. Devanthi kneels before a picture of Sri Krishna and prays]

Devanthi:

Do not cause my lady any more unhappiness
Oh, God; she has suffered enough.
Let her enjoy at least a brief period
Of domestic bliss in this quiet retreat;
Strange rumours are afoot. Let him
Return in safety, unharmed
By any intrigues in this strange city.

[Madhavi comes in. She is a young, attractive sophisticated woman of the world]

Madhavi:

Is this the house of the cowherd
Where Kannaki stays with her husband?

Devanthi:

You here!

Madhavi:

Yes. Madhavi is here in search
Of her lover and his wife. You are Devanthi,
Companion to Kannaki, aren't you?
Where is your mistress?

Devanthi:

And I had foolishly imagined we were safe here!
How did you find out? Who told you
We had gone to Madurai? We never informed
A soul. What mischievous tricks are you about to play
On us? Cannot you leave us alone?

Madhavi:

When my letter was refused and my message spurned,
I thought it was a temporary quarrel and waited
In hope that my lover would return to me
In the evening or the day after, but he did not come.
The next day I went to Kannaki's house.

Devanthi:

You had the audacity to cross the door
Of a chaste and virtuous woman whom
You made unhappy!

Madhavi:

Yes, my love gave me courage
But I found the house abandoned,
Saw the austerity of the place where
My lover's wife had spent five unhappy years,
Saw the poverty that lurked in every corner
And the pride that hid it all from the world

And even from her own parents. It was then
That I realised my part in her sorrow
And decided to make amends and to return
All the wealth that he had lavished on me
As a poor recompense.

Devanthi:

Vile woman! Are you capable of regret and remorse?
If so, leave this city immediately; do not
Disturb once again, a happy household.

Madhavi:

I will when I have proved my innocence
And returned the wealth into rightful hands.

Devanthi:

But how did you get here?

Madhavi:

When! I found your house abandoned, I went
To their respective parents.

Devanthi:

What, there too?

Madhavi:

Yes, I went there too to expose
My sins and to ask them where you were,
Whither you had gone and when you would return.
Alas! they knew not; so there also
I was a messenger of sorrow, for they
Did not know that you had left the city
And left no trace.

Devanthi:

You carry sorrow like an infected germ,
The best that you can do
Is to isolate yourself.

Madhavi:

My fate is such perhaps.
But I had to follow it and left the city
By the very same route that you took
And followed you from one village to the next.
I saw the temples where you had prayed
The humble abodes where you had rested,
And my heart ached with pain and grief
For all the sufferings that you had undergone.

Devanthi:

You evil charmer of innocent men, Destroyer
Of their happy homes, foul perpetrator
Of immoral traffic, seducer of virtue and honour,
Listen to me;
Our lord Kovalan has no more wealth to offer you,
And his love or what remains of it, is pledged
To his wife. Your offer of help even if true
And honest will never be accepted, your innocence
Will never be believed and you will be spurned,
Insulted and reviled by us all. You will gain
Nothing by staying here.
You sow the seeds of sorrow wherever you go,
Carry misery and disruption and earn
The curses of all virtuous wives. Your
Looks are evil, your words are poison,
Your intentions are always foul. So I beg you,
Go, and do not return again.
I shall pray every day of my life
To all the Gods for your salvation. But
If you will not go, your accumulated sins

Will be multiplied and you will face in hell
For all eternity, he tortures and miseries
You have inflicted on us by your ignoble part.

[Kannaki comes in]

Kannaki:

What is the noise here?

Madhavi:

Dear sister – I hope you will let me
Call you my sister for we have both loved
The same man and suffered for it. I,
Unfortunate woman, am the cause of your misfortune
Without realizing it and have come
To make amends for what is past. I come
Not as a rival for your affections,
For I will not presume to compete with one
So beautiful as you, but as a humble slave
To do your bidding, to atone for my past.

Devanthi:

Go away before my lady gets angry;
Go and do not come back.

Kannaki:

Let her stay; and apply the arts of seduction
That she has so well practiced once more
If she desires. If my husband
Is weak enough to fall for them again,
Then I do not deserve a husband.

[She turns to Madhavi]

Miserable woman, have you no virtue
At least for show? No modesty or shame,
No dignity or self-respect, nor even the pride
Of your profession that even thieves are said to have
That you have followed us all this way
In search of another woman's husband?

Madhavi:

You are a respectable wife my dear,
Society guards your honour, protects
Your rights, upholds your claims and condemns
The husband if he leaves you. Convention
Bars you from following the man you love,
And demands that you wait and suffer.
But I have no such rights, no claims to duty
To detain the man I love. My name
Is at the mercy of every clever rogue
Who wags his tongue; my house is a place
Of alleged ill –fame, a den of vice.
The men who guard your virtue
Lightly besmirch my name. Though I practice
The noblest of the arts, no one dares
Or cares to protect my chastity.

Kannaki:

What protection did I have when my husband
Lavished all his wealth on you?

Madhavi:

Your honour was protected if not your wealth;
But listen to me dear sister, and then
Condemn me if you will. You married him
By your parents' wish, to the chant
Of the brahmins' hymns and were in duty bound
To him for life as he was to you. No duty
Compelled me, no virtue, honour of chastity
Forbade me, for I was free. Cupid
Threw his enchanting net around us both
And we were caught like helpless birds
And we lived as such, sharing in the ecstasy
Of a love so sweet that all else was ignored.
No bonds but those of love bound us together
Until our daughter arrived.

Kannaki:

You have a daughter?

Madhavi:

Yes, the image of your husband.

Kannaki:

Devanthi, why didn't you tell me
That our lord has a daughter?

Devanthi:

I didn't think you would like
The information madam.

Kannaki:

[Turns to Madhavi] Then lucky woman, be satisfied,
Do not aspire for more and cause
Needless unhappiness all round.
You have his child and his wealth
And you have had his love for a time.
What more can you ask?

Devanthi:

Do not listen to her madam; did you not hear
What our lord said? Her words are
Perfected with care in a thousand plays,
Her eyes and gestures are trained to express
Any mood she wants; her face is like a mask
That can be changed at will. All these
Are but aids to her cunning designs.
Sends her away before you too fall
A victim to her snares.

Madhavi:

I have not come begging for his love.
Though I desire it, it shall be
Exclusively for his wife. Never again
Will I come between you and him. I have come
Only to prove my innocence before him
Who suspected me and to offer you
All the wealth I possess, but for which

I have no use and to beg your pardon
For the past, for the misery you had suffered
On my account.

Kannaki:

Presumptuous woman!
Do you dare offer me your sympathy
Because my husband was blinded for a time
By carnal desire? Do you dare offer me
Your filthy gold as compensation
For your sins? Do you dare call me
Your sister? Do you not know my station,
My birth, and my virtues? Do you think
I will sell my pardon for your wealth?

Madhavi:

Do not insult me needlessly my dear,
In the eyes of Him who knows all
We are both unfortunate women, paying
The penalty for our former lives.
Birth and station in this world
Are not taken into account in the next.
And as for virtue, I grant you that
Though I must claim my share of it.

Kannaki:

You, a miserable courtesan, virtuous!

Madhavi:

Yes, strange as it may seem to you,
I too have my virtue. Whatever others may say,
My life has been dedicated to the noble art
Of dancing and my heart has been
Constant in its love.

Kannaki:

For another woman's husband!

Madhavi:

I cannot help that. If we could but control
Our hearts as easily as we do our hands
Or feet, then everyone would be an angel
And this world an earthly paradise.
If I had yielded to the tempting offers
Of other men, my fame would have been greater.
And yet, I was constant and true to my lover
Because I loved him. Don't you call that virtue?

Kannaki:

You stuck to him only because of his wealth.

Madhavi:

How simple you are in your judgement!
I have the wealth of the city of Puhar
At my disposal. But all that he gave
Is yours and is here for you to claim
Whenever you wish.

Kannaki:

If you were so sincere and so true
And loving, then why did you sing
Faithless songs and pretend you were
In love with someone else?

Madhavi:

I had no ties recognised by the world
To keep him by my side
And when there are no ties, a man
Is in constant danger of leaving you.
Every good-looking woman becomes a rival

And the suffering wife, an emblem of sacrifice
Looks more attractive from a distance. You feel
The pain of jealousy where no cause exists.
I was more jealous than a wife would be
And so was he. Bonds of love that seemed
Pure and ethereal and divine became
Shackles from which he longed to get loose;
Jealousy was the only means of keeping alive
His love for me, for I was ever afraid.

Kannaki:

So he was bored with you?

Madhavi:

No, but he had a guilty conscience about you
I think; there were times when he used to sit
For hours and not utter a word, but gaze
Into the emptiness that seemed to envelop him.
Even my daughter's pranks failed to amuse him.
Many were the times when I longed
To ask him about you, but he would not share
His thought with me.

Kannaki:

I too have often wondered about you,
What you were like, what charms you possessed,
What arts you practiced, what love you bore
Towards the man who married me.

Madhavi:

If we had but known each other
Before this, we could have shared the man
We both loved and made him happy and contented.

Kannaki:

No, you are the cause of all misery
And I hate you still. I will never share
My bridal couch with another woman.
But your words are strange and your thoughts
Seem pure. You have a ready answer
To every question, so, stay and meet
My husband if you like and let him
Decide your fate.

*[Mathari comes in during this speech, very agitated and is whispering to Devanthi –
Kannaki turns to her]*

What is it my friend?
You seem agitated and my lord is late;
If you bring bad tidings do not hide them from me.

Mathari:

I bring you evil news; prepare to hear it.

Kannaki:

Is it about my husband?

Mathari:

He has been accused
Of being a thief.....

Kannaki:

Who dares to accuse him
Of such an act?

Mathari:

He has been accused, caught with the stolen
Ornament, sentenced and executed
On the spot by the king's command.

Devanthi:

It cannot be true. There must be some mistake.
Perhaps you heard it from hearsay. Perhaps
It was someone else who was executed
And being a stranger to this city, they thought

It was my lady's husband. *[She turns to Kannaki]*

Do not believe her Madam; I shall go out
And find out the truth myself, for I am sure
It is false. It cannot be.

Madhavi:

Who told you of this? Did you see the execution?
Did you watch the trial? What proof
Have you that you bring such dreadful news
As if it were the truth?

Mathari:

How much I wish it were not true! How much
I wish that my tongue had been severed from my month
Before I repeated it! It would have been better
If I had died on my way here than bring
Such a sorry tale to end your happiness
For all time. But it is true I fear.

Kannaki:

Oh! My husband!

Madhavi:

My lover and my life!

Kannaki:

Is this the fate of one so illustrious
And true, one too proud to accept the help
Of his own parents, to die accused
Of being a thief with no defence?
To die by the ruthless hand of an unjust king,
Oh fate! Oh fate! We tempted you
When we came to this accursed city.
Oh that you had stayed with Madhavi
And left me in my unhappiness and thus
Escaped this cruel and unjustified death!

Madhavi:

You were so full of life; you gave life
To so many when they were in fear of death,
None returned from your doorstep empty handed.
Thousands sing your praises, remember you
In their prayers; could not their blessings
Have protected you from your fate?

Devanthi:

But how did it happen? How did you know?

Mathari:

When I left you some time ago, I met
My husband in the streets, where people
Stood about and talked of this unusual theft
By a stranger, how bold he had been
And how angry the king was that his wife's
Precious anklet should have been stolen.

Devanthi:

The Queen's anklet, is it?

Mathari:

That was what we were told, that a stranger
Approached the king's jeweller and offered
For sale the queen's anklet, saying
That it was his wife's and they had come
From a far off land in search of fortune.
It seems the jeweller reported it to the king
Who sent his guards to recover the ornament
And punish the thief by instant death.

Devanthi:

But how did you know it was my lady's husband?

Mathari:

When we heard it talked about, we felt
That a stranger and an anklet referred
Ominously to your lady's husband, and went
Immediately to the jeweller's house where we saw,
Oh, I cannot bear to say it!

Kannaki:

Please tell us what you saw, the heart
Once broken cannot be broken again.

Mathari:

I saw your husband's body in a pool
Of his own blood, the head severed
By a cruel axe had rolled away
And idle spectators were walking past
Talking of a thief and his just punishment.

Devanthi:

Is the king's jeweller so vile, the king
So villainous, his guards so foolish,
That they cannot distinguish between
A thief and a noble, honest man?

Kannaki:

My husband, you left me once for another,
For whom have you left me now?
Has some heavenly angel with her charms
Enticed you to the other world
And is this unjust king a mere accomplice
In such an act? You promised me at dawn to-day
That you would be back before nightfall.
For how many settings of the sun shall I wait
For your return. No, I shall not wait.

Madhavi:

You left me for your wedded wife, for whom
Have you left us both now, beloved?
You would not hurt your enemies in your life;
Why do you hurt your lovers in your death?

Kannaki:

If you were so weak as to fall
By the villainous hand of a foul assassin,
Why did you ever tempt me to leave our home?
If you were so guileless as to be tricked
By the very first rogue you met,
Why did you leave the protection of our state?
If you were so foolish, ill- informed,
About the crooked sceptre of this king,
Why did you choose to come to this place?

Madhavi:

When the foul villain struck at you with his axe,
What were your thoughts my love?
Perhaps the instrument was too sharp, the blow
Too accurate to leave any time for thought?
Or did the messenger of death hack you
Over and over again in his clumsy cowardly way?
What were your thoughts then? Did you think of me,
Of our brief but blissful love, of our silly pranks,
Happy duets, nights on the beach, expeditions
On the river? Did you think of all these?
Did you think of your beloved daughter
And her clever stammering words? Did you think
Of my agony at parting or of my alleged faithlessness?
Or did you suffer ignoble pain and had no thoughts
For this poor woman in a corner of your heart?

Kannaki:

Did I leave my parents, home and friends
And everything that I had known and loved
Merely to follow you to your grave.
No, my lord, I shall follow you beyond the grave,
I shall search every corner of heaven and hell
And claim you as my husband even in death.

Madhavi:

I loved you on this earth, now that you are gone,
My love shall be cremated with your remains.
Let it be consumed by the leaping flames,
Turned into divine smoke and spread
Over this earth. Through loving you,
I shall learn to love the universe.
Every living thing, be it ant or insect,
Bird or flower, or poisonous snake, they shall
Be equally dear to me for they possess
The divine spark of life that once was you,
My feet will no longer dance to the gay tunes
That once attracted men. My beauty will
Not disturb their thoughts again. My eyes
Will not carry on a silent conversation
And this miserable body with its beauty
Hidden shall serve all living things.

Mathari:

My dear lady, we all suffer with you
For what is inevitable.

Kannaki:

Is this the state where the king is just,
Where the philosophers are wise, the land
Is prosperous and the rains do not fail?
This is no city ruled by a king, inhabited
By civilized people where honesty had its due reward

And trickery, its just punishment. No!
It is a jungle where rapacious animals roam
To satisfy their hunger; where there is no law
But that of cruel, selfish, greed; no justice
But the wishes of a tyrant king; no mercy
For the unfortunate; no consideration
For their guests. This is the state
Where we have come, not to make our fortune
But to meet our doom.

Mathari:

My dear lady,
Your sorrow is just and we are all grieved
That such misfortune should have befallen you
And I am doubly grieved that you should meet
Your inevitable fate under my unfortunate roof.
But perhaps, your anger though natural
Is not so just. The anklet was the Queen's
They say. No one has the wealth to own
Such another.

Devanthi:

Perfidious woman! Do you dare to suggest
That our lord would stoop to such tricks
As are practiced only in your state? In the land
Where the sacred Kaveri flows and from where
We come, there are a thousand merchants
More wealthy than your miserable king.

Kannaki:

What cruel destiny, what sins
Of our former life, what retribution
For unavenged wrongs, what heavenly gods
Whom we failed to propitiate have brought us
To this cruel fate, I know not.

This woman here, my friend and protector
Who gave me shelter in a strange city
And welcomed me with open arms, even she
Suspects my husband. The name of thief
Repeated by the ignorant, confirmed
By the king's execution, sung by the poets
Hired by this king will stick to him
For all time. But I shall defy them all
And prove to the world that he is innocent
Of this foul crime for which he has paid
Such unjust penalty. I shall not break
My marriage string, nor humiliate myself
By wearing white and being pointed out
As a bringer of bad luck,
As one whose chastity failed
To protect her husband in his hour of need.
No, I shall not lead a miserable widowed life.
For I do not recognise his death.
I swear before all present here and now,
That my lord is innocent and was done to death
By some foul villain. I proclaim
That I shall prove this truth before
The sun descends tonight. And I demand
As a chaste and virtuous wife, equal in love
And sacrifice to all the heroines of our holy books
That heaven should give some proof
Of my husband's innocence.

[The rumbling noise of thunder is heard while the others look up]

Mathari:

The sky is cloudless and yet we hear thunder;
This is no time for rain and we see lightning,
Pardon me divine lady, for harbouring suspicions
Even for a moment about your husband.

Devanthi:

Your call has been answered. And all the world
Will know that he was innocent. There has been
A cruel miscarriage of justice.

Mathari:

I shall bear witness to the miracle
We have just seen. I shall proclaim
To the inhabitants of this city
That your husband had been wrongly done to death.
But first I must make arrangements for his funeral.

Kannaki:

I have no more tears to shed; I will not light
The funeral pyre, but I shall go
To the palace of the Pandya King,
Accuse him of his foul deed, condemn him
To the eternal damnation of an unjust ruler;
I shall convict him by the same justice
That my husband failed to get. I shall follow
My dream to its bitter end for now I see
I have a mission to carry out.

Madhavi:

What is done can never be obliterated
There is no going back on the fact of death.
But the Gods have proved him innocent.
Let us be content with that. Your anger
Is divine. Do not let it loose needlessly.

Kannaki:

I shall never be an accomplice to such an act;
I shall have revenge for my dead husband.

ACT THREE

The same evening. The queen's apartments at the palace in Madurai. The room reflects the ancient grandeur, the wealth and prosperity of the King. The stone pillars are finely carved, cloth of silk and gold is hung as draperies, the couches are ornamented with gold. At the back of the stage is a door with open carved woodwork through which can be seen the private garden of the queen. On the left is the door leading into the apartments of the King. As the curtain rises, the queen looks expectantly towards the door on the left which opens and the King enters.

Queen:

Are you so full of the cares of state
That you have so little time to spare for me?
They say you are the lord of this world,
That your enemies tremble at the mention
Of your name, that you are so wise and just
That the lions and tigers of your forests
Do not molest men on legitimate business;
I have so often heard your poets declaim
That your slightest wish is the supreme desire
Of your subjects, that your thoughts
Are their philosophy of life, that your will is law.
And yet, is not your time your own?

King:

My work is never finished; there is no one
To whom I can delegate my authority
I am responsible to God for the acts
Of all my subordinates for they are carried out
Under my name. I have to be above all
So that I may be impartial.

Queen:

Even when you come to me, your mind
Is preoccupied. You listen to my conversation
In a half-hearted manner. Your ministers
And your problems of state follow you
Even into the sanctuary of my apartments.

King:

My task is hard my dear; I have to know all
So that I may be constant in my vigilance.
The clever scheming
Of selfish courtiers, the flattery
Of those who wish to keep me in ignorance
Of my weaknesses, the harmful advice
Of my unfaithful ministers are all
My constant enemies of whom I must beware,
The protection of my realm from external foes
Or from internal disruption is my sacred duty.
But above all, I have to guard against
The tyranny of my own unbridled power.

Queen:

You are like a demi-god, are you not?

King:

I have a demi-gods responsibilities
But unfortunately, not the powers
Or the wisdom of a demi-god.

Queen:

Many are the days when I have sat
By the fountain in the garden and waited
For your visit. I have watched my rippling shadow
In the pool fade and disappear with the sunset
And still you had not come. Many are the nights

When I have sat by the window and counted
The stars. I used to say to myself,
'My love will surely come before I have counted
A hundred.' How often have I numbered
All the starts in the firmament in vain!

King:

To-day I have come to make amends,
For I am entirely free of the cares
Of state and I have given orders
Not to be disturbed. I shall devote
The entire evening to amusing you
And pleasing myself.

Queen:

If I were of a suspicious nature,
Or of a jealous temperament, I would think
You had a mistress hidden somewhere
In one of your numerous offices of state,
But I trust you implicitly.

King:

I cannot rely on what my courtiers say,
Or even my ministers, for they speak
Only of what I like to hear and hide the rest.
So, on many nights I walk round the city
Disguised as a merchant or a beggar
And hear what people talk and think about me.
Hence I have to forego the pleasures
Of being with my queen every evening.

Queen:

And what public wrong or private grievance
Have you set right today?

King:

It is both public and private, public because
A clever thief from another land has been
Caught and executed, and private because
The grievance of my queen has been set right.
The precious anklet that was mysteriously lost
Some days back and that caused you so much grief
Has been recovered from the culprit.
Hence, I have a double cause for satisfaction.

Queen:

Have you got the anklet?

King:

Here it is. *[He hands her the anklet]*

Queen:

Oh, you have really got it back; I am
So pleased. How did you catch the thief
Who had eluded all the palace guards?
What just punishment did he get?

King:

You were so annoyed when it was lost.
Is your pleasure at the recovery equally great?

Queen:

Of course, I was annoyed. A precious jewel
Was lost from the queen's apartments
And all the king's forces and his powers
Were unable to find the thief. Is that
A matter for congratulation? But tell me
How it was found and who found it.
So that I may reward him properly.

[There is a commotion outside, followed by a hurried knock on the door.]

King:

Who is it? Who dares to make such unseemly noise
When the king is with his queen?

[The knock on the door is repeated]

Come in

[The minister comes in agitated]

Minister:

I beg your pardon, your Majesty;
I would not have dared to disturb your privacy
Unless it was important.

Queen:

Have the king's commands no respect in this palace?

King:

What is it?

Minister:

A woman stands by the palace gates and demands
An immediate audience with the king.

King:

Can you not find out what she wants?
Can you not pacify her if she is grieved?
Give her alms if it is charity she needs,
Or if she needs the protection of the state
From the cruelties of a roguish husband
Or a tyrant father, can you not arrange it
Without the king's consent? Have you been
So long in our service and not learnt
The elementary duties of your profession?

Minister:

She is no ordinary woman, your Majesty;
Her eyes though filled with tears are like balls of fire.

Though her voice is soft, her words are harsh
And ring through the streets like the terrible curse
Of prophecy. The people are afraid of her
And speak in whispers in her presence.
She swears vengeance on this realm
And on the ruler, yet no one dares to molest her.
The guards tremble at her sight; holy anger
Radiates from her presence. She is like one
Possessed by some divine spirit. There is none
To resist her anger or her demands.

King:

[To the queen] You see why I am busy my dear.
Some distracted, unhappy and probably mad
Woman shouts at the top of her voice
And the minister of the king is afraid;
The palace guards tremble at her sight, he says.
So, the king has to disturb his privacy,
Grant an audience and find out what her complaint is
And set it right.

Minister:

Believe me, sir, this woman is a messenger
Of evil. She will not reveal her designs
For I am sure she has some vile designs.
That is why I have come
With all haste to ask for your advice.

King:

The minister is supposed to advise the king.
There is a convention in this state to that effect
I believe. And yet, you ask for mine.
Are you barren of all experience and wisdom
That you do not know how to act?
Bring the woman here; let her say
What she wishes in our presence.

Minister:

Do not see her, your Majesty!
Give me the power to imprison her or at least
To send her away beyond the borders
Of our state. For she utters blasphemies
Against your sacred person and against
The justice of your rule.

King:

You ask for my advice and then presume
To give it. Your behaviour is strange. That woman,
Whoever she is must have some influence
To upset your powers of reason. She must be
Interesting, if not sensible. I will grant
Her request if only to see her and to hear her speak.

Queen:

Please do what the minister says, my lord;
She does not seem a desirable character
And likely to disturb our evening. Perhaps
She deserves the fate that has befallen her.
And remember, this evening is mine.

King:

Do not be upset my dear, I promise you
Some unusual entertainment.

Minster:

Strange things have been happening in the city, sire,
The public is disturbed, normal work
Has been suspended; the merchants have closed
Their shops; the craftsmen no longer ply
Their trade. The women do not gossip
By the river Vaigai while they wash their clothes;
The brahmins are silent instead of chanting
Their hymns. Even the Buddhist priests
Whose eternal calm is never disturbed
Seem perturbed to-day. All are apprehensive

Of their safety. They dare not talk aloud
But stand in groups in the public squares
Or in the streets and whisper to each other.
Only thieves and murderers and other suspected characters
Are bold while honest men are nowhere
To be found. There is panic everywhere.
No reasons are given, no complaints
Are made, no one is accused. But the air
They breathe is full of sorrow.
There is a feeling of impending doom.

King:

And all that is because of this woman
Who now stands at the palace gates?

Minster:

Yes, your Majesty! Men worship the ground
On which she walks. Her words are like arrows
That pierce the hearts of men;
Her rage is like a fire that consumes
Everything it falls upon. Men follow her
With fear and reverence, afraid of her voice
Ashamed of themselves for she accuses them all,
Yet unable to resist her divine presence,
They trail behind her like moths towards a flame.

King:

You say she is evil, but also divine;
How is that possible? Is she is a heavenly spirit
And brings her curse upon this city,
Can we avoid it by imprisoning her?
Yours is not the counsel of a minister.
Advice should be given after calm consideration
Of all the factors involved, without emotion
Or passion clouding your judgement.

But you are actuated by the fear
Of something unknown. You are not fit to advise.

Minister:

Your Majesty, this is not a case that can be judged
Without fear, for that woman inspires nothing
But fear in all our hearts.
Uncontrolled by the usual virtues
Of modesty or gentleness, unrestrained
By the consciousness of her sex, she is
No woman at all, but walks the streets
Like a fearless, unconquered foe in an alien land.
Please let the army deal with her.

King:

My friend, the army takes charge
Only when the ministers are bankrupt
Of all wisdom and justice cannot be enforced
By law, but what madness is this?
A woman comes to the palace gates and demands
Justice from the king and the minister of the state
Requests that the army should deal with her!
There is something mysterious in all this;
If her demand is just, she shall
Have it fulfilled however much it may cost.
I shall see her immediately.

Queen:

Do not see her my Lord! I have dreamt
Of evil forebodings. This woman means
The ruin of us all. The minister is wise,
I beseech you, accede to his request.

King:

Am I not the king, lord and master
And guardian of my people, the fountain
Of justice where every citizen drinks his fill?

[Kannaki enters, followed by the leader of the palace guard]

Kannaki:

Are you? Are you the father of your people?
The upholder of law, destroyer of evil
Protector of the innocent? Are you
Ordained by God to rule this state?

Guard:

We tried to prevent her, sire,
But she would not be stopped.

King:

Never mind, let her go on.

Kannaki:

Are you the descendant of the famous Pandya kings?

King:

I am a descendant of these famous kings,
But I am a king by my own right,
By the valour of my armies, by the justice
Of my rule and by the affection of my subjects.

Kannaki:

Then why do you hide yourself in your wife's apartments
When there is justice to be done?
Why is your palace so heavily guarded?
Why do your ministers try their best
To frighten me with their foolish threats?
Is this the justice of your rule? If so,
You are no king, but a tyrant and a thief!

Minister:

You are not in the streets now, stranger,
Accusing and frightening the mob
With your arrogant words; be careful
How you address the king!

King:

Young woman,
May be you are distracted by your sorrow,
Or have suffered injustice at the hands
Of some foul villain. But that is no cause
To accuse us of being a tyrant. Justice
Shall be done to you if you deserve it
And any wrong shall be set right
In so far as it lies within our royal power.
But if you desire justice from the king,
You should show the respect that is due to him.
Your face seems noble and your heart true
In spite of your words. What is it that you desire?

Kannaki:

My husband has been murdered wrongfully
And I have come to demand the justice
That he failed to receive in your city,
And to take revenge on you who caused his death.

King:

This is no way to demand justice from a king.
But still explain yourself. Who are you?
Where do you come from? Who was your husband?
How did he come to die? What cause have you
To burden us with his death?

Kannaki:

I am the daughter of a famous merchant prince
In the great city of Puhar and my name
Is Kannaki. My husband's name
Was Kovalan. We came to your accursed city
In search of fortune, driven from our home
By fate though nobly born. We came
To sell my precious anklet and to trade.

But when my lord took my ornament
To sell to your jeweller, he was accused
Of stealing it from your palace and murdered
On the spot. And I now demand
Retribution for your cruel deed.

King:

Is it not justice to kill a thief?

Kannaki:

Unjust king! You did not kill a thief,
But an honest man and so became a thief yourself.

King:

We excuse your foul and unwarranted words
Because of your grief and because
Our patience as well as our mercy had no bounds.
But your husband was caught with the anklet
In his hands. And in a country where
There are no thieves and no cause
For thieving, an imported one must be
Quickly exterminated lest he should spread
The contagion of his crime in this state.

Kannaki:

What proof had you against him?

Minister:

The anklet was found in his possession
And he admitted to owning it. By these words
He accused himself. Is not that enough?

Kannaki:

How does the possession make him a thief?

King:

Does not the possession of stolen property
Make the possessor a thief and a villain?

Kannaki:

Did he admit the anklet was stolen?
Did you know that it was the queen's anklet?
For I claim it to be mine.

King:

My dear woman, the anklet was made
By my jeweller who recognised it immediately.
Does not the maker know his work when he sees it?

Kannaki:

Foolish king! Do you think that a thief
Clever enough to steal an ornament
From your well guarded palace would be so stupid
As to try to sell it to your jeweller?
What if the jeweller were the thief
And blamed my husband in order to escape
The guilt himself?

King:

The jeweller is an honest man who has been
Long and loyal in our service. I have
Every reason to trust him implicitly.

Kannaki:

I see it clearly now. You are but a foolish accomplice
In his crime. You are the trusting fool,
He the arch villain of this act.

Minister:

If you do not mind your words, woman,
I shall order you to be removed by the guards!

Kannaki:

Just as you stopped me from entering the palace
I suppose! But tell me unfortunate queen,
When was your anklet stolen?

Queen:

About ten days ago.

Kannaki:

My husband and I arrived in this city
Only yesterday, a fact that can be proved.
Then how could my husband have stolen it?

Minister:

That is easy for a clever thief. He might
Have employed other men to do the dirty deed;
He might have bribed the servants and arrived
In the city in time to receive the stolen article
In which case, his crime is all the more villainous.

Kannaki:

How did you find out about the theft?
Who told you of it first? What action did you take?

King:

My jeweller came to me this morning and announced
That a man was waiting in his house
Wishing to sell an anklet, the one
That had been missing from the palace.

Kannaki:

Had he been informed of the loss? Or else
How did he know a theft had been committed?

Queen:

I did not tell him of it, for he never
Came to the palace since the theft.

King:

I thought he had been informed by you.

Minister:

That does not matter in the least, your Majesty.
The theft was a matter of general knowledge
Throughout the palace, and no doubt
The honest jeweller had heard of it and came
To inform you as soon as he saw the thief.

Kannaki:

But what if he had not been informed by anyone?
He could only have known of the loss
If he had been the thief himself.

Minister:

I tell you it was a matter of general knowledge
And the jeweller, like every honest servant
Of the king was on the look-out for the thief.

Kannaki:

What did you do when you were told
That the thief was waiting in the jeweller's house?

King:

We sent our guards with him to recover
The jewel, to make sure it was in the possession
Of the thief and he claimed ownership of it
And then to execute him, for justice
To be really just must be swift. There is the leader
Of the guards, who will tell you the rest.

Guard:

The man was sitting in the jeweller's workshop
And was pointed out to us as the thief.
I went to him, asked him to show me the anklet
Which he did and claimed it was his wife's.
But I knew it belonged to the queen.

Kannaki:

How did you know that?

Guard:

As a loyal and obedient guard, conscious
Of my station, I have always looked
At the queen's feet and not at her divine face
While I spoke to her, and so recognised the jewel.

Minister:

Well spoken my friend, proceed.

Kannaki:

Did you accuse him of the theft
As soon as you recognised the jewel?

Guard:

No, for the jeweller urged us not to,
Said the thief was secretly armed and might
Escape if he was accused directly or even
If he was suspicious that the theft were known.
So I had to pretend I had been sent
By the king to negotiate the price.

Kannaki:

You were not ashamed to kill a man
Without accusing him to his face. You struck
A cowardly blow while he trusted you.
Is that how you maintain the honour
And the justice of your king?

Guard:

The man's face was noble and honest, he did not
Look like a thief. He told us of his folly
In his native land and of how he came to be
In the unfortunate state of having to sell
The jewel that belonged to his wife. But

The jeweller assured us he was a villain
Who combined the art of robbery
With a clever tongue and warned us
Not to be deceived, but to strike him down
Before his suspicions were aroused.
He urged us and we had to carry out
The orders of the king which were
To recover the ornament and kill the thief.
We were not asked to judge.

King:

Perhaps my guards were hasty, but
The fact remains that he possessed
The stolen property and had to pay
The penalty of Death. Now, young woman
Be satisfied that our rule is just.
We shall do what is in our power
To alleviate your sorrow. For it is not
Our intention to punish the innocent.
And we will see that you do not suffer
For the crimes of your husband.

Kannaki:

You who are the cause of my grief,
What can you do to alleviate it?
Can you bring my husband back to life?
I am here to accuse you of his murder
And demand the justice that was denied to him.
Do you think I will accept your help?

King:

But where is the proof? He someone else
Got the stolen anklet instead of him?
You must prove your husband to be innocent.

Kannaki:

Why should I prove him to be innocent
When you have not proved him to be guilty?

Minister:

Do not quibble with words, young woman;
He had the queen's anklet in his hands.

Kannaki:

The Queen's anklet, did you say?

King:

Yes.

Kannaki:

Then let me see it.

Queen:

Here it is. *[She unclasps it from her foot and hands it to Kannaki]*

Kannaki:

[Examines the anklet] Do you claim this as yours?

Queen:

Of course!

Kannaki:

Then you lie! For this is mine.
I remember every line of gold, every figure
And every stone that is set in it
Just as my mother gave it to me. You are a thief.

King:

We have been very indulgent with you
Because of your grief. We have tried
Every means to convince you of your husband's guilt.
But you are mad and will not listen to reason.
Love should not blind you to the frailties
Of your lover. And your words are not
Those of a petitioner to the king, but
The arrogant retorts of a disloyal rebel.
We cannot tolerate any more of your words.
[To the guard] Take her away.

Kannaki:

One moment king! You have had the upper hand
So far. Though you failed to give
The benefit of a suspicion to my husband, yet,
You have clever answers to my arguments.
And your words are backed by the strength
Of our army and by the craftiness of your ministers.
My husband is dead and his voice is stilled
For ever and so cannot be heard in self defence.
But I swear on my chastity as a wife,
And on the honour of my dead husband
That this anklet is mine and shall prove it
Presently. I cannot carry out
The justice that you so well merit.
But you will be judged before the bar of history;
Countless generations will condemn you
And your unjust rule as ignoble; you will sink
Into oblivion as a weak and vicious king
Unworthy of his ancestry, who to please his wife
Murdered an honest man and stole his wealth.

King:

The proof! Give me the proof or else,
You will suffer the same fate as your husband
For your impertinence.

Kannaki:

What if I were to give you the proof?
What will you do then?

King:

If you should show beyond the shadow of a doubt
That I have killed a man innocent of this crime
Then I too shall prove to you that though
I failed to rule like a king. I shall die like one.
I swear by the honour of all my revered ancestors
That I shall execute by my own hands

The punishment of death on myself!

Queen:

What cruel words you utter my lord!
That woman is evil and she merely wants you
To commit yourself and you talk to her
As if she was a divine spirit!

Minister:

These thoughtless words of an impetuous king
May prove to be our undoing. Withdraw your words
Your Majesty, before it is too late.

King:

What! My minister is so afraid of the justice
Of his king that he wants the uttered words
Withdrawn! Do not be afraid my friend,
If she proves me guilty, then I must die
By my own law. But if she does not,
Then my fame shall shine all the brighter
For future kings to follow. *[Turns to Kannaki]*
But if you should fail to prove
Your husband's innocence and my guilt,
Then you shall pay the penalties
Of a false accuser of an honest man,
Of a traitor to the king, and of an arrogant
Rebel in support of an unworthy cause.

Kannaki:

Unfortunate king, you are not aware
That all this has happened once before
In my dream. This is but a repetition
In every detail, preordained by fate.
It is but a recollection from some past.
I am the instrument of your fall
Just as you have been a tool of my fate.
When you are dead by your own hand,
There will be death and destruction

In your beautiful city. It shall burn
For a fortnight from tonight without ceasing
And on the day when I meet my husband
On a lonely hill and fly away with him
In a heavenly chariot, then will the fires cease,
For then, my anger shall be appeased.

Queen:

These are the ravings of a mad woman
Who has lost her head.

Minister:

Let me take her away, your Majesty!
The crowds are gathering outside the palace
To know the end of this business. They are
Getting unruly. Any further tolerance
Of this woman will be taken as a sign
Of weakness. And will result in bloodshed
And fire as this woman predicts.

King:

[Very agitated] But the proof! Where is the proof?

Kannaki:

Ah, you are agitated now. You are
No longer foolishly confident. You are
Afraid of those men, your beloved subjects
As you call them; you are afraid
Of the justice of which you boast so much!
Justice is a double edged sword that cuts
The user as well as those on whom he uses it.
Suspicion is beginning to eat into your soul
Lest you had made a mistake. You are getting
Nervous. Where is your confidence now?
Your foolish boasts and your display of power?

King:

Do not torture me woman, whoever you are,

Be you good or evil, right or wrong,
Divine or devilish, give me the proof.
If I have made a mistake, if I have failed
As a king, I shall still die nobly.

Kannaki:

Yes poor man, you have made a terrible mistake
And you shall pay just as my husband paid
Though he did not make a mistake, with death.

King:

Then, let it be quick I beg you;
Do not keep me waiting any longer.

Kannaki:

Your suffering is my victory. Should I not
Prolong it? What is the hurry?

King:

The proof or I shall murder you.

Kannaki:

You have a conscience after all,
Though you may be weak, you are not foul.
You are but a victim of your fate!

King:

Noble woman, all my life,
I have tried to be just and if I fail once,
I am prepared to pay the price. But pity me,
And tell me how I have failed.

Kannaki:

When bullying fails, you beg; you are
Like a worm that I can crush
Under my feet. You are beneath contempt.
You will not die a villain, but a coward!

King:

If you will not let me have the proof,
Then we shall both die. The world

Shall say, that I killed a woman. *[Draws his sword]*

Kannaki:

This is the anklet that you say
Was recovered from my husband?

King:

Yes!

Kannaki:

What stones did your jeweller use to make
Your anklet jingle as you walked?

Queen:

I knew it! I suspected it! Oh, my God!

King:

Answer the question, my dear. What were the stones?

Queen:

Pearls, my lord!

Kannaki:

Pearls! Miserable pearls that every peasant woman
And fisherman's wife use in my home!
Are those the stones fit for the queen
Of the Pandya kingdom? Now listen,
I call the gods of all the worlds
And all the unborn generations to bear witness
To this act of mine. This anklet I hold
In my hand and which you claim as yours
Has no pearls inside. Miserable ruler
Of this ancient city, look!
My anklet is filled with rubies!
Red as the innocent blood you shed!

[She breaks open the anklet with all her strength and red rubies are scattered from the hollow inside]

King:

I am no king! I am the villain, I am the thief!

[He stabs himself]