THE BEACHSIDE SONG.
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A RENDERING INTO ENGLISH OF THE KANALVARIPPATTU

(Cilappadikaram)

By

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“THE BEACHSIDE SONG”

BEING A CANTO FROM THE “CILAPPADIKARAM”
OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE “LAY OF THE ANKLET”

INTRODUCTION.

“The lay of the Anklet” has had always a special fascination for the Tamilian both literate and illiterate. The story has for its theme the greatness and holiness of chastity and as embodying a scene of execution where innocent Kovalan is foully done to death by the artifice of a goldsmith, is exhibited with much effect on the stage. The deep pathos stirred up by the unmerited suffering of the chaste wife Kannaki is quieted later by the apotheosis of the lady and we leave the stage halfelated and yet halfsubdued as one would feel on departing from the presence of a manifest deity.

The story is briefly told. Kovalan a young gallant, born to great fortune, neglects his wife and leads a riotous life with Madhavi, a woman of the city, who had captured him on the very day of her debut on the stage. Sometime thereafter the gay pair followed by a gay throng repair to the beach and there on the sands, he sings, to her varied Songs on “love” which the charmer beside him misconstrues, and deeming him lost in love with another damsel, full piquant, sings songs which Kovalan in turn also misconstrues. Kovalan then renounces her company and scarce bidding the fair one goodbye, repairs to his wife. To her he now proposes starting for Madura
the capital of the Pandyas, where he hopes to build up a business and soon recover all that he had erstwhile squandered. Kannaki accompanies him to Madura, and gives him her diamond-beaded golden anklet with which to start business and in the streets of Madura as he passes by in search of a suitable purchaser the royal jeweller appears like Death on the scene, views the jewel and later reports him to the King as a thief who had stolen one of the Queen's anklets. The King bids his guards slay the thief and seize the jewel and a rash youth slays Kovalan with the sword. Much grieved but still with a dignity that is all her own, Kannaki now repairs to the Palace, and there convinces the dismayed King of the innocence of her husband by showing the diamonds that were inlaid in her jewel. The Queen's anklets had pearls in them inlaid, and when the King saw his error, he fell down from his throne senseless. His Queen faithful even in death falls down behind her dead husband, a corpse and a curse is laid on the city. A huge fire breaks out and envelopes the city in its flames and that night the wicked of the city perish to a man. On the fourteenth day from her husband's death, Kovalan now a god appears to her in his divine form and takes his beloved wife to his abode of bliss.

To attempt to give a faithful and forcible rendering of the masterly Tamil original would have been beyond my powers. But it was my ambition to present here in a way a version of the "Songs of love" Kovalan sang to the fair one by his side, inasmuch as the songs formed stray detached pieces, that could be set, each in its own separate setting and appealed to me chiefly as being suitable for a second volume on the "Lovesongs of the Tamils."
And but one word about the form. This is not pure poetry and it was not my intention either to trick it out foot by foot in measured cadence. But my aim had always been, as it was in my previous volume on the "Lovesongs of the Tamils" to give a faithful rendering line by line, so that the division into lines was necessitated by the fact that the Tamil original was poetic in form.
"THE BEACHSIDE SONG"

And as the servant awaiting further commands
Stretched out the lute to Kovalan’s hands
He began Odes to Cauvery and other varied songs
To play softly, so to please the maiden’s heart.

(He Sings)

IN PRAISE OF RIVER KAVERI.

Though the Chola with the white-moon-shade
Sways his righteous sceptre far
And weds the sportive Ganges
Thou dost not quarrel! Hail thee Cauvery!

Though he weds the sportive Ganges
That thou dost not quarrel, fisheyes one!
I’ve learnt’tis thy mighty chastity
Hail thee Cauvery!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Though the Chola with the white-moon-shade
Sways his righteous sceptre far
And weds the virgin by the shore
Thou dost not quarrel! Hail thee Cauvery!
Though he weds the virgin by the shore
That thou dost not quarrel fisheyed one!
I've learnt 'tis thy mighty chastity
Hail thee Cauvery!

Though confused the noise that swells around
Of the plough, the sluice and the surging flood
In tune to the chants of bathers in the freshets
Thou speedest along! Hail thee Cauvery!
That to the chants of the gay bathing throng
Thou speedest along in thy course
I've learnt is the glory of thy faithful-arrayed Lord!
Hail thee Cauvery!

IN PRAISE OF PUKAR.

He who softly unto the darkcornered petaleyed lady, swore afore
with the Lord of Seas for a witness
How could we poor ones know Sir! that that graceless one'would
so belie his plighted troth?
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Ours is that farfamed Pukar where the Ampal graceful blooms, seeing the cluster of shells and the conches That in their whiteness ape the silver-rayed pale moon and the constellated stars on high!

He came to us with loving words, stood with his presents, and like a mendicant prayed unto us on the sands How should we then know Sii! that we neglected later should pine and pray for him in turn? Ours is that farfamed Pukar where the simple honeybee nigh our women confused sings Mistaking their darkblue eyes for the darkrobed Nila that sprang to blooms in the shades of the coolrayed Moon!

The sweetsounding conch that softly sweeps o'er sands being tossed thereto by highbuffetting waves Having in its course ploughed through and despoilt the maiden's sport on the beachside Ours is that farfamed 'Pukar, where deeming the scattered lilies strewn by the fretful ones From garlands swung by tender hands for beseeching eyes, the eyes of passers, pass not by!

IN PRAISE OF THE LADYLOVE BY A FRIEND
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Looking after furrows by the sands which 'the sporting Valamburi hath lately ploughed
Beneath shades where the flowerladen punnai had robed the floor with its pollen
The harm that the fullmoonfaced bright maiden hath wrought with her fish-like looks
That illness incurable unto chests of medicine, her goldtinted soft breasts perchance could cure!

IN PRAISE OF THE BEACHSIDE.

Under the guise of scaring the birds that prey on the fish spread out in the sun
Bearing in her hands the fragrant gnalal around whom roar the gladsome bees
I never knew that a frowning deity resided in those woods by the beach
If indeed I had, I had avoided those fragrant bowers where she doth bide!

Standing by the yard where the fish is dried, a chaplet of flowers in hand,
She came in her selfchosen guise of a maid guarding the fish
I had not known then that there abode another Death with lancelong eyes
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

If indeed I had, I had then avoided those cool bowers by the waves!

DESCRIBES THE LADYLOVE.

This face which the creator formed after models tried of fish and bows

Dark clouds and pangs of Kama, sure is the fullrayed moon
Sure it is the full moon that in this fisherman's hamlet
In her retreat flies though fear of the snake that assails her above.

Gamboling hither and thither with her bangles full resonant
Her bloodred lancelike eyes are frightful Death
Frightful Death sure it is that in this fisherman's hamlet
Abides as a maiden coy, gracious and charming.

This is the divine damsel that causes such frightful woes
To those that behold her guarding the fish that is spread on the springs
This sure is the blasting deity that lives by the adampu-grown sands
In the form of a ravishing maiden with soft clustering locks!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG

DESCRIBES HIS CAPTURE.

The fragrant flowers that the grove doth yield, the newfallen flowers on the sands
The faultless chastened speech of hers, the rich youthful abounding breasts
Her soft face that gives one the suspicion of the moon, the bent brows that ape a pair of bows
The thin waist that comes not to the easel, it is these my friend I have beguiled me soft!

The wooded beach where the billows roll, the sandy waste that expansive lies
The manyhued flowers with spreading fragrance, and the gnarled woods where darkness broods
The rich curls hanging around as a glory and a countenance that vies with the moon
The pair of eyes that darting look like fish, it is these my friend I have beguiled me soft!

The sandy beach where seashells scattered lie, the woody grove where fragrance bides
The many scented flowers that break their folds and the many spots where all alone she sports
The subdued laughter that sprouting grows and a round face that is
the fullblown moon
Her youthful breasts that are so handsome paired, it is these my
friend! have beguiled me soft!

Describes the ladylove's charms

Your sires enter the seas and kill the beings there
And you enter our hearts and strike all same
Weighted with breasts the bands can scarce restrain
Take heed lady! You lose not your drooping waist!

Your sire kills lives with his manyholed net
And you with your longeyed net effect the same
Weighted with breasts with, garlands for their stays
Take heed lady! You lose not your drooping waist!

Riding in their canoes your elders hunt the fish
And you with your curled blows kill us all!
Heedless as you are of your charms and our woes
Take heed lady! You lose not your breastweighted waist!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Holding in her hands a coral reef for a pestle
The pinkeyed one pounds pearls in the shade!
The pink eyes of her that pounds white pearls
Aren’t lilies but are cruel! Cruel!

Under shades of the Punna in the fishy beach
The pinkeyed one stalks shaming the swans!
The pink eyes of her that stalks shaming the swans
Are heartless cruel deadly! Deadly!

With the honeystreaming voilets in her hands
The pinkeyed one scares the birds from the fish!
The pink eyes of her that scares birds from the fish
Aren’t harmless darts—are smiting! Smiting!

(Translation)

With the honeystreaming voilets in her hands
The pinkeyed one stalks shaming the swans!
The pink eyes of her that stalks shaming the swans
Are heartless cruel deadly! Deadly!

With the honeystreaming voilets in her hands
The pinkeyed one stalks shaming the swans!
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With the honeystreaming voilets in her hands
The pinkeyed one stalks shaming the swans!
The pink eyes of her that stalks shaming the swans
Are heartless cruel deadly! Deadly!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Approach not gentle swan! Thy gait approaches not hers!
Approach not sweet swan! Thy gait so sung approaches not hers!
Fond swan, that roamest after one that with her charms
Smites the world! Her amble thine approacheth not. Swan!

THE POET SPEAKS

Hearing this, the broadeyed lovely maid
Bethought herself her lover had by some stranger lady
Been ensnared and full piquant, but in her art
Veiling her inmost thoughts, with an outward smile
Took the lute from her lover, and began her song
In soft, rich melodious tones, pleasing alike
To the gods and the gay crowd thronging on the beach

(SHE SINGS) IN PRAISE OF KAVERI

With the gladsome bees humming around, clad in robes bedecked
with blooms
Full coy as a darkbrowed maiden with quivering eyes you sped past
Hail thee Cauvery!
That with thy darklike eyes you sped past full coy Cauvery!
I've learnt is due to thy lord's righteous sceptre. Hail thee Cauvery!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

With the peacocks sporting in the woods and the cuckoos warbling sweet
At this maddening eventide you sped past full graceful. Hail thee Cauvery!
That at this loveprovoking eventide you sped past full graceful Cauvery!
I've learnt is due to thy true lord's victorious lance. Hail thee Cauvery!

Let long prosper this fertile realm! And like as a mother tends her babe
You will not your felicitous bounty ever grudge. Hail thee Cauvery!
That you will not your felicitous bounty ever grudge Cauvery!
I've learnt is due to the monarch radiant as the midday sun. Hail thee Cauvery!

IN PRAISE OF PUKAR

Though they can hardly vie with her teeth, as she smiling opes her lips
You came like some softbrained youth saying “Moonfaced maid! Buy these pearls!”
Ours is that farfamed Pukar where the spiceladen billows roll
Like as a barterer changing their costly pearls for our wornout wreaths!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG

How could we poor ones know sir! that the bracelets of the lusty fishermaids
Daily bewail the wanton youth who having stealthily wedded, callous went his way
Ours is that farfamed Pukar where the honeybee confused sings
Mistaking for the moon and the stars, the swan that had clambered up the flowerladen Punnat

How could we poor ones know sir! that you are indeed that mischievous youth
That sows this cureless illness in this village where the potent toddy never doth cease?
Ours is that farfamed Pukar where the moonfaced maid with tears in her gory lancelike eyes
Fain would close up the ocean that spoiled her sport by throwing sands into the deep!

He gazed at the spotted crab that sported with his male
And glanced at me in that fragrant beachside bower
I know not lady with dangling curls, the thoughts of him
The lord of the fremescent seas who unreconciled hath sped away!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

What of his graciousness and his fleet chariot
But - he left me unheeding full ungracious!
Let him - but ye clustering *adampus* and ye swans!
We cannot forget him who hath us so forgot!

Little lily dripping honey! Thou sleepest dreamest soft
Thou hast not aught to trouble thee this dreary eve!
But no wink visits me in my vigil. Tell me if in thy dreams
Thou hast ever beheld my ungracious lord in the beach?

The track of wheels left by chariots drawn by fleetfoot steeds
O sea! You have by your unkindly billows swept away
Alas! You have by your unkindly billows swept the track
You are unkind, in league with that graceless lord! What avails
my wail?

Oh! Ye unkindly waters that cover the track of wheels
Of my lover as he hastes in his fleetmared chariot
Ye flowerladen woods! Ye swans that sport with your mates!
And ye sylvan banks, tell him this accords not with his worth!
Hail thee foamcrested billow that in thy sport hast swept
The track of chariotwheels of him that loved us afore?
True in thy sport thou sweepest oft the track of his steps
But like him thou hast not me whole forsaken. Hail thee billow

DESCRIBES HER FEARS OF DISCOVERY.

Lord of shores where the richlyattired billows sport
Rolling along fields of rice, pearlbedecked and coralclad!
Those wounds fresh from shafts of the crabbannered one
Though I uncomplaining hid, who would answer my zealous
[mother?

Lord of shores where in the midst of fishermen's huts daily sport
The billows laughing with their pearlwhite teeth and coral lips!
O! What can I do, if my mother perceiving the sickly hue spread
on her darling

Like as the flowers of Pu queries the priest and learns the truth?

Lord of shores where the waves ceasing from their windy wail
Enter the arbours and sport amongst softstrewn sweetsmelling
flowers!

O! What can I do, if as her darling daily pines with dread disease
Which though in diverse ways concealed, the zealous mother still
discerns?
Youthful darkness hath now spread and the giver of day hath sped
My eyes have streamed tears in the loneliness which hath no cure
Tell me lady with flowerladen curls! Is it this cruel even hour
even there
In the lands where he tarries, this bangleloosening, fireflooding
evening!
The brightrayed sun hath set. Deep darkness doth spread afar and
these eyes
Which are as rival buds shooting up in beauty, have streamed a
flood of tears
O lady with a face like the fullrayed moon! In the land of him
that tarries yet
Is it this cruel even hour which hath come spitting the moon and
chewing the sun!
The birds have ceased their chatter, the dayfashioner hath done
The lovelorn eyes have flooded long at this wasting illness that
knows no cure.
O Lady with the flowercrammed curls! Is there in the land of
him that tarries
This evening hour which hath come like Death's own self to rob
me of my life!
Some one came and stood by the wild pine fence
And weaned us away from thoughts of play.
And that some one who weaned us afore from play
From our loving heart doth not now depart!

Walking by the fence in the marshy grounds
Someone came and entreated our love.
And that someone who afore our love entreated
Is not one who would forget our fawnlike looks!

Seeing the swan that sported with its dame
Someone stood by yesterday lost in thoughts of love.
And that someone who here stood yesterday
Is not one who would like our golden gleam depart from us!

THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Kavithaigal.

DESCRIBES THE FIRST MEETING WITH THE LOVER

Someone came and stood by the wildpine fence
And weaned us away from thoughts of play.
And that someone who weaned us afore from play
From our loving heart doth not now depart!

Walking by the fence in the marshy grounds
Someone came and entreated our love.
And that someone who afore our love entreated
Is not one who would forget our fawnlike looks!

Seeing the swan that sported with its dame
Someone stood by yesterday lost in thoughts of love.
And that someone who here stood yesterday
Is not one who would like our golden gleam depart from us!
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

Come not crane! Come not nigh our marshes!
Come not crane! Come not nigh our marshes!
Thou tellest not my distress to my Lord of Breakers
Come not Crane! Come not nigh our marshes!

(The Poet Interposes.)

And the choice-jewelled lady singing thus
With her flowerlike fingers touched the lute
And full mournful sounded its strings and sang
One other ode in richest tones, sonant swelling.

(She Sings) PASSIONATE OUTBURST.

O slowcreeping cruel even hour, that beguilest my heart
And let'st my hands finger my lutestrings false!
Thou that hast sped my fingers false on lute! Hail thee!
Take thee evening hour! My life! Thou art cunning cruel!

Soft evening hour that hast surrounded us who live
Counting on the sweet words of love that he breathed afore
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

If thou art the beleaguering prince, what kinship then
Dost thou bear to Love, who hath now turned my foeman?

Distress dark pervades the donor of day hath done
Causing the tearblinded world to droop, thou hast come O! Even hour!
If every evening were thy like and every lover he
Hail thee evening! The world were indeed to be pitied!

Mighty lord of seas! At this distressing eventide
Which hath come spreading fire, I beseech thee
In thy mercy forgive the thoughtless one who falsely swore
Words of love and hath thus later forgetting sinned!

THE POET CONCLUDES
Hearing this, Kovalan, the pursuing fates blinding him
Bethought himself "I sang a loveair befitting
This beachside. And this woman true to her nature
Her false heart wedded to some other stranger
Who hath chanced her way, now pines for him."
And full enraged, he viewed not her full moonlike face
But took off his entwined arm from hers and in haste
Sped his way, followed by his train, not beckoning to her
As was his wont saying "Now go we! The day is done!"
And Madhavi dumb beside the sonant woods and the
[raging waves
Her heart full sunk, clambered up her chariot
Now no longer with her lover and lonely entered her abode.
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

NOTES.

Verses 2-4. These verses are addressed in praise of Kaveri though incidentally they bring out the might of the monarch, Cholan Karikala. This king and many other monarchs after him claim to have subdued the Aryas and brought the Ganges and with it North India under their sway. In Silappadikaram itself the Chera king Senkuttuva makes a similar attempt.

These verses serve to bring out the patriotic sense of the people of those days. The Purananuru (186) has it

"Food sustains not life, nor does water
The life of worlds is supported by its monarch"

These verses are also psychologically significant. Kovalan sings of the chaste wife who does not quarrel with her husband when he espouses a new wife. But these songs serve to convey a different meaning to Madhavi, who deems Kovalan lost in fancy towards another woman and so contrive to bring about the estrangement of these lovers.

Verses 5-7. Here, the attendant maid of the ladylove is supposed to address the lover who was unnecessarily prolonging the period of engagement. People of Pukar were so guileless and trustful that they did not know that a lover could be false.

Verse 8. This is put in the mouth of a friend [Vide Iraiyan's Aphorisms on Love. Aph, III] The friend who sees the ladylove himself being hidden amongst trees, perceives that the lady herself would surrender herself to the lover and so relieve him of his distress.

Verses 9-16. These are put in the mouth of the lover who describes how he came to be lost in love towards that maid on the beachside.

Verses 17-22. The lover continues and complains of his ladylove's cruelty.

Verse 24. Here the poet interposes and describes what next, happened as he is entitled to in all lyric poetry. For this charac-
THE BEACHSIDE SONG.

*astic of Lyric Poetry Vide Literary introductions to the etical Books p. 1444 in R. G. Moulton’s Modern Reader’s Bible.

Verses 25-27. Madhavi sings. She addresses Kaveri and in veiled terms conveys the idea that Kaveri was faithful because the monarch was so just.

Verses 28-30. This is put in the mouth of the maid who refuses to encourage the advances of according to her deceitful lover. Madhavi reveals her suspicions in these verses that the lover beside her was perhaps deceitful also.

Verse 31. The ladylove declares how in her simplicity she was unable to gauge the love of her lord towards her.

Verses 32-36. The ladylove here bewails the neglect of her lover.

Verses 37-39. The lady draws the attention of the lover to the gossip of the village and requests him to wed her with due rites.

Verses 40-42. The distress of the ladylove at eventide.

Verses 43-45. The ladylove declares her confidence yet in her lover.

Verse 47. The poet interposes again.

Verses 48-50 These reveal the extremely desperate state of the ladylove at evenfall.

Verse 51. This is the parting shot of Madhavi who concludes her lover to be deceitful towards her. She offers up a prayer to Varuna the God of Justice amongst the Aryas and the presiding deity of the seacoast.

Verse 52. For the parting cf. “Jealousy in love? Not rather dead love’s harsh heir, Jealous pride.” Tennyson; Lancelot and Elaine.

The whole piece is a perfect specimen of lyric poetry and argues some previous knowledge of the Lovemanners of the Tamils and Tolkappium which will appear shortly.