

This text is has undergone additional editing and will be republished in early 2023. This version will provide curious researcher access to this epic's basic text (in translation). Copyright Brenda E. F. Beck, November 31, 2022.



Land of the Golden River

The Medieval Tamil Folk Epic
of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu

Collected and Translated by
Brenda E. F. Beck



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Information for teachers is available at <https://sophiahilton.com/study-the-legend-of-ponnivala/>.

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Description: Text of an oral epic from South India, translated from the Tamil, with an extensive introduction, sub-story summaries and an index. Relevant to epic studies and folklore worldwide, as well as religious studies, especially Hindu mythology and ritual. Includes bibliographical references.
Issued in print and electronic formats to additional research results and analyses that focus on this specific story.
Subject references: Tamil | folklore | epic poetry | South Asia | Hinduism | oral tradition | oral history

Praise for *The Land of the Golden River*

Magnificent stories like this one can play a key role in teaching our children to appreciate our rich South Asian heritage. This is a unique tale presented in translation using easily readable language, now made available to people like me for the first time.

Ajanta Jain
First-generation Tamil-American

This story text contains all the essential components of an exceptional oral folk epic. The words of the bard are beautifully presented in a colloquial style through songs, narration and dialogue. The author's introduction explores a variety of social themes and provides us with a fresh and intriguing perspective on South Asian heritage legends more broadly. This work is both enjoyable and educational. It is suited to all who commit the time to discover its hidden gems.

Appadurai Muttulingam
Sri-Lankan-Canadian Tamil author and essayist
Secretary, Tamil Literary Garden of Toronto

Brenda Beck's luminous translation brings a magnificent but little-known South Asian oral epic to the attention of a wide audience. A substantial critical frame helps prepare our journey through an imaginative universe that can be fruitfully compared to world classics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and also to myths and folk legends from around the globe. The Land of the Golden River's heroes and heroines entertain us through their adventures. They also prompt us to reflect on themes of contemporary relevance, such as political power, familial relations, the value of natural resources, and even our own modern immigration challenges.

Professor Jo Ann Cavallo
Chair, Italian Department, Columbia University, New York City

This oral epic contains a sweeping story of local characters' ambitions, predicaments, choices and feats of courage. Its episodes are full of miracles and supernatural intervention. Prof. Beck (re)tells this grand legend and unbraids many of its meanings and mysteries. She praises the singers who shared the story with her, and cautions us to accept this written, and therefore ossified account as just one variant in a long procession of tellings. But one should not underestimate its importance. This account was recorded decades before the explosion of social media both in India and around the world. It is a painstaking act of preservation—and a great story to read.

Joseph C. Miller
Folklorist and Rajasthani Folk Epic Scholar

Land of the Golden River is full of action and complex characters and presents an extremely powerful story. The hype around this book is unquestionable and, admittedly, I was eager to read it. I have always wondered what I could tell our future generations about our great Indian epics. Here is a testament first generation migrant Tamils like us will want to share with up-coming generations. I definitely recommend this book to all students, especially those who express a particular interest in Tamil folklore. Dr. Beck's narrative retelling is ethical and sensitive. Her writing is emotionally astute, and the historical legend that she recounts is full of family love and perseverance.

Shivakumar Kandaswamy
Founder, RainWater Literacy Foundation, Scotland and Koṅku Nāḍu

DEDICATION

For

E. C. Rāmacāmi – Lead Bard
O. P. Paḷanicāmi – Assistant Bard
O. K. Sundaram – Scribe and Research Assistant

For the work and dedication of all three men
to this magnificent epic story.
The first two spent years in patient study,
and then repeatedly performed this tale
through many long, dark nights.
The third spent months transcribing,
and then later carefully checked the wording.

These three men were close friends
They worked in concert to achieve a common dream:
They wanted to share the wisdom
contained within this important legend
with all who would listen.

They hoped their many audiences,
once live listeners, now to be replaced by careful readers,
would embed in their hearts
this story's core message of courage and of selflessness.
They believed their great tale could set an example
of the need to help others:
all human beings, all of whom are destined to suffer,
all who look towards renewal,
right across this wide, wide world.

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A Note on Transcription Conventions

The translation that follows uses standard transcription conventions to represent Tamil letters that do not exist in the English alphabet. A dash over a vowel indicates a “long” sound (like *Maa*, a slang reference to mother in English). Such vowels should be given extra emphasis. A vowel without a dash is short and does not merit special emphasis. The dot used above an ‘n’ (ñ) represents an ‘n’ followed by a ‘g’ sound and should be pronounced as such. One important example used in the discussion that follows is *Koñku*, the name of the region where this story is told. Koñku should be pronounced *Kongu*. Another example is the name of a key heroine, *Taṅkāḷ*. Her name is pronounced using an ‘ng’ sound followed by a long ‘a’, as if it were written *Tangaal*.

short vowels:	a	e	i	o	u	
long vowels:	ā	ē	ī	ō	ū	
consonants:	ச	c	ந	n	ர	r
	க	k	ஈ	ñ	ய	y
	த	t	ண	ṅ	ல	l
	ட	ṭ	ட	m	ள	ḷ
	ஜ	j	ப	p	ஶ	ṣ

Figure 1.
Conventions used to represent the spelling of Tamil words using English letters.

Lines under letters have little bearing on their pronunciation but represent distinctly different letters in the Tamil alphabet. For example, four different letters in Tamil are all represented by the single letter ‘n’ in English. The differences in pronunciation between these four types of ‘n’ are subtle and not easy for the standard English speaker to imitate. But their transcription, using diacritics, allows a reader to identify that word’s exact Tamil spelling.

A dot underneath a consonant does indicate a noticeable difference in sound (known as a retroflex consonant), but one not easy for English speakers to imitate. Retroflex sounds involve rolling the tongue up against the palette located on the roof of the mouth, creating a gentle explosion. Overall, when it comes to pronouncing Tamil words, it is important for English speakers to distinguish long vowels from short ones. However, except for ñ, most readers can just ignore the dots and lines underneath the other consonants. For further details, consult Figure 1.

Furthermore, where a word has a common English spelling, as in the name of the great Hindu god *Shiva*, that convention is used and alternate spellings, with or without diacritical marks, are ignored.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

As the subtitle states, *Land of the Golden River* is an epic story that celebrates the heroines and heroes of a medieval kingdom: Poṅṅiḷaḷa Nāḍu. This tale is known by many different names and is an important Tamil legend worthy of international attention. We do not know much about its origins, but a good guess is that this story acquired the general shape presented in this book some time around the fifteenth century. There are no early written versions and the tale varies somewhat from teller to teller—more specifically, from one school of bards to another. These variants are recognizable but differ in the names of subsidiary characters, the various details included or omitted, and more. Of particular interest, perhaps, is a bastardized version created by a politician-cum-Tamil folk enthusiast. About ten years back, he made the whole story into a Bollywood-style movie, dressing the female characters in very skimpy (inappropriate) clothing and, quite strikingly, omitting all references to the gods! Most people say the result was a flop, but it is still a version that many Tamils have seen and remember.

The key takeaway is that this story has not been “frozen” by an authoritative text handed down from the past. Several palm leaf manuscripts are said to exist wherein this legend is told, at least in part. In every case, however, the actual existence, as well as the authenticity of these leaf-based documents has yet to be verified by a trained manuscript scholar.¹ Furthermore, multiple excerpts and summaries have recently been uploaded to the internet by local enthusiasts. Some of these discussions use alternate names for the story’s key characters, but most do appear to reference the same basic legend. The version presented here is rich in detail and rendered in a colloquial style, reflecting the teller’s personal skills and taste. The legend, as told by the bard who speaks through this text, uses three roughly equal storytelling pillars: poetic song passages, descriptive narrative segments, and character-to-character conversations. These three styles, used side by side, keep the entire tale lively and engrossing.

¹ For more detail see Version “L” in Beck (1982), p. 5, as well as an archival record of research interviews on this epic story conducted by Professor P. Krishnaswami, Christ University, Bangalore, and held in the library there. See the bibliography for further details on where possible palm leaf versions of this story are thought to be located.

This is the first version of *The Legend of Poṅṅivaḷa [Nāḍu]* to circulate internationally.¹ It was recorded, as delivered, directly from the mouth of a much-respected local bard and exists in two versions. The first is an oral performance that lasted for eighteen nights and was simultaneously tape recorded. The second is the result of the same singer's patient dictation of the story to a local scribe, a days-long retelling that occurred just weeks later. The text printed here faithfully presents that second version. As the translator, I have tried to keep the English linguistic style close to the informal, colloquial Tamil that the bard himself used. I wanted to preserve the wonderful folk feel of this oral, down-to-earth source.

But remember this: oral folk epics, at least as enjoyed and celebrated in localized South Asian contexts like the one described here, are stories that their bards only commit to memory in a somewhat elastic way. Each bard, in each generation, is free to enhance and omit small bits from the broader tradition, an acknowledged flexibility that a singer needs in order to hold the attention of his immediate audience. Furthermore, although most performers are male, occasional female actor-singers also exist. But, to my knowledge, there is no lead singer who is female, at least currently. However, it is common for men to take on female roles and to dress accordingly when performing. Furthermore, all singers I have met have belonged to a local, collegial cluster one could loosely call a "troupe." The two or three singers from the troupe who decide to perform together at a given moment vary according to availability and convenience, but the entire circle of singers collaborates with each other. Each bard identifies with and supports the troupe's other members. This entire community has likely learned the story from the same respected elder—a guru of sorts, a man who may also be a close relative. Membership in this communal group of singers is not, however, restricted by caste or economic status. Members are self-selected. It is a kind of "calling," linked to a personal desire to help perpetuate a powerful local tradition.

Every singer has memorized the legend in a heartfelt and very deep way, and steps into public view only after many years of apprenticeship and practice. Each local "school" is recognizable, and, to a limited extent, these various singer clusters act as rival groups. The older listeners in the crowd serve as the final judges. They listen for the details they remember from previous performances and want to hear retold. It is those well-known and extra-knowledgeable elders who serve to keep the performing troupe honest and focused. A singer's reputation is at stake during every performance. The enthusiasm key listeners express after each session will impact the troupe's reputation and hence its future livelihood.²

¹ This is the title of a two-volume graphic novel (Beck, 2012 & 2015) which presents the same story in an abbreviated, highly visual form.

² Local bards have found many creative ways to tell this story to local audiences. Some just sing it while wearing ordinary street clothing, seated on a cloth or straw mat laid on the ground. One man can choose to sing the story alone or he may be accompanied by an assistant drummer-singer, as was the case in this instance. Sometimes one or more members of a troupe dress up employing make-up and costumes intended to portray individual characters. If wearing

Why, one may ask, is this story important? Why honour it with an international edition when it is just one of many hundreds of long, local South Asian oral tales? There are many answers. For one, *Land of the Golden River* contains many interesting historical insights. Second, this epic is sociologically a rich and well-embellished tale, providing a wealth of detail for anyone interested in learning about South Asian Hindu traditions at the folk level. A third answer is that this particular story compares well with a wide variety of better-known epics taught to university students worldwide.¹ Fourth, the story can be interpreted using a variety of different perspectives, depending on the interests of specific readers. It addresses ecological issues, social justice themes, mythological concepts, principles of comparative religion, plus descriptions of various ritual practices, and much more. This legend also provides a good starting point for conversations about the nature of high-prestige cultural traditions compared to what might be called rural, backwater themes. The story illustrates the kind of challenge to high-level traditions that a folk account can offer. Each of these many perspectives is discussed briefly below.

The Geographic Backdrop

The *Legend of Poṅṅivaḷa* is a story focused on one specific area of South Asia known as Koṅku Nāḍu. See the map in Figure 2 on page 4. The term Koṅku describes a relatively distinct region in the northwest corner of India's southern-most state, Tamil Nadu. Koṅku shares one edge with Kerala, a state just to the west along the Arabian Sea coast. But Koṅku is just one sub-region of Tamil Nadu and it has no coastal lands. Rather, it is a high, upland plain surrounded by mountains on its western and northern edges, while a dotted ring of high hills marks the eastern boundary. Furthermore, Koṅku is a relatively dry area, traditionally dependent on seasonal rains and deep, hand-dug wells. Perhaps for this reason, Koṅku's folk poets frequently sing about the beauty of the river they have named Poṅṅi or "golden" for its life-giving waters and lovely sunset colours. This waterway, widely known as the Kāveri, is a major river that flows out of high mountains to the north and then turns south to run through the middle of the Koṅku plain. Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, "Land of the Golden River," is a favoured poetic name for this magnificent watercourse. That lovely moniker expresses the deep love the residents of the region have for this area. It communicates the pride they feel, by association, with this unique landscape and its long, storied history.

costumes, some or all the members of the performing troupe will stand and move around within a small clearing that acts as their "stage." These actors may use a few simple props, such as a fake sword or a hobby horse for visual effect. In still further examples I have seen a kind of "line dance" arrangement where a group of singers fancy-step around a small stage or clearing, moving in unison elbow to elbow. Various combinations of these performing styles can be employed and audiences seem to welcome the variety.

¹ See Beck (2021, forthcoming) for a variety of other epic examples, each discussed in relation to this one, using a comparative framework.

The Topography of Tamil Nadu

Showing the location of
Koṅku Nāḍu and the likely position of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu within that area

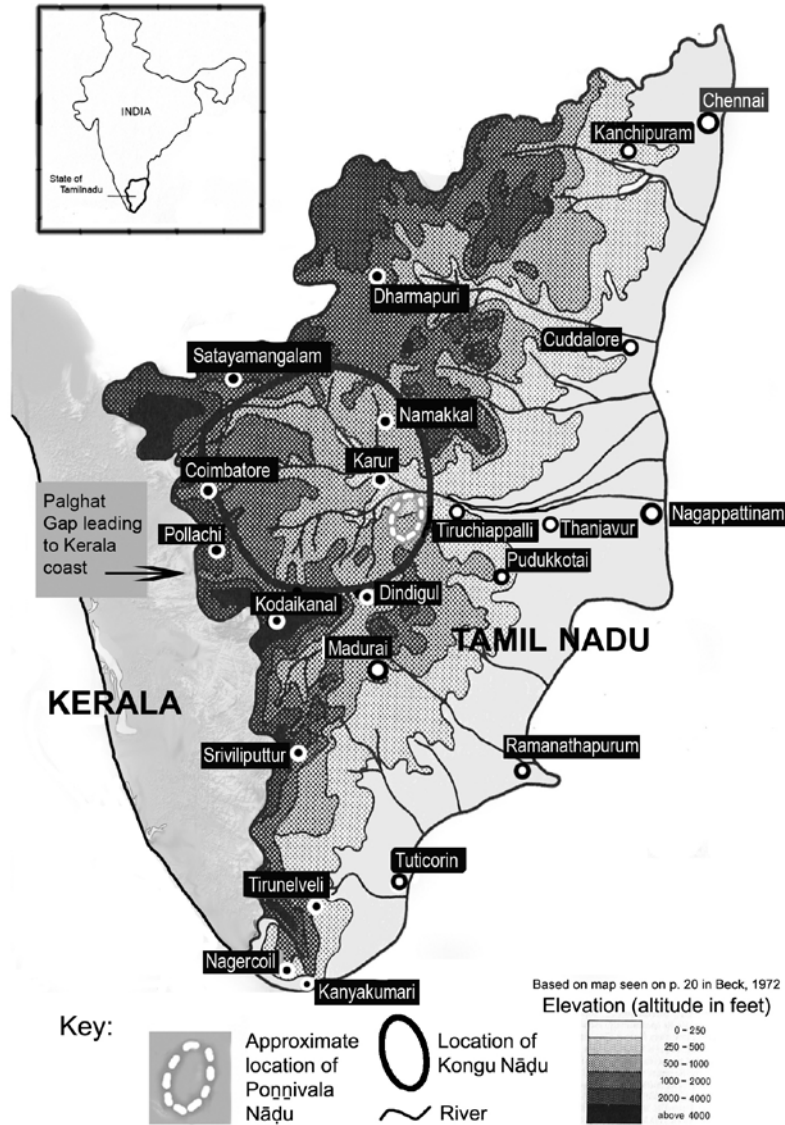


Figure 2.
Map of the state of Tamil Nadu,
showing the region where this epic is traditionally performed.

The Name of the Legend, Its Documentation and Its Translation

The story told in this book has many names. In Tamil, this epic tale is usually named for its two key heroes, Poṅṅar and Caṅkar. However, these two men only surface in the third generation of the story. The legend is also referred to in Tamil as the *Aṅṅamār Cāmi Katai*, or Elder Brothers' Story, again referring solely to two male grandchildren who only enter the story at the beginning of its second half. I, for one, am not happy with either convention and so, for decades, I have struggled with how to name this great story in my own writings about it. In 1982, I published a book analyzing the tale from a structured literary and poetic perspective. I titled that work *The Three Twins*. It was my first attempt to highlight the ambiguity I feel surrounds the tale. My question is: who are the real heroes of this story? Is this really a tale about a set of twin brothers or is it about a set of triplets born to the queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu? The third member of that cluster is female, a young girl named Taṅkāḷ. Though human, she is a kind of "divine observer," a goddess embodied in a living female whose job it is to carefully monitor the multiple escapades and misadventures of her two elder siblings. Those two young men are older than she is, but only by minutes, due to the fact that the triplets were born one at a time and thus have a technical birth order.

I continue to believe in the great importance of this partially hidden third member of the story's central triad. That is why I have, for many years, consistently resisted naming the story solely after her two brothers. In 2015, when I completed a thirteen-hour animated version of the story, and also published a two-volume graphic novel to match, I decided to call that work *The Legend of Ponnivala*. This title more accurately reflects the core idea that this story presents: a folk history of a very special geographic locale that lies on the banks of the great Kāveri River and is called Poṅṅi (golden) by poets. But that choice was later criticized by a Tamil scholar. He complained that I had left out the term Nāḍu and in Tamil one cannot properly use the term "Poṅṅivaḷa" without adding the suffix "Nāḍu," indicating that this term has a very specific regional and geopolitical meaning. That is why I decided to name the present work *Land of the Golden River* and then add a subtitle that includes the full Tamil wording: *Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu*. Thus, once more, I have chosen to avoid using the names of the story's main heroes as its title. This is because I deeply believe several key women are equally important to this grand legend, though in subtle and somewhat secretive ways. I do not want the core significance of these females to lie hidden because the title only features two (out of many) male heroes.

The lead singer of the version of the great legend documented in this book was E. C. Rāmacāmi, of Erucaṅampāḷayam. Rāmacāmi spent eighteen nights in early 1965 singing this story to a group of villagers in the nearby hamlet of Olappāḷayam, where I was living at the time. He sang for about two hours a

night, accompanied by his nephew, a talented assistant singer. I was just a young doctoral student back then, collecting material for a thesis to be delivered to Oxford University upon my return there. I really knew next to nothing about this tale at the time, but upon discovering it, I decided to bring out my tape recorder. I was hoping to learn more Tamil by relistening to the recording later, and maybe I would pick up a few new cultural insights along the way. I had no idea how long the story would take to tell, initially thinking it might last no more than an hour or so! In the end, I had to use nearly all of the audio tapes I had brought with me, an item one could not obtain locally at the time.

Afterwards, I was curious to learn more about the story. I thought of listening to the tapes again but did not want to repeatedly play and rewind small segments and thus likely damage what I had just spent days carefully collecting. So, a few weeks later, I decided to call the same bard back. I asked if he would mind dictating the very same tale to my local research assistant, who would act as his scribe. I asked my assistant to write down each line the bard spoke exactly as uttered. I wanted to retain his many colloquial terms and also his regional pronunciation¹.

It was only years later that I became so interested in the tale that I realized it demanded translation so it could be widely shared. Eventually, my work on the story got noticed by the Institute of Asian Studies in Madras (now Chennai) and that organization published my translated text. They chose a layout that allowed each Tamil and English paragraph to appear side by side. This made the work so bulky that it had to be published in two volumes, together comprising over 780 pages.² To avoid the complexity created by a reader needing to purchase both volumes, this new version reproduces only the English half of the original publication.³ I have also slightly loosened my original translation to allow for an easier read. As mentioned above, a full audio version of this story has also been preserved. It is notable for its expressive style, its much longer songs that are full of repeated lines, its fine drum rhythms, and more. A digitized version of that recording is available now in three places,⁴ along with a full, typed Tamil transcript.

A comparison of the same bard's performed and dictated versions has yielded some very interesting results.⁵ The performed version is wordier, but also more

1 For an excellent review of the challenges faced in collecting, transcribing and publishing a dictated text, see Jonathan L. Ready, "The Textualization of Homeric Epic by Means of Dictation," *Transactions of the American Philological Association (TAPA)*, 145 (January 2015): 1-75.

2 Beck (1992).

3 It is hoped that a matching Tamil equivalent, using the original Tamil wording, will follow.

4 The scribe's original Tamil notes handwritten while the bard dictated the entire story are available in the archives of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife & Cultural Heritage in Washington, D.C. To hear a few original snippets, search for "Smithsonian Folkways Brenda Beck." A scanned version of the notes is held in the University of Toronto Library, Scarborough campus, and a roughly similar version is available at the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) archival library in Gurugram, Haryana, India.

5 See Beck (1982) for a book-length analysis of the key differences between the oral and the dictated versions of this epic tale.

humorous and colloquial. Furthermore, it contains additional mythological references. Most important, it is only by listening to the performed version that one can appreciate the true power of the songs the bard and his assistant sang. It is via those songs, and the skilled drumbeats that accompany them, that a listener can gauge the full emotional impact this story can have. The contrast is relevant to understanding how mankind's many heritage stories have been altered in tone and their awesome impact when transformed into written documents. Unfortunately, most stories, including this one, now have printed variants that largely replace their lively, poetic, and often non-costumed earlier versions.

Historical Dimensions

Land of the Golden River is a legend that features a band of nine brothers who immigrate to a new area called Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. They have been asked to open up land there and convert it into ploughed fields by a powerful regional king. These nine workers are tasked with cutting trees and putting their ox-drawn ploughs to work in order to create a new regional ecosystem and, alongside that, a new lifestyle. But substantial resistance to this plan is mounted by a group of artisans already living in that "new land." Later, the new immigrants are also challenged by a band of tribal hunters who live nearby. This significant theme—local resistance to a group of immigrants—persists throughout the story. But neither the artisans nor the hunters ever fully succeed in countering the advance of those newcomers into their traditional territory. And although one can easily sense a bias in the story that favours farmers over hunters and artisans, this tale does highlight the legitimate anger those earlier residents in the area feel. The resistance that native groups have mustered in the face of colonial encroachment is, of course, a worldwide theme. Furthermore, this historical truism is especially relevant to the North American experience. The Golden River story provides a rare example of a parallel set of historical events that occurred in a South Asian context. This makes it a very "teachable" story for North and South Americans, Australians, and others.

Nonetheless, the fierce resistance posed by native residents to a group of newly arrived plough-farmers is only part of the Golden River story. In this long legend, the values cherished by the heroes' own family also shift significantly over the three generations of the epic. This constitutes another recognizable aspect of this South Asian tale: a family's evolutionary story similar to those currently observable in diaspora communities worldwide. In the first generation, a pioneer grandfather struggles to gain a toehold by tilling just a few acres. His family, meanwhile, is forced to live in a humble hut. But in the second generation, this man's son gradually expands his land holdings and becomes a prosperous landlord. As a result, the family's social status changes. Unlike his father, the immigrant son is able to make good money, build himself a small palace and begin to manage others. They are the ones who now have to take on the hard physical work of actually farming the land. In this story, that son of immigrants, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, gradually expands his own local power by

building an alliance with (and affirming his allegiance to) a distant king. This is the same powerful family of rulers (the Cholas) who once backed his own pioneer father's humble start-up efforts. Furthermore, that Chola King¹ now benefits from the expansion of his kingdom, enabling him to expend his control upstream. He also benefits from one more form of prestige: he learns that he can demand periodic, if only symbolic, gifts from the hero's family.²

In the third generation, however, things change again. Now the grandsons of the original pioneer, a set of twin boys, become the celebrated heroes. Poṅṅar and Caṅkar now sit at the centre of this legend. They adopt a different lifestyle entirely: that of prestige-seeking, horseback-riding warriors.³ The story describes these two men as asserting control over a vast acreage where others do all the hard day-to-day work. The grandsons are no longer interested in tilling the soil, not even in carving the first symbolic furrow using their most handsome team of oxen. Furthermore, that distant Chola King, whose father was once supported their family, now starts to express his distinct disrespect for these two rulers who sit just astride the margin of his own fine kingdom. Unwilling to accept that subordinate position, the two brothers decide to revolt, and they soon manage to kill this unnamed ruler. Independence is thus won for the beloved lands of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, but that victory comes at considerable cost. The two young brothers' revolt also frees the tribal hunters from the same broad thumbprint of Chola rule. That monarch, it appears, previously claimed that vast forest area as his own, using it as a private game preserve and as a rich pasture where his kingdom's fine horses and elephants could be housed.⁴ Now that those hunters have been freed of their obligation to serve the king, their farm-based rivals—the twin heroes—try to extend their own dominance to include that rich forest area and its many resources. Fresh fighting ensues. Poṅṅar and Caṅkar eventually kill a great wild boar, a demon-like figure who is the symbolic protector of those hunters' sacred, mountainous terrain. Alas, even after conducting a large pre-war sacrifice (using the boar's carcass) and presumably enjoying the rewards of this gift to the forest's guardian spirits, the two brothers eventually come to realize that they cannot succeed. The hunters

¹ Or perhaps it was this king's father who mentored the original set of nine pioneers. The story is not precise on this point.

² These tribute payments appear to be largely symbolic (a ploughing yoke, standing for the input of local labour, a vessel containing fresh curds that marks the contribution of the animals on this land, and a measuring vessel, which likely symbolizes the impressive size of the produce being reaped there). These payments express the respect and subservience the heroes pay the king. They are hardly a tribute, and these "payments" have more symbolic than economic value.

³ These brothers resemble the Vedic Asvin twins, sons of the sun god Surya, but differ from them in that they ride their two magical steeds bareback and are nowhere said to own or drive a chariot. What is even clearer is that they mirror a larger and very ancient tradition of dual kingship. The "elder" twin, born first, acts as the day-to-day ruler-manager of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu's fine agricultural lands. His "younger" brother, meanwhile, is the great warrior who defends the land from a variety of aggressive rival attackers.

⁴ This is an inference, a detail not specifically provided in the story itself.

melt back silently into their lovely eco-preserve and live to resist the farmers again and again.

Why is it that these two epic heroes manage to hold off their hunter challengers, but never succeed in fully defeating them? The story reveals that those wily forest residents are existentially backed up by the great god Lord Vishnu himself. Meanwhile, the farmer-twins become dismayed and tired from the sheer exertion of having to undertake so much fighting. Soon they receive a hint from Vishnu, a symbolic gesture pointing them towards a different path to glory. The two brothers pay attention to this god's deliberate signal, and soon decide to submit to death deliberately by falling forward on their own swords. That is their heroic response to Lord Vishnu's gentle, flowered arrow, shot directly at Caṅkar's chest. Vishnu uses a special sugarcane bow for this purpose, a sign of his divine love. That arrow, full of mixed meanings, removes a thread strung over the younger twin's chest. The thread was meant to provide them supernatural protection in times of warfare and grave danger.¹ Both men understand that this loss of their thin chest thread signals that they are destined, now, to sacrifice their own lives. This grim decision, taken by both heroes, must not be read as a simple suicide. Rather it is a cosmic gift they decide to make, jointly, to a great goddess. She is unspecified but it is likely the ancient Tamil goddess named Korṅvai that they are thinking of. Or perhaps it is her counterpart, Būdevi, Vishnu's second wife? Whichever goddess it is, that cosmic female will soon recycle both heroes' life energies as she works to jump-start the next cosmic cycle (yuga).

A Comparison with Gilgamesh and with the Mahābhārata

There are significant parallels between the legend of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu and the epic of Gilgamesh². One similarity of note is that the two brothers in this epic have a companion, a semi-wild man named Cāmpukā. He resembles Gilgamesh's colleague, Enkidu, in many ways. Although not born in the forest, Cāmpukā knows the wild areas near Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu well. He can track animals and find his way around in a forest easily. He exhibits great skill when confronting the multiple tigers and cobras that reside there. Like Enkidu, Cāmpukā helps the story's twin heroes regularly, especially in all tasks that involve animals or tracking forest beasts. Furthermore, he is exceptionally

¹ The heroes' family do not traditionally wear the sacred "twice-born" chest thread. But they do decide to don a similar protective strand, in a little ritual conducted just before they leave for the great final battle. The twin heroes are farmers by caste, but by setting out for a great war, they are quietly claiming a new and higher social status as they become fierce warriors. Vishnu takes that claim away just before their joint deaths. Perhaps that symbolic act is a part of the humbling process involved in gifting one's life to a higher being? Perhaps that thread is exchanged for a special prestige obtained by gaining an honoured position next to Lord Shiva in their soon-to-be-obtained after-lives?

² I refer to the general story in the case of Gilgamesh and to the story as told here for the legend of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu.

strong and can run as fast as a horse can gallop. Cāmpukā, an “outcaste” by birth, is thus a proud and capable (even supernatural) man. He is shown a lot of respect by the twin heroes, albeit within the limits of the traditional social norms of the time. He is sometimes called the heroes’ First Minister and we see that he is given a lot of responsibility in a wide variety of situations. In many scenes the two heroes and Cāmpukā form a triad of close associates.

That alliance, highlighted by this story, reflects a very old relationship between the two castes involved. In Koṅku’s farming areas these two groups were once very dependent on one another and they interacted regularly. But that closeness and shared respect can rarely be observed today.¹ The farmers’ community is still highly respected while Cāmpukā’s is literally considered so low as to lie “outside the caste system” altogether.² Cāmpukā is also key to the heroes finding Kompaṇ, the huge wild boar that they eventually spear and use as their pre-war sacrifice.³

Many further commonalities exist between the Gilgamesh story and this one, at least at the mythological level.⁴ And the surprising suggestion that these two cultures, one in ancient Mesopotamia and the other in South India, may have had a link of some kind is not so far-fetched. Basic geography, Greek and Roman records, and also some of the most recent DNA research all suggest that there may have been boat contact between the Koṅku area and Mesopotamia even before the Greek and Roman periods. This is partly because of the strong, well-developed sailing craft already in use by the ancient Sumerians, and also because of the ease of reaching the southwest coast of India that way by departing from the north end of the Persian Gulf. Sailing down the west coast of India and then nearing its southern tip, sailors would have easily located the one key pass (and major trade route) that led directly to the Koṅku area from a costal port in Kerala, earlier called Musiri.

There are also many significant links between India’s great Mahābhārata story and the legend of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. It is certainly possible to argue that this regional epic is little more than a simplified and localized version of that much earlier and very famous pan-Indian story.⁵ I agree that the relationship between these two great legends is significant and that there are multiple overlaps. The two areas where I believe comparison is warranted are structural: the similarity in the key heroes’ descent lines on the one hand, and a correspondence in the

1 For a detailed description and analysis of the caste system that used to exist in this area, see Beck (1992).

2 His community, called Paraiyaṅ, is the source of our English term “pariah”

3 This creates a clear parallel with Humbaba in the Gilgamesh epic, while Cāmpukā himself parallels Gilgamesh’s powerful converted wild ally Enkidu.

4 See Beck (2021, forthcoming).

5 Alf Hiltebeitel, in *The Cult of Draupadi*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) discusses many details of the folk cult that surrounds the *Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu* story in comparison with the folk cults in South India that celebrate the Mahābhārata. The similarities across these two epics are greater at the folk level level, and less pronounced when one simply compares textual versions. The women in these two stories also resemble each other more at the folk level.

nature of the heroes’ key enemies, on the other. Figure 3 attempts to illustrate these links.

Consider the father of the key heroes in both stories. Instead of the descent line being drawn from their marital link (the = sign indicating the bond between a husband and his wife or wives) we see the line to the next generation being drawn from the wife (or wives) only. There is no descending line seen to issue from either Kuṅṅuṭaiyā or Pandu directly to their multiple offspring. This is because, in both stories, all their children have been sired by gods. This act of impregnation is “immaculate” in both cases. The gods have simply chosen the wombs of these men’s wives as the vessels needed to bring forth that story’s most famous protagonists. The key rivals of those heroes, furthermore, are lineal relatives (“cousin brothers”) born from their father’s brother (in the case of the Mahābhārata) or from the brother of the grandfather (in the male line) in the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu case.

The fundamental story structure of the Mahābhārata is nicely reflected in the names of the territories affiliated with the key protagonists active in the Poṅṅivaḷa legend. Here, the heroes’ family is created and set down in Veḷḷivaḷa Nāḍu (the “Land of Silver”) but later migrates to an even finer locale, Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu (the “Land of Gold”). But that latter area must be divided among the nine brothers who arrive there together. The finest piece of this “new” land is given to the grandfather of the heroes, K, and continues to be called Poṅṅivaḷa, while the other brothers must share the remaining area, a subdivision of Poṅṅivaḷa called Taṅkavaḷa (or Taṅkavaḷa Nāḍu). It has been named using a different word for gold (tankam), itself suggesting one common ancestry (gold) but now in two parts or halves or pieces: Poṅṅi and Taṅkam. These separate territories identify the two lineages that compete and challenge each other, both of whom belong to a single male “clan” or descent group. Taken together, this entire clan area contrasts with another, quite separate and distinct territory called Vāḷavaṅḍi Nāḍu. This is where the in-laws live, the place where women married into the heroes’ family hail from. Vāḷavaṅḍi has no clear meaning as a term beyond referencing where these family females were born and raised. Unlike the place names discussed above, there is an actual place still in Northern Koṅku called Vāḷavaṅḍi. We can describe the male kinship structure that dominates the Mahābhārata as an “epic template,” therefore, that the creators of the local legend likely adopted. Both epics also feature a conflict between the heroes and a nearby group of forest-dwelling aboriginal hunters. But when one considers the women in the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu legend, either in territorial terms or otherwise, however, the overlap with women described in the Mahābhārata appears to be minimal.¹

1 See Beck (2021, forthcoming) for a more extended discussion of these similarities and differences.

Kinship Structure

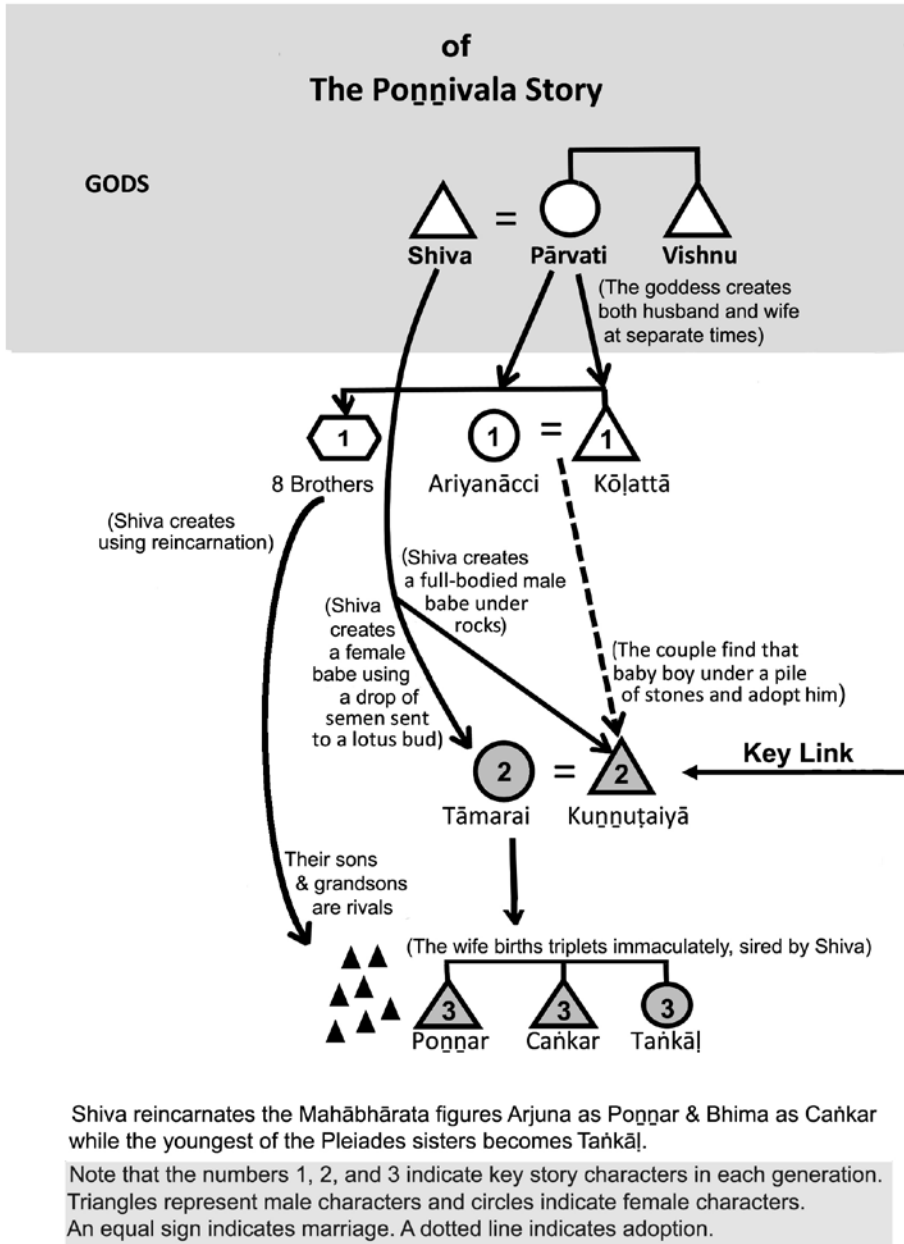


Figure 3.

Descent lines and patterns of rivalry between groups in the Poṅṅivala Nāḍu story.

Kinship Structure

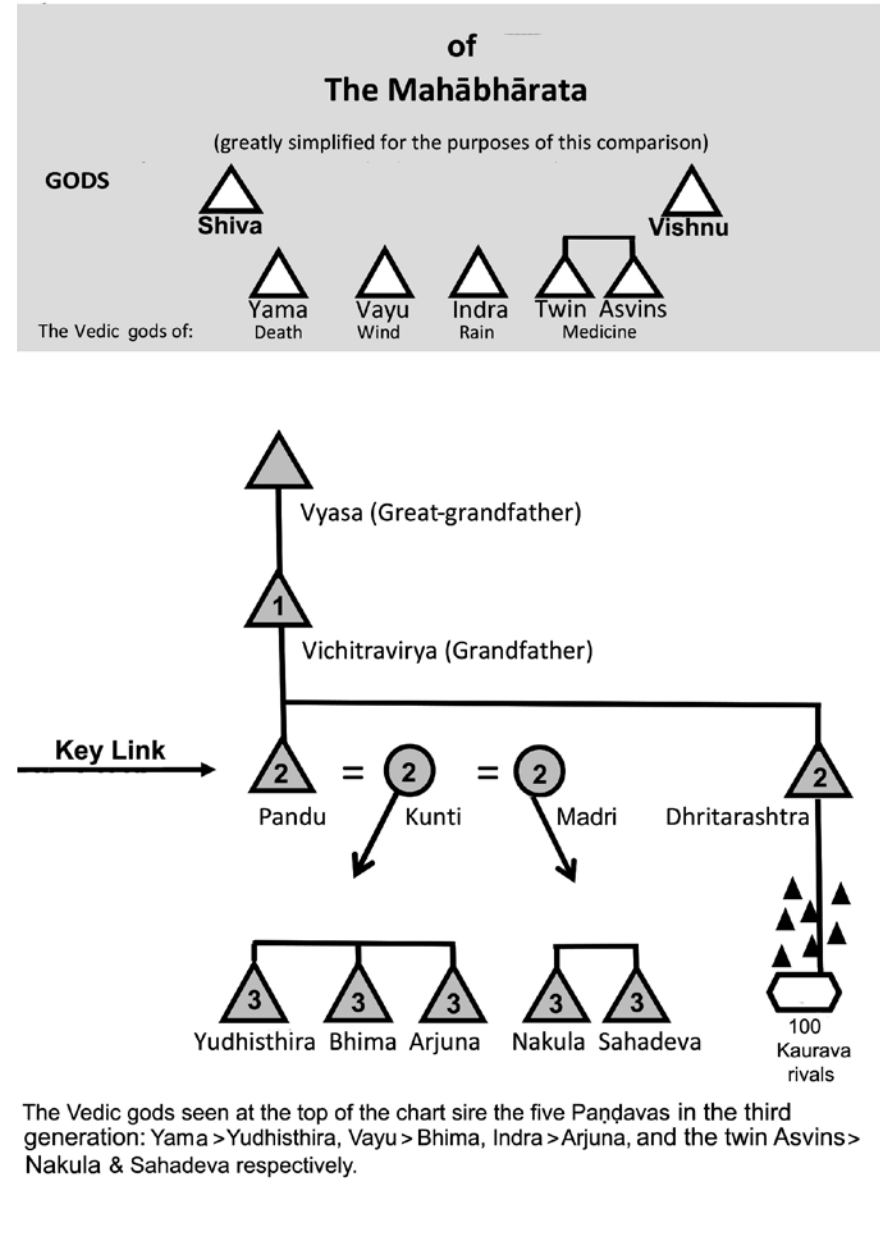


Figure 4.

Descent lines and patterns of rivalry between groups in the Mahābhārata.

The reader will also notice a number of references to the Mahābhārata in the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu tale seem to function either to provide a sacred frame or else to be akin to poetic “name dropping,” rather than serving to point towards deep structural correspondences. These are what one could call “story status enhancers.” One example is right at the very start of the story where the bard references the Mahābhārata in his initial invocation. Later the astute reader will notice occasional other references to various Mahābhārata characters sprinkled like decorative jewels. These cross-references are relevant, of course, but most can be assigned to the domain of poetic cross-imaging. The interested reader can find all such references by skimming through the Glossary, and then precisely locating each one by using the index.

This leaves us with one final similarity that is unquestionably more important: The elder twin, a key hero in the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu story, Poṅṅar, is clearly stated to be a reincarnation of the great Pandava hero, Arjuna. Meanwhile the younger twin, Caṅkar, is described as reincarnating Bhima. But there is a surprise here. Everybody knows that in the Mahābhārata Bhima is the elder brother and Arjuna the younger.¹ This relationship is reversed in the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu epic! Hierarchy is a very important social principle in this folk legend and the striking inversion of these two brothers’ status positions is no accident. It is one indication, among many, that this regional epic repeatedly asserts its independence. Indeed, there are many ways in which this story holds itself apart from pan-Indian themes, setting Brahminical scholarship and male dominance to one side, while affirming the importance of magical female power and deep knowledge of local story tellers. This folk epic stands tall and confident in the face of the literati who snub it, while the bards who know how to tell this story using their own voices, accompanied by nothing more than a small hand drum and a pair of finger cymbals, are much admired.

Sociological Themes

This epic story is truly a sociologist’s dream account. It is light on character development, but the tale is very strong when it comes to outlining the key dimensions of a local medieval society: its dilemmas, its hierarchies, its core values, and its family bonds. Admittedly, this story does not provide much information regarding the local caste structure. However, this may actually represent a roughly accurate portrayal of the situation during the time period that frames this story. Caste divisions and subdivisions in South India have proliferated rapidly in recent centuries and are now considerably more rigid than they used to be. The story told here depicts just three basic social categories: the farmers, artisans, and forest-dwelling hunters. Just a few minor references are made to Brahmins. When we encounter a Brahmin, it is always just a single male, someone who is called in to conduct a specific ritual. The outcaste Paṛaiyā group that Cāmpukā belongs to is

¹ The twin heroes are born just minutes apart, but the one born first, Poṅṅar, is designated as the elder, and his brother, Caṅkar, as the younger brother.

also mentioned, as are one or two occasional merchant figures and one potter. It is significant, perhaps, that nowhere in the story do we learn the caste identity of the Chola kings, one of whom the two heroes eventually kill.

It is in its description of traditional kin relationships that the legend of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu really shines. The heroes’ father is supportive and loving towards his two sons, and on his deathbed, he gives them significant guidance on how to behave when he is gone. Their mother is likewise nurturing and protective. Her lifelong wish is to bear children and when she finally becomes the mother of triplets, her role shifts almost entirely to fostering their development. Most interesting is the fact that a set of triplets is featured in the story, even though the varied Tamil names for this legend always focus exclusively on its twin males. Remarkably, too, these two are always referred to as “elder” brothers (*aṅṅaṅmār*), even though their sister was born just minutes after they were. The relationship between these brothers and their sister is key to understanding this legend in depth. The girl, whose very name, “Taṅkāḷ,” means “little” or “younger sister,” underpins nearly everything important that happens in the third generation. She provides the family with a hidden energy and mythically she is one of the seven Pleiades, a key constellation of seven stars that are embedded in a very visible star cluster. That cluster (called the Krittika) is located just over the shoulder hump of Taurus, the constellation believed to depict the great Bull of Heaven. The centrality of this brother-sister relationship is also seen in the heroes’ parents’ generation, where their mother, Tāmarai (lotus flower), experiences a run-in with her own two brothers. Tāmarai feels mistreated when they refuse her entry into the family’s heritage home, the place that was once their residence. Tāmarai then curses her two brothers and all their children. Eventually, however, the brothers submit and admit their wrongdoing to her while on their knees. She then lifts her curse and their children all revive.

The Politics of Twinship

One of the fascinating aspects of the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu story is its focus on the set of twin heroes. As with twins elsewhere in folklore, this doubling is used to develop a contrast, or more specifically a complementarity in personality types that emphasizes differing sets of strengths. The twins are implicitly ranked and, as you will discover, they are frequently referred to as Periyacāmi (“the elder,” also called Poṅṅar, referring to gold) and Ciṅṅacāmi (the “younger,” also called Caṅkar, referring to a conch shell.¹ Periyacāmi is thoughtful, and patient (one might say almost timid) but is also the wiser brother. He is always respectful of others. Poṅṅar is the one lauded in songs as the fine ruler who oversees Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu’s abundance and enviable prosperity.² Caṅkar, on the other hand is aggressive, impetuous, and insistent on righting all of the wrongs once committed against his ancestors. This makes the entire story essentially a treatise on the nature of

¹ Caṅkar (or Shankar using an English spelling) is also a name for the god Shiva.

² Technically the two brothers rule as one, but in songs about these kings, it is the elder one who is named and singled out.

kingship and a commentary on which personality traits are essential if one wants to be an effective and respected leader. A tension is frequently exhibited between these two principles. As one might expect, the younger hero often acts as a bully who occasionally intimidates or shames his elder sibling. He frequently bullies others as well. Nonetheless, Caṅkar is the more “beloved” of the two heroes. This is not surprising. In folklore it is the agitator, the show-off and the aggressor who is frequently more admired, compared to more gentle and introspective characters.

This ambivalence about the qualities of a good ruler can also be seen to operate in the previous generation. Similar issues are brought to the fore during the reign of these two men’s father, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā. In that earlier time, however, his generous measure of paternal timidity is balanced, not by a second more assertive brother, but by his very aggressive male cousins. And Kuṅṅuṭaiyā’s wife (the heroes’ mother, Tāmarai) is also a very strong character. While Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is impressive as a child-hero, in adulthood he sheds some of this early courage and gradually becomes overshadowed by Tāmarai, his remarkable wife. She embodies a bundle of invisible, superhuman powers that far exceed those of her husband. She is the more determined and also the stronger character physically. Tāmarai tries harder and achieves more. This points to her largely unspoken position as a living goddess. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is a simpler being, a man known to be a good and generous king. He rules with empathy and gentleness, and his lands and workers prosper accordingly.

The inner capacity Tāmarai can draw on, using her inner perceptiveness and goddess-like traits, gradually gets transferred to her daughter, Taṅkāḷ. Indeed, Taṅkāḷ’s divine inner being is specifically mentioned near the end of the story. At that point, Caṅkar calls her “our Korṟavai” (the name of an ancient form of Kāḷi). This declaration occurs just before Taṅkāḷ’s two elder brothers give up their lives, making a devotional sacrifice of their bodies, seemingly to the same goddess. One must also note that Taṅkāḷ has her own twin, a second female who happens to live in the forest. Her counterpart there is named Vīrataṅkāḷ (a fierce, warlike Taṅkāḷ). She is the sole sister of a hundred warlike hunters, men who form a group called the Veṭṭuvās. This is an unspoken relationship, yet the two taken together constitute a highly symbolic pair. The second girl’s name, by itself, serves to suggest twinship. Perhaps the most important background feature of Taṅkāḷ, however, is that she is the youngest of the seven sisters that constitute the constellation known as the Pleiades (called the Kaṅṅimār, the Krittika or seven virgins in Tamil). She is placed in Tāmarai’s womb by Lord Shiva himself, next to the twin story heroes. Thus, these three are born as triplets. Taṅkāḷ’s mission in her earthly life, given to her by the great god himself, is to watch over her two brothers, to guide them and to lend them extra strength by transferring extra power to them via her own blessings. The Kaṅṅimār are a cluster of important local goddesses that this author has written about in several separate articles.¹

¹ Beck, 2018, 2019c, 2020 and 2021.

Ritual Enactment and Mirroring

The legend¹ of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu has not been frozen and set aside in Koṅku Nāḍu as just one more “old tale.” It still plays a vital role in the life of people in this region. Numerous temples are dedicated to its three key characters, the twin brothers and their “little sister.” Sometimes the parents of these triplets are also represented in the same shrine complex along with the heroes’ two fine horses, their assistant Cāmpukā, and even the heroine’s tiny little female dog. It is that tiny bitch that succeeds in bringing the great forest boar “to its knees.” You have to read the story to find out how she can achieve such a feat! Many of these folk shrines that celebrate the story are specifically linked to local farmer clans. Their owners normally celebrate their story heroes with a large festival event each year. A special set of rituals intended for this purpose are performed on the moonless night in late February or early March each year. The night is called Shiva Rātiri or Shiva’s Night. An especially important shrine centre known for this is located in a village called Vīrappūr. That little hamlet lies at the foot of the hills where the twin heroes died (the Vīramalai mountains). That is where Poṅṅar and Caṅkar are said to have leapt into the air in order to fall onto their own swords. They planted their mighty weapons in the ground, with the pointed tips facing upwards, just moments before.

The Vīrappūr festival seems to grow larger each year, attracting hundreds of devotees. The most courageous and devout of these are hoping that the spirit of the deceased Poṅṅar and Caṅkar will personally possess them on this special night. Self-selected men, who have ritually purified themselves beforehand, fall into a trance and then become overwhelmed by the dead heroes’ divine energy. Women can undergo possession too, but I have never seen one fall down “dead.” Many of the men, by contrast, do fall onto the earthen floor of the pavilion, one by one. There they lie for hours, as if dead. Their “corpses” are quickly covered by white funeral cloths. Each is then dragged to the side where a solemn, immobile row of hidden bodies gradually grows longer. Eventually, in the wee hours of the morning, the crowd witnesses their revival by a young girl. She is understood to embody the spirit essence of the little sister, Taṅkāḷ, herself. The pre-puberty female who takes on this role then sprinkles sacred drops of water on these many fallen, deathly-still bodies. Meanwhile, special verses are chanted, and loud drums beat rhythmically in the background.

This dramatic revival ritual is linked to many other themes prominent in local Koṅku cultural tradition, including the winter solstice rituals practised by cattle-owning farmers of the area. Many references to this epic are visible in popular merchandising as well. Some tea shops, for example, are named after

¹ I use the terms *epic*, *legend*, *tale* and *story* more or less interchangeably in this book, as well as elsewhere. Scholars have tried to distinguish among these terms, but this is very hard to do consistently, especially across cultures. There seems no good reason to do that here and risk annoying the reader with the constant repetition of a single term.

the heroes, petrol stations have borrowed their names, resorts are advertised using references to these two heroes, and more. It is hard to say whether the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu epic is on the wane now because fewer bards know the story well enough to perform it, or whether its popularity is actually growing because of the surge in local tourism and the growth in popularity of the story's most important pilgrimage site.

Philosophical and Religious Themes

A central theme in this long legend is female barrenness and how hard a woman will strive to reverse such a troubling fate. And it is interesting that, ultimately, a woman's barrenness reflects on male behaviour, at least as this particular story is told. The key heroine suffers this fate because of her father-in-law's mistreatment of a group of hungry cows. Yet it is the woman, the mother-to-be of the twin male heroes, who ends up having to atone for that male "sin." The story contains many strong images of this sorrowful barren woman and how she comes to blame herself for her inability to bear a child. It is that despair that drives Tāmarai and makes her into a real heroine. At several points she is the only character who propels the entire story forward. It is also clear that female barrenness can affect the entire landscape, including all the animals and plants, because they can also cease to reproduce in difficult times or under trying family circumstances. Keeping a herd of cows in the family cattle pen, and a related emphasis on good farming practices and the use of teams of oxen to plough, are further core story themes.

This brings us to the goddesses in the story. The local deity, Cellāttā, is responsible for overseeing the fertility of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, but her beneficence rests on being properly respected and worshipped. In sum, the attitude the heroes' family displays towards their goddess serves as a core metaphor for their good stewardship of all of the fields in the area. The heroes' family's focus on the wellbeing of their goddess expresses a deep concern for the soil itself. In fact, in metaphorical terms, the body of the goddess is also that of the great earth. Cellāttā lies at the heart of the land and nurtures all that prospers or dies upon it. Furthermore, Cellāttā is Lord Vishnu's sister and a form of the great goddess Pārvati.¹

Two other goddesses are also important to the big picture: one is the "black" Kāḷi of the deep forest, Karukāḷiyammaṅ. She is the goddess of the hunters living there. The other is a tamer form of Kāḷi, who oversees the land of this heroic family's in-laws (the area tilled by Tāmarai's two brothers). The key territory that the heroes' family inhabits is called Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. The territory that the in-laws oversee is named Vāḷavaṅḍi Nāḍu. It is a large forest area nearby (named for its most famous set of mountains, (the Vīramalai) that is not

¹ This makes Vishnu and Shiva brothers-in-law, as mentioned earlier. This creates a somewhat tense but also teasing relationship, which is activated repeatedly throughout this epic story.

a nāḍu at all. The term "nāḍu" implies a civilized and organized territory. The lack of a nāḍu label for an area suggests a place of wildness and disorder. But on the flip side, the absence of a nāḍu identity also suggests that an elemental form of fertility and energy permeates that area. It is indeed only in the forest where the land's primal energy is located. That energy, implicitly some kind of electricity or lightning strike, is symbolized by the sun maiden and her copper pillar. This energy is needed to reboot and begin the next human era: this is where the power to ignite all cosmic *yugas* (or time cycles) yet to come can be found.¹ Through the names of the various territories, and their links to these several separate goddesses, we see clearly that the geography of the story reflects this epic's broad kinship structure and also the key social tensions it describes.

The cosmic or "upper level" geography presented by this legend is also of real interest. The heroine and her husband Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, the local ruler of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu during the second generation, are described as they set out on a long journey to try to find Lord Shiva. They are hoping he will perform his magic, bless the barren Tāmarai and enable her, henceforth, to give birth to children. They hope to find him holding court inside his Himalayan council chambers high above. It is a long trip and she is clearly the stronger and more resilient partner. At one point, she even carries her husband on her back; but even so, the way becomes too tough for him. Eventually Tāmarai agrees to leave him by the side of the path. He will sit there and watch for her return. Lord Vishnu agrees to help. He converts Kuṅṅuṭaiyā into a stone for the long wait ahead so he will not suffer or notice the many years that will pass before Tāmarai returns. Vishnu then announces that he, himself, will accompany Tāmarai on her onward journey.

The geography that separates earth from heaven in this story is very interesting, and it is well detailed by the bard as he describes Tāmarai's long pilgrimage. Her trip involves crossing mythical rivers of fire, stone, thorns, hot butter, and more. She also goes through a hell-like tunnel where she must pass by humans who are undergoing torture for their previous misbehaviour. Finally, Tāmarai finds a high pillar on top of which she will sit for twenty-one years. She is supported there by her long hair, braided into four stiff guy-wires that serve to stabilize her against the onslaught of the elements. Tāmarai is motionless as she meditates there, day and night, without food or water. She perseveres under the heat of the sun and the cold of the moon. During this long ordeal, Tāmarai is described as dying seven times from cruel attacks ordered by Lord Shiva himself. Each of her symbolic deaths, it would appear, compensates for

¹ Seen in this light, the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu legend takes the reader to the end of the Kāḷi Yuga. The world will then revert to its "natural" state so that the next sequence of four long yuga periods can begin. The copper that forms a part of the Sun Maiden's pillar was an on-site research discovery I made unexpectedly. Copper is not mentioned in the story itself, except for one copper pot. However, the Sun Maiden's pillar, hidden deep in the Vīramalai hills, is an actual object that can be seen (and climbed) to this day.

the loss of one of those sacred cows her father-in-law allowed to die on his spiked metal fence long ago. Significantly, in one of these deaths, Tāmarai's head is cut off. Thankfully, however, each time she is attacked, Lord Vishnu helps her out. He does this by immersing Tāmarai's dried skeletal bones in the Ganges, right at its heavenly source. Tāmarai's life and her flesh return with each bath and then she begins her meditation routine once more. Finally, Shiva agrees to grant her a direct audience and invites her to enter his cloud-encircled council chambers. There, before a circle of senior divinities, Shiva magically inseminates her by placing three heroic life-spirits in her womb. Those spirits then transform into a set of triplets who will be born to Tāmarai nine months later, long after she has returned to earth. Lord Shiva also gives Tāmarai a magical pot of fertility water, which he orders her to share with all the women and female animals in Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, upon her return to earth. All these women have been praying that they also may soon become pregnant. Thus here, as in many other places in this epic tale, we see the central role women are given in perpetuating human families, and how this theme is linked to assuring the vitality of the human landscape and of the Poṅṅivaḷa queen's entire local kingdom.

Social Justice Issues Useful for Teaching this Story

The Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu story can also serve as a very useful starting point for instructors who want to start classroom discussions built around social justice themes, which is a popular approach in Canada at present. This epic provides many examples for students to explore. A partial list includes: 1) the adventures of an orphan, 2) the anxieties of a childless woman, 3) a group of wandering refugees, 4) a bully who is eventually challenged by a brave little female dog, 5) a terrorist attack on a school, 6) women beaten by a variety of male relatives, 7) a group of tribal hunters whose territory and lifestyle are threatened by immigrant farmers, 8) a couple thrown out of their home by jealous relatives, 9) a woman who is paid less than a male for equivalent work, 10) a person planning to commit suicide who is eventually persuaded not to, 11) a shunned female who has a disability, 12) a man cheated by his cousins, and 13) a fence built by a wealthy landowner that ends up killing those who try to get across it. Any careful reader will find more. This richly embroidered text outlines many scenarios that a creative teacher can use as reading assignments and then ask students to unpack. Furthermore, for most readers, this story describes a "foreign" cultural environment. This can be helpful because sometimes it is easier to discuss the key dimensions of a difficult situation—one where tough decisions must be made—when that specific scenario does not lie too close to one's own life at home. It is also worth noting that many scenes in this epic play out through the use of animal metaphors, such as the moment that a lovely parrot is caught and trapped in a cage. In another case, a tiny earless dog that is tan-skinned and female is viciously teased by a huge, black male boar that has extremely sharp tusks.

This is a story that champions the underdog in many ways, often describing weaker characters with great empathy. Predictably, as in many other folk traditions, this story is a teacher's "Platonic dream." It leaves judgment about what was and was not appropriate behaviour up to debate by members of the audience. But in this new written form, the story's "listeners" have become readers. The Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu legend is a story by and about "the folk." It is a tale that examines the underbelly of a highly structured and hierarchical society from a humble villager's perspective. It offers the reader a folk history of Koṅku Nāḍu that relates well to its not-so-distant past. The story depicts life as it is understood there, using a non-judgmental mode of tale-telling. Also notable is the fact that this legend describes numerous face-to-face interactions between its human characters and various gods. These two distinctly different types of beings speak to each other in plain language and conversational tones. Often one side tries to redirect the other, hoping to realign commitments, challenge assumptions, and engineer a different outcome. One might even say that the story describes a lengthy human-divine bargaining process. As such, this epic account blends social traditions and religious conventions together, shedding light on both subjects at the same time. For a student of regional cultures, this story significantly unpacks an ancient social heritage and an underlying belief system prevalent in one particular area of South India. Both the social issues described and the religious concepts outlined in the story remain influential in the Koṅku Nāḍu area of South India to this day.

Indeed, one way to think of the *Land of the Golden River* is to imagine that this title serves as a metaphor for the great stream of history itself: its waters contain patterns and opposing forces hidden within that have helped to create this epic tale. The Golden River is forever drawing into itself the spirits of those who live along its broad banks. This beloved waterway, like a great bard, can also sing and spin stories. When carefully watched, those currents can be read. Like a fortune-teller's palm leaves, a river's many eddies and currents can be understood by those who watch them carefully. The Golden River, as it flows slowly past, can speak to key folk memories and reveal new threads in a fine tapestry designed to depict Koṅku's unique local history.

Brenda Beck – December 30, 2020

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The bard did not divide the story into episodes. The division of this story into the segments indicated below is entirely mine and is designed to match the twenty-six episodes of the legend's animated video. The numbered parts that follow also reflect these same subdivisions, as they were used to develop this legend's matching graphic novel set. Both of these works are cited in the list of additional works at the end of this book. The start of each segment is also marked in the text itself and provides an easy way to refer to the various parts of the story.

The reader will notice in the text of the story how the bard alternated among three presentation styles: descriptive narrative passages, character-to-character dialogues, and songs that carry much of the emotion. Furthermore, the affectionate names used for the heroes of the third generation in the dialogues set a special tone for a lively and heartfelt rendition of this most beloved part of the larger epic.

Episode 1: In the Beginning (*starts on page xx*)

The goddess Pārvati creates nine farmer-brothers using her personal will-power. She says that when she looks down from her home in the skies, she wants to see fine food-producing fields. So, she creates nine adult human males and gives them a plough. These men find themselves in a forest. Soon, the goddess sends them nine women to marry. Then they quickly begin the assigned task: the work of tree cutting and preliminary homesteading. But a sudden and severe drought soon forces them to abandon their idyllic environment in order to survive. All nine families walk out of the forest, led by the eldest. Soon they discover a nearby agricultural kingdom controlled by a powerful Chola ruler, a man who belongs to one of South India's three best-known medieval kingdoms. (Unfortunately, that monarch is never given a specific name, nor are any other details provided that might make him historically identifiable.) He welcomes the nine desperate brothers because he needs labourers. They are given work in this monarch's rice paddies, fields that clearly lie along the banks of Tamil Nadu's (golden) Kāveri River.

After some time, the king begins to notice the fine work of these nine honest families. So, he decides on a new assignment. He will send them upriver with a mission. They are to find an area known as Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, cut any trees that are

in the way, and begin to plough. In sum, the story's heroes now become a group of commissioned pioneers, essentially a band of colonists. But they are shocked when they discover that a group of proud local craftsmen are already living in the middle of what they had thought would be a pristine, empty land. The skilled artisans, already resident there, try to stand up to the intrusive immigrants. They do not want their territory to lose its trees and be torn up by ploughs. But Lord Vishnu, a backer of the Chola King who sent these men, now intervenes. He commits to helping the newcomers. After a symbolic struggle, the artisans are forced to establish a social contract with the original inhabitants of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, creating a sort of silent truce. But this only lasts until a new challenge appears on the horizon. Just as the eldest of the nine brothers is about to harvest his first field of sugarcane, its delicious smell attracts a group of wandering cows. The next morning the eldest of the nine brothers discovers that his fine field was badly trampled during the night, but he does not know what sort of animal caused the destruction. Dismayed, he orders that a spiked fence be quickly built to protect his crop. To do this work, he calls in the very same artisans who recently resisted the creation of his farm fields to begin with. The next night, the seven cows return, but they die a painful death trying to jump the new barrier. The spirits of those fine cows quickly rise to the heavens where they complain to Lord Shiva about the injustice they have suffered. The great god then curses the family of the eldest pioneer, announcing that his family will suffer barrenness for three times seven generations.¹ This is Shiva's reprisal for this farmer's thoughtless and selfish mistake of building that spiked fence without first discovering who or what had trampled his field. The very survival of this newly established farm family now hangs in the balance. A series of distressed wives, women who discover that they are infertile, is a problem that is now destined to plague the heroes throughout the rest of the story.

Episode 2: A Young Orphan (*starts on page xx*)

The pioneering couple are grief stricken over their lack of children. Kōḷattā, the eldest brother, and his wife Ariyanācci worry that they have no babies in their home who might eventually become their heirs. So, the two beg the gods for help. Finally, Lord Shiva's heart softens, and he commits to lessening the impact of his earlier curse. He decides to create a baby boy and hide it under a pile of stones in Kōḷattā's back field. A compassionate cow, one that belongs to his own small herd, soon notices this helpless human child and takes pity on it. It secretly allows milk from her teats to drip into its mouth several times each day. Noticing that cow's peculiar behaviour, Kōḷattā finds the infant. His wife is enthusiastic about his find and the couple adopt it. The little boy, soon to be named Kuṅṅuṭaiyā (boy of the rock pile), is raised with much love. But after a time, his two "parents" suddenly die. The poor little boy, now six years old, thus becomes an orphan. The Chola King soon learns of the death of his lead pioneer and he travels to Poṅṅivaḷa for the

¹ For more information, see footnote 52 on page x.

funeral. He also tries to console and to help the young orphan. The king makes arrangements for the future care by his eight uncles, Kōḷattā's many brothers.

Episode 3: A Long Exile *(starts on page xx)*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā paternal (agnatic) kinsmen agree, half-heartedly, to care for the boy but their real interest is in taking over the land his father Kōḷattā had previously controlled. These men begin to manage those fine fields, land that was a part of their eldest brother's estate, but they deliberately destroy Kōḷattā's old palace home. These uncles reason that the demolition of that building will ensure that the young orphan will never be able to find and reclaim the rich agricultural lands that once belonged to his father when he grows to adulthood. They believed that the palace would be the sole identifying landmark. As the days roll past the young orphan Kuṅṅuṭaiyā find that he is being treated very badly by his clansmen. He suffers abuse and is repeatedly forced to run from place to place in search of both shelter and food. That mistreatment continues no matter where he goes, but the boy is a survivor. He summons his magical powers and his courage allows him a few successes here and there. Finally, far off on the horizon, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā spots a village with a temple that has a high and welcoming tower. He can see this beacon clearly outlined against the sky. Fresh hope rises in the orphan's heart.

Episode 4: A Love Match *(starts on page xx)*

After much wandering and repeated suffering, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is finally adopted by two prosperous, kind farmer-brothers who are strangers to him. He is now in the area called Vāḷavaṇḍi Nāḍu where the family's in-laws live, the Land of Abundance. The orphaned boy Kuṅṅuṭaiyā begins to work for the two farmers as their shepherd. The little hero is still too young to understand the importance of this: that a young girl he meets in this area could actually be an eligible marital partner. Then, as he grows into adolescence, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā gradually discovers that he is falling in love with the little sister of these two rich masters. She sits on a lovely swing in the family courtyard each afternoon and one of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's regular duties is to push that swing for her. He dreams of this lovely girl each day as he tends the animals and does other farm chores. But he believes that there is no way he could marry this young girl, now his sweetheart. She stands way too far above him, as she is the little sister of two wealthy men.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is an orphan now, living far from his Poṅṅivaḷa homeland. This is why he does not realize that he is actually working for two of his own "cross" cousins. In fact, these two men he views as his bosses are actually sons of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's own mother's brother. That makes their much younger sister an "urimāy pen" or extra-desirable marital partner when one takes local kinship norms into account. Furthermore, the lands of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, the area that once belonged to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's father, have long since been taken over by his lineal relatives, his "cousin-brothers," as English speakers in India define them. Those lands have been

badly mismanaged ever since. The goddess there, named Cellāttā, is suffering as a result. The lands of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu are like an extension of her own "body." Cellāttā wants the hero, the son of the man who once ruled there, to return. She remembers that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's father was kind to the land and also devoted to her.

So Cellāttā seeks out Vishnu, her divine brother, and complains. She asks if he can find Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, who must now be a grown man, and bring him back. Concerned to help the goddess, his sister, Vishnu searches everywhere and finally finds Kuṅṅuṭaiyā late one night. He is asleep near the cattle fold where the animals he tends are housed. When Vishnu approaches Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, he does so in disguise, as a religious mendicant. This makes Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, who is now barely awake, suspicious and fearful. But Vishnu has a plan. He tells Kuṅṅuṭaiyā that he actually has the right to marry his bosses' lovely young sister, the girl he is in love with. Vishnu tells Kuṅṅuṭaiyā about his parents, explaining that he is actually the son of the brother of his beloved's mother. This makes him an eligible, and in fact a very desirable, candidate to become her groom. Vishnu further explains to the young shepherd that his parents were prosperous farmers and that they once tilled a fine set of fields. But Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is afraid to ask his two bosses for their sister's hand. He lacks confidence and all of what Vishnu has told him sounds like a fairy tale. Worry and anxiety give him a terrible stomachache.

Episode 5: A Magical Marriage *(starts on page xx)*

The young shepherd Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, still doubtful, succumbs to Vishnu's urging, and agrees to stand up to his two bosses and ask for the hand of his beloved. But those two powerful overlords are not convinced and simply respond by having Kuṅṅuṭaiyā beaten for his insolence. Finally, however, Vishnu finds a way to intimidate the girl's two brothers by causing a fire that threatens to burn down their palace. He then arranges a magical marriage for Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and the lovely young girl, whose name is Tāmarai. Furthermore, Vishnu conducts the wedding himself, in a clandestine fashion, deep in the forest. But the girl's family remain upset and uncooperative. They send the couple insulting wedding gifts and banish them both from the area. They tell the newlyweds to never return to the bride's homeland. The newlyweds then leave the area on foot, seeking the boy's ancestral lands in Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. Finally, they see a temple in the distance, and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is able to identify it, remembering that this building was located on his father's lands and that the shrine honored the family's local goddess Cellāttā.

Episode 6: Roasted Seeds *(starts on page xx)*

The young, wedded couple, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai, find Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu after a long and tiring journey on foot. First off, they clean the temple belonging to the goddess Cellāttā and worship her with love. Then they proceed to reclaim one ancestral field from Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's greedy uncles, who are now clan rivals. These men quickly pose new problems. For example, they try to undercut the couple's

early efforts by secretly roasting the seeds needed to plant their first crop. But the couple perseveres. Next, Tāmarai refuses to do the work of placing each seed in the soil, fearful of bad luck. Her intuition tells her that the seeds the cousins gave her husband have been roasted. So, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā decides to sow the seeds himself. This breaks with a key convention, the belief that woman must do this work in order for the crop to germinate properly. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā does the work of seeding anyway, expressing faith that Lord Vishnu will step in to help out. And then this god does provide some supernatural aid. The rocky field the couple have worked so hard to plough now begins to spring into life, as if by magic.

Episode 7: A Thousand Beggars *(starts on page xx)*

The young couple have now just ploughed and planted one field. Next, they decide to build themselves a small thatched-roof home with help from distant relatives. Finishing their humble hut, the two move in and then watch with joy as their first maize plants grow tall. But the seed buds on those green stalks do not appear to contain any grain! The two are deeply worried. Pushing the inquiry further than her husband has, one day Tāmarai finds myriad jewels hidden inside these precious plants. The two are joyful and when they have completed the harvest, they find that their new wealth has filled many baskets. Tāmarai wants to share this unexpected windfall and decides to hand out large cups of jewels to a raft of beggars who magically appear on their doorstep. This is Vishnu's test to see if they are suitably grateful, charitable and deserving people. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is reluctant to support this giveaway of their new wealth and complains. But Tāmarai continues to donate their jewels to a long line of waiting mendicants. Seeing this, Vishnu is impressed, and he decides to magically refill the couple's baskets with even more wealth.

Episode 8: A Cruel Curse *(starts on page xxx)*

Using their new baskets full of jewels, the couple decide to rebuild Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's ancestral home, this time making it into a fine palace. Before starting this construction project, they perform a special milk-post ritual. Then, when the palace has been built, they invite the neighbouring Chola King to attend the celebration they have organized. The Chola, pleased at being included, honours Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai with a generous gesture. He now names them King and Queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. All is well for a brief moment, but then the new queen discovers that she too, is suffering from the curse of barrenness, a terrible fate that Shiva has laid on the heroes' family for a full three times seven generations. Tāmarai starts to worry about the family's future.

Episode 9: The Counter Curse *(starts on page xxx)*

The Queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu continues to be barren and is taunted by the family's clan rivals. Soon she decides to seek comfort by visiting her two wealthy brothers. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is opposed to that plan, remembering how badly

those two men treated him when he asked for the hand of their young sister long ago. He suspects that the ill will they felt then is still there. But Tāmarai decides to go and find her brothers' place anyway. It is her ancestral right to be allowed to return there for periodic visits. But when she arrives, accompanied by several servants and armfuls of presents, Tāmarai is cruelly rejected. Indeed, she is mercilessly beaten at the gates of her old home palace by one of its guards. Angered, Tāmarai lays a curse on her brothers' entire family. Even though they hide all of their children under a large basket, knowing that Tāmarai will be jealous to see this fertile, growing family, she manages to pursue retribution by magically freezing each child with a spell. As a result, all of her many nieces and nephews appear to suddenly die. Tāmarai's own body is bleeding. In this sorry state she goes to visit the temple of the family's local goddess Kāḷi, which is close by.

Episode 10: The Pillar of Destruction *(starts on page xxx)*

Tāmarai, badly beaten, visits the shrine dedicated to the goddess of her childhood. The temple priest there, sensing that there is a problem, goes to find his local masters, Tāmarai's land-rich brothers. He counsels these powerful landlords to seek their sister's forgiveness. The two brothers, now very worried about the loss of their many children, go to the Kāḷi temple where they find their sister. They then drop to their knees and beg her forgiveness. Tāmarai accepts their pleas and magically returns their many children to life. Having done that, however, she now takes two of the young girls, her own brothers' daughters, as her "rightful" daughters-in-law-to-be. Tāmarai then magically turns them both to stone, at a place very near the Kāḷi temple, where the goddess is supporting her claims. Those two young girls will wait there for many years, unharmed but with their lives "suspended." They will be brought back to life much later, after Tāmarai's own twin sons (not yet born) reach adolescence and are ready for marriage. Meanwhile, Tāmarai returns home. There she finds that her own husband is angry with her for having gone to her brothers' place against his stated wishes. Tāmarai leaves her own home in despair and soon climbs a high pillar she had ordered to be built nearby. She is thinking of suicide. But Lord Vishnu is watching closely, and he skillfully begs her to descend slowly from that perilous spot. He manages to persuade her to listen to his plan, promising that what he recommends will bring her children.

Episode 11: A Pilgrim's Journey *(starts on page xxx)*

Tāmarai descends her suicide tower and agrees to listen to Vishnu, who appears before her in the form of a beggar. This caring god first persuades Tāmarai's husband Kuṅṅuṭaiyā to join her. He then tells the King and Queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu that they must focus on helping others, rather than fixating on their own sorrows and problems. He counsels them to complete a long list of charitable deeds: building shelters for animals, constructing resting places for tired travelers, lighting a lamp on a tall pillar, and more. One special

commitment they must make is to celebrate a festival for the local goddess Cellāttā. Vishnu promises the couple that if they can first accomplish the many things on this “to do” list, children will be a part of their future. But soon, the local artisans, men who are still angry over their earlier loss of land and status during the time of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā’s father, Kōḷattā, now start to make life tough for this couple. A rebellious group of craftsmen develop a plot to kill both the King and the Queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, using the wheels of Cellāttā’s own temple cart as their weapon. A strong faith in the goddess, happily, allows for the couple’s miraculous rescue from danger. But then Lord Vishnu spells out one several more challenges. Finally, the couple leave their palace. As they set out they carry requests from many around them that they, too, be cared from barrenness as a result of the great pilgrimage they are about to undertake.

Episode 12: The Gates of Heaven *(starts on page xxx)*

The King and Queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu now begin their long walk towards the gates of heaven, hoping to at last bring an end to their childless condition. On the way, the two meet with many adventures. One important encounter happens early on. Just as they are leaving the palace, the King and Queen encounter a wild she-boar sleeping on their path. Tāmarai kicks her, demanding that she get out of the way. The sow is angered by this insolence and vows to pray to the goddess Kāḷi. She will ask Kāḷi to grant her a son who will make the couple’s own two sons suffer greatly. Various hardships follow and make the couple’s pilgrimage difficult. The queen must even carry her husband on her back at one point after he is weakened by a scorpion sting. Unfortunately, soon after this, King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā completely loses his strength to continue. So, Vishnu decides to mercifully halt his journey. This god then painlessly turns Tāmarai’s husband into a stone, which he places at the edge of the path the two have been traveling along. Vishnu further helps Tāmarai by committing to accompany her as she continues the journey alone. Soon Vishnu guides her through a long tunnel that resembles hell. There Tāmarai sees many other humans being tortured. She is scared but promises to look straight ahead and never gaze back at all this suffering. Finally the two arrive at the place of penance where Tāmarai will now climb a tall pillar and begin to pray. Vishnu then asks her to climb a very tall pillar of penance where Tāmarai to start praying and remain motionless for many years.

Episode 13: The Book of Fate *(starts on page xxx)*

Shiva tests Tāmarai’s determination many times as she sits on her pillar of penance. He sends his assistants to torture her seven successive times, effectively seeing to it that she undergoes seven symbolic “deaths.” One death (it would seem) is demanded by Shiva for each of those seven cows that died on her father-in-law’s spiked fence, years earlier. After she survives all of those deaths, Vishnu arrives to help Tāmarai one last time. He now reverses the direction of suffering and blasts her torturer, Shiva, using a flame of hot fire.

This burns Shiva, who is withdrawn and intent on his forest meditation. However, Vishnu’s “heat” succeeds in “melting” Shiva’s cold exterior, at least somewhat. As a result, that powerful ascetic god finally invites Tāmarai to enter his Himalayan council chambers. There, in front of many other gods—all colleagues—the great Lord places three fetuses, immaculately, in Tāmarai’s empty womb. He also gives her a small carrying pot filled with a magical liquid. The queen returns to Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu with this pot in hand, reawakening and rejoining her husband on the way. On arrival she shares one drop of Shiva’s precious liquid with every female human and animal in Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu wishing to become pregnant. The couple then returns home, cleans their long-abandoned palace and restores it to its former fine condition. Tāmarai shares the magical water will all who ask her for a few drops. The entire kingdom begins to flourish once more.

Episode 14: The Temple Secret *(starts on page xxx)*

Tāmarai is now pregnant. Most assume that the child will be male. The jealous male cousins are worried that there will now be a successor who will stand to inherit Poṅṅivaḷa fine lands. Meanwhile, the palace begins to make preparations for a birth. A midwife is hired, but she is first bribed by the clansmen, who secretly force her to consent to kill any male child immediately upon its birth. That scheming midwife tries her best, sharpening her knife as the moment of delivery nears. But the family goddess, Cellāttā, quietly rescues the new infants, which turn out to be twin sons. She does this invisibly, just moments after Vishnu delivers them via a secret Caesarian. Cellāttā then protects the twins by hiding them beneath her temple and feeding them tiger’s milk. Meanwhile Tāmarai, who is wearing a blindfold, is unaware of what has happened. Just minutes later, a third child is born by natural means in the palace birthing room. To everyone’s surprise this is a baby girl. Everyone except the midwife believes that this was the only child born to the queen. Despite Tāmarai’s and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā’s deep disappointment at this outcome, they accept their little baby girl cheerfully and raise her with love. Meanwhile the two boys are raised in secret by the goddess. They receive repeated martial arts lessons while under her care, which will last for six years.

Episode 15: The Truth Unveiled *(starts on page xxx)*

For a time, the leading couple of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu live in peace. A naming ceremony is performed for their only child, a young girl. Henceforth she will be addressed using the given name, Taṅkāḷ. But because the king and queen’s only child is female, their initial sense of peace does not last. The family clansmen soon attack the Poṅṅivaḷa palace, taking as their excuse their belief that the family has no male successor. They badly beat the queen and then send her and her husband into exile. The two flee to a nearby forest with their young daughter. Soon after entering that wilderness they locate the palace home of a powerful king of tribal hunters who are known as Veṭṭuvās. Their powerful leader offers the desolate and

hungry couple food, as any generous ruler should if refugees arrive on his doorstep. But Tāmarai and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā decline, refusing to admit that they have not eaten. The king knows this is a lie and is angered by this falsehood. He rightly senses that their rejection is a snub that expresses their true thoughts: that they believe that the Veṭṭuvās are an inferior community, both socially and ritually. In response, the hunter king has the two forcefully taken away. He orders them housed in a very humble hut. Having no money, the queen is now forced to pound rice for a local merchant. It is the only way she can find that will allow her to feed her suffering family. But a surprise is in store. Soon five years have passed. Those twin boys born to Tāmarai and instantly hidden by the goddess Cellāttā now begin to ask the goddess who their “real” mother is. This forces Cellāttā to decide that it is time to return the two boys to Tāmarai’s and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and so she sets out with the twins to find their parents’ forest hut.

Episode 16: The Homecoming *(starts on page xxx)*

Cellāttā sets out with the twins to try to find the forest hut where the two boys’ parents are now living. When the goddess arrives at the door of the little hut where the king and queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu reside, they welcome her, though they are startled by her visit. Soon the twin boys she brought with her are reunited with their “lost” parents. Vishnu then helps the couple conduct a magical test. It is used to prove to Tāmarai that she truly is these boys’ birth mother. The Poṅṅivaḷa family has now grown to five, including two male offspring. This means that they can begin their return journey home to the old family palace with a new confidence in their hearts. On the way, however, they stop briefly when they discover the forest den of a wild boar-sow. She is nursing a young, red-eyed piglet. This is the two boys’ introduction to the baby boar, Kompaṅ, son of the sow their mother once kicked. He has been born with a singular fate. Kompaṅ will confront them and endanger all of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu later in life. Following this encounter and its ominous meaning, the little family arrives home and re-establishes themselves in their long-neglected palace. There they clean and rebuild their empty and neglected family home. A naming ceremony is performed and the two become Poṅṅar and Caṅkar. The boys begin to ride the family’s fine horses and then to explore the lands around the family palace. Later still, when the two boys come of age, the bard shifts to using more affectionate, less formal terms of address: Poṅṅar is addressed by his “younger” twin brother as Periyaṅṅacāmi and Caṅkar is similarly addressed by his “elder” twin as Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi. The bard, however, still uses their original names in his songs. As they approach maturity, at the age of sixteen, the two boys start to play dice together. Tāmarai, meanwhile, starts to worry about getting her two sons married.

Episode 17: Chastity Forever *(starts on page xxx)*

The two sons of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu’s king and queen are engaged in playing dice when a maid tells them their mother is not feeling well. They go to speak with her and when they learn why she has not eaten due to worry about their

wedding arrangements, the two tell her that they do not want to wed, but eventually they bend to their mother’s pleading and agree to take wives. However, the two brothers first insist on one very harsh condition: they will never touch these women. Tāmarai had long ago turned two of her brother’s daughters to stone to await their maturity. She ignores her son’s joint vow, proceeds to revivify them, and a double wedding takes place. But something strange happens in preparation for this event. The two grooms demand that silver finger extensions be made so that, even for the one wedding ritual where the bride and groom are supposed to link little fingers, no direct touch will occur. Implicitly it is clear that these two brothers want to focus on the defending their family’s honour rather than submitting to parenthood and raising a new generation of family members. So right after the double wedding with the two brides, who of course are sisters, these poor women are locked away and told to spin thread for the remainder of their lives. Meanwhile, the two grooms’ unmarried sister Taṅkāḷ continues to share the family palace with her brothers and her parents. But it is not long before their aging parents leave their sons parting instructions about how to rule the kingdom, and then die a natural death. Taṅkāḷ is left to pass the time on her courtyard swing, while her twin brothers become Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu’s new rulers. They also begin to quarrel with one another.

Episode 18: An Overlord Angered *(starts on page xxx)*

The two brothers, accompanied by their now faithful assistant, a local man of low caste named Cāmpukā, now decide to raid their cousins’ schoolhouse. This is the beginning of a campaign the brothers launch with the intent of shaming their clansmen. This happens as soon as the parents of these twin brother-heroes pass away. Now the twins quickly veer away from the course their parents had set out for them with their parting words of advice. Instead of being tolerant and forgiving, as Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai had asked, these two adventurers now embark on a series of raids designed to make their cousin brothers pay for all the wrongs their family members ever committed against their deceased parents. They savagely beat the young students who are seated on the floor of that little one-room schoolhouse. The two brothers also demand that these young and helpless boys act out a variety of demeaning behaviours. When their fathers arrive, there is a fight between cousins that the two heroes win. Soon, the families of those tortured little children are all forced into exile. But those now-homeless families are clever and they complain about their fate to the neighbouring Chola King. The fathers inform that ruler that ever since Tāmarai and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā’s deaths, the twin kings of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu have not paid the Chola King the tribute he expects to receive. So, the Chola King now sends emissaries to demand the symbolic payment due to him by custom. Caṅkar, the more rebellious brother, refuses to make such a payment, but his elder twin, Poṅṅar, states that he will do this in order to keep the peace with that Chola overlord.

Episode 19: Independence Won *(starts on page xxx)*

Poṅṅar arrives alone at the gate of the king's palace with the required gifts, but the king throws him in jail, reasoning that this will force his younger brother to appear in an attempt to rescue him. He wants to receive a gesture of submission from both brothers. However, when Caṅkar, does arrive, the cunning king tries to kill both men. To accomplish this, that overlord resorts to a number of tricks, including trying to poison the two brothers, causing them to fall "accidentally" into a deep pit, and finally stranding them on top of a high cliff with the pretense that they are making a visit to a family shrine located there. But after this final deception is accomplished, the king pulls the needed ladder away and departs in haste on his elephant. As a result, the two heroes find themselves stranded. Unexpectedly, Viṣṇu now arrives to offer help. To accomplish this, the great god has again taken the form of a mendicant. The twins hear his voice, singing praises to the gods, and they call out to him. The mendicant, who has magically long hair, quickly makes two long braids and throws the ends up to the heroes who are stranded on top of that cliff. Poṅṅar and Caṅkar use these ropes as guy-wires and cleverly slide down. Viṣṇu gives them his blessing when they safely reach the ground. The twins then depart for the Chola King's palace together, at a run. There they find their loyal assistant Cāmpukā faithfully waiting for them, tightly holding their horses' reins. Together the three men attack the Chola's palace and kill that mean monarch in revenge. The battle for Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu's independence has now been won.

Episode 20: Two Swords Blessed *(starts on page xxx)*

Poṅṅar and Caṅkar's rule the lands of Poṅṅivaḷa while their isolated sister, Taṅkāḷ, lives in the family palace with them. She constantly sits there on her swing, dreaming, while being largely ignored by her brothers. Meanwhile they have been out conducting exciting adventures that they barely bother to tell her about. Lonely, Taṅkāḷ has a dream about some parrots that descended from the heavens and were living in a tree in the forest that the local Veṭṭuvā hunters controlled. She requests that her brothers bring her one of these parrots to keep her company. Although the twin brothers have not entered that forest before, now that the Chola King is dead, they sense a new opportunity. So, the two agree to their sister's challenge, and are now unwilling to change course. First, their key assistant Cāmpukā helps get the raw material needed by stealing a huge cartload of iron from the Veṭṭuvās. Then they commission some local artisans to make a specialized bird-trapping net out of that raw material. Finally, the preparations are complete. Before they leave for the hunt they ask their sister to bless their swords. But then Taṅkāḷ changes her mind, sensing that she is sending her brothers into danger, and starts to cry.

Episode 21: A Kidnapping Spree *(starts on page xxx)*

Taṅkāḷ's twin brothers are ready to hunt for a parrot, despite the fact that their prescient sister senses danger. But after Poṅṅar begs her to bless their swords,

she finally does so, suppressing her fear that something will go wrong. Then the two men set out, with their talented First Minister and several village laborers coming along beside them. Entering the neighbouring forest, the members of this expedition are met with an onslaught of tigers. Soon after, they are also met by one hundred vicious cobras. Conquering all of these, the men then throw their huge iron net over a large banyan tree and succeed in capturing a female parrot living there. They place this bird in a cage and leave for home. But that bird's male partner escapes capture and quickly flies to the palace of the Veṭṭuvā princess, Vīrataṅkāḷ. That male bird complains bitterly to her about his loss, and this fierce sister responds by calling all of her one hundred brothers together in front of their forest goddess Karukāḷiyammaṅ. Meanwhile the twin brothers return safely to their Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu palace with their prize, a frightened and sad female parrot. They present the captive bird to their sister, who receives it happily. But the forest hunters and their sister Vīrataṅkāḷ (Taṅkāḷ's twin double) are distressed. This is the second time they have been deceived by those lying farmer-brothers! They then plot the capture of Taṅkāḷ, the Poṅṅivaḷa palace princess herself, as their act of revenge. But on the way, these hunters mistake a palace maid who is fetching water from the Poṅṅi river for the true Princess of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. They carry her back to the forest instead and tie her to a tree while they have a picnic snack nearby. But soon the twin heroes' loyal assistant, Cāmpukā, takes up the chase. He runs into the forest and frees his masters' captured maid using his own clever tricks. Cāmpukā then returns to the palace with this woman and is copiously rewarded with alcohol by the twin heroes for his bravery and his cleverness.

Episode 22: A New Challenger *(starts on page xxx)*

An artisan in the area holds an old a grudge against the Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu family and so plots to trick the twin brothers. He cuts down a much-venerated family tree and makes a measuring vessel from its wood. He then coats it with a very light layer of tissue-thin gold. Claiming to be taking this fine gold measure to a distant ruler, the artisan pauses to spend the night in the Poṅṅivaḷa palace for safety's sake. Indeed, Poṅṅar invites him to rest there. But it is a trick. The artisan sneaks into the palace storeroom late that night, plotting to steal the two brothers' finest fighting sword. But the artisan bungles this plan and cuts himself as he drops a sword that turns out to be very heavy. He then accuses Poṅṅar of having stolen his special "gold vessel" when in fact its very thin outer layer of metal has simply melted off because it was (deliberately) placed too close to a hot oil lamp that night. Pretending to be shocked when the gold vessel seems missing, the artisan then challenges Poṅṅar to prove his honesty. He now asks him to swim through a dangerous irrigation sluice. But Lord Viṣṇu arrives and helps the honest hero succeed. Meanwhile the younger twin, Caṅkar quickly appears on horseback and kills the dishonest artisan with the very same sword that very villain had earlier tried to steal. But then a gang of Veṭṭuvā allies suddenly burst out from the neighboring forest and attack the

twin brothers, because they had earlier agreed to support the artisan against these ruler-farmers. The Poṅṅivaḷa brothers win this short contest, but this brief if fierce skirmish, in which several Veṭṭuvās die, serves to signal that there is serious enmity between the farmers and their hunter rivals. Another and more serious battle against the forest dwelling hunters now lies on the horizon.

Episode 23: The Enemy Confronted *(starts on page xxx)*

A huge wild boar, son of that sleeping sow the heroes' mother had kicked long ago, now realizes that the time has come to pursue his singular mission in life. His aim is to destroy the two farmers whose family has ruined "his" beloved forest, the Veṭṭuvā's home. He considers himself their loyal servant and of course he sides with these hunters as the conflict escalates. Kompaṅ's signature trait is a huge pair of crescent tusks. He now sets out on a rampage, uses those tusks to tear up the beautiful rice fields of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. He also rips apart the dam where their irrigation water is stored. And he insults the family gardener by making him roll in the mud and send him with a message to the heroes' palace. That huge wild boar's message is a challenge. Essentially he says, "I dare you to come and hunt me down." The heroic twins accept. They "take the bait" and prepare for a great boar chase. A large war drum is readied, and fine offerings are laid out with the intention of keeping all possible demons at bay. Taṅkāḷ expresses doubt about the outcome, but the two men are determined to proceed with their wild boar hunt. But her anxiety is not quelled. She serves them what she thinks may be their final meal and asks them to make a formal pass through their local village in their palanquin, a kind of "final viewing" ritual.

Episode 24: A Curse Revealed *(starts on page xxx)*

Before the two brothers depart on their hunt for the wild boar Kompaṅ, their sister asks that they leave her with a tray of predictive signs designed to indicate whether the two remain alive, safe and well. She also proposes a magical divination ceremony intended to predict the final outcome of this expedition. That ritual produces mixed results, but she hides that unpleasant truth from her two siblings. Then, as her two brothers leave the palace, they make several mistakes. They put their swords in their scabbards without getting their sister to place her blessing on them. Then they overlook their sister's tiny female dog Poṅṅācci (a piece of gold), and do not invite her to join in the expedition while all the bigger male hunting dogs in the area are asked to join in. This angers the tiny little bitch, who is also rather odd and ugly as she has no visible ears. She feels slighted and in revenge she decides to send a curse that incapacitates the heroes as they lie in their forest tent just before the big expedition is about to begin. Distressed, and not understanding the reason for their sudden illness, Taṅkāḷ's brothers now ask their First Minister to lead the hunt in their stead. But Cāmpukā bungles that mission and the attack on Kompaṅ is a monumental failure. Instead of killing the great boar, that beast

succeeds in trampling and killing the heroes' entire support team, men they depend on as local farm labourers. Lord Vishnu then arrives at their forest tent, this time in the disguise of a fortune-teller. Asked to read from his almanac, Vishnu reveals the true reason for the heroes' illness. This soothsayer recommends apologizing to the little female dog and then tells them they must ask her to join their hunting effort. Cāmpukā is ordered to go and fetch her and bring Poṅṅācci to their tent.

Episode 25: The Great Sacrifice *(starts on page xxx)*

The two warrior-brothers' assistant Cāmpukā finds their sister's pet dog Poṅṅācci, and brings her to them. Appeased, this little bitch now arranges to lift their illness which was caused by her curse. In gratitude, the Poṅṅivaḷa kings decide to show her respect and ask that she help them find the great boar. Poṅṅācci, now a loyal participant in the hunt, easily finds Kompaṅ's forest cave. Then, when he teases her, she jumps on him and chews off both his ears, making him earless, just like she is. Suddenly scared, the boar starts to run. But Poṅṅācci chases him and sinks her poison-bearing teeth into his testicles. This greatly weakens Kompaṅ and he starts to stumble. Then Poṅṅācci steps aside and allows the twin brothers, who are standing on a cliff waiting for the boar to pass by underneath, the honour of throwing the great hunting spear. The two Poṅṅivaḷa kings claim victory while Kompaṅ cries out as he dies.

The forest hunters have acute hearing, and they easily hear Kompaṅ's cries of agony. Alerted, they quickly decide to seek revenge for the death of their beloved boar. But meanwhile, the heroes have quickly cut up Kompaṅ's carcass and laid out his flesh on a rock in the forest as a set of offerings. Then, once more, Lord Vishnu intervenes, tricking the heroes into giving up Kompaṅ's head. Vishnu drags it off and (implicitly) gifts this trophy to his pregnant second wife, the goddess Būdevi.¹ A huge fight between the Veṭṭuvās and the Poṅṅivaḷa farmers ensues. But its outcome is manipulated by the great Vishnu, who creates a "vision" of a thousand attacking Veṭṭuvās. The two heroes only see this smokescreen, while the true forest hunters retreat. Poṅṅar and Caṅkar believe they have "won," but once again Vishnu enters the scene. This time he shoots a flowered arrow at Caṅkar, telling him, via a symbolic piercing, that his allocated time on earth is now finished. As a result, the twin kings quickly determine that it is time to give up their own lives. After bathing and washing their weapons in a nearby stream named after the goddess Saraswati, they fall upon their swords and die. Their sister learns that her brothers have encountered some kind of misfortune through her tray of "signs," which now wilt and dry up. She starts having bad dreams.

¹ She is possibly a double for the ancient Tamil goddess Korṅṅavai.

Episode 26: An Epoch Ends *(starts on page xxx)*

The two fine heroes, the rulers of Poṅṅivaḷa, lie dead, having first demonstrated their amazing courage in a great battle. Their sister realizes that both of her beloved brothers have given up their lives, by noticing what has happened to the tray of signs they left her. In sadness, anger and confusion Taṅkāḷ decides to burn down the home of her two sisters-in-law and also her own palace. But first she gives away all of the valued contents to her loyal servants. Taṅkāḷ also collects the bones of her two sisters-in-law and places them in the nearby Poṅṅi river. Lastly she then conducts a small funeral rite in their memory. After all this is done, Taṅkāḷ sets off to find her brothers' dead bodies.

On the way she meets a potter. Using her magic, she forcefully obtains a pristine set of seven ritual containers made of earth. A woman who worships the sun, who Taṅkāḷ finds sitting on a high pillar in the forest, then gifts Taṅkāḷ seven magical substances that serve to fill those new containers. That same sun maiden also lends Taṅkāḷ a goose. With the help of this goose, she flies across the mountains and quickly locates the place where her brothers lie dead. Using the special substances from the sun maiden, Taṅkāḷ briefly brings her two brothers back to life so that she can have a last conversation with them. Then their spirits slip away, and Viṣṇu carries them back to the gods' council chamber in Kailasa. Meanwhile, Shiva provides Taṅkāḷ with a special double bier on which her brothers' bodies are carried down from the mountains to the small town of Vīrappūr. Once there, Taṅkāḷ commissions a humble folk temple to be built in her brothers' honour. She then, by herself, performs the first ritual worship at that shrine. The heroes' assistant Cāmpukā is also memorialized there, along with the twins' two fine horses and the little earless dog Poṅṅācci. Next Lord Shiva sends down a special chariot that raises Taṅkāḷ up into sky above. The spirits of her two dead brothers join her next to Lord Shiva himself. All three heroic siblings win a final resting place beside this great god, high atop the clouds. The epic ends with a lovely benediction that describes the regrowth of a green and lush landscape on the banks of the golden river Poṅṅi. This signals a new beginning for Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, the land where this heroic ancient family had once prospered.

LAND OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

The Medieval Tamil Folk Epic of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu

Opening Songs Addressed to the Gods

INVOCATION TO VINĀYAKAR:

*The great ascetic who had immortal power,¹ derived from penance
Recited the Mahābhārata,² in order to re-establish the Vedas³
That were crumbling in a world surrounded by the deep sea.
The white-footed Lord Vināyakar used his tusk
To write the Mahābhārata on palm leaves,
Let us not forget to worship (him) with love.*

INVOCATION TO SARASWATI:

*You, dressed in a white cloth, decorated with white jewels;
You, seated on a white lotus;
You have placed me on a par
With a king seated on a fine throne.⁴
Oh, Vāṅiyammā,⁵ oh, Vāṅiyammā! Bless me with your right hand!
I am searching, searching for your blessings.
Your sweet-versed lady, my teacher who taught me the Mahābhārata,
I will never forget her, never even for a day
The lady who taught me,
I will never forget her even for a day.
I am searching, searching for the gods' council chamber.
And for the sweet words contained in the Mahābhārata.⁶*

- 1 Vyasa [Vyāsa], the saint-ascetic who is said to have first recited the Mahābhārata, using the god Vinayakar [Vināyakar] as his scribe.
- 2 The Mahābhārata is India's greatest classical epic. Vināyakar is a god who presides over the auspicious beginnings of all new ventures.
- 3 The Vedas are here referred to in the very general sense of "India's ancient classical wisdom." The idea here is that the moral order was in decline and man's knowledge of truth was being lost. Vyasa's recitation of the Mahābhārata and Vināyakar's transcription of the story, which made it available to the world, is thought to have helped reinstate virtue and inspire mankind to righteous action.
- 4 This invocation is sung by the bard who will recite the epic. He is suggesting that, for performing this task, he will enjoy respect equivalent to that accorded a king on a throne.
- 5 Vāṅiyammā is a name of Saraswati, goddess of learning and of the arts.
- 6 From this line, as well as from those that have gone before, it is clear that the bard wishes to link his telling of the epic story to the great story of the Mahābhārata.

Episode 1 ✪

This is the story of the family of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, a farmer who lived in the land of

brave men, a land ruled by a king, a land known as Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu: The Land Graced by the Golden Waters of the Kāveri River.

This is the story of how the farming community of the Land of Abundance¹ came into existence.

There was once a time when no decisive-minded agricultural community existed. But the goddess Pārvati thought, “This land (of Silver) must prosper, and so she created nine brothers from a plough². The Maniyar clan of Kavunṭars of the land called Vāḷavaṅḍi was to be related first as father-in-law and then as brothers-in-law to these nine farmer men³. Then a famine broke out in the Land of Abundance and the eldest of the nine sons, Kōḷattā

1 This is the translation used in the earlier 1992 version of this text for the Tamil term Veḷḷivaḷa Nāḍu, which literally means “the Land of Silver.” This term contrasts nicely with the name of the area these men later migrate to, Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, which literally translates as “the Land of Gold.” This latter term is so poetic and evocative that we have chosen to use it for the title of this work. The poets who sing the story also use the term Poṅṅi to refer to the Kāveri river, a much-treasured waterway figuratively known as “the River of Gold.

2 Alternatively, one could say that the goddess gave these nine brothers a plough. The core idea is that they are her original nine “northern farmer brothers” and that their hard work can make the land prosper and bring forth much wealth. The locale where she places them is very nice (like silver). The implied “Southern farmers” (not mentioned) would be the equivalent community living in the moister, flatter delta areas of Tamil Nadu lying East and South of the Koṅku (Kongu) area where this story takes place. Other versions suggest that Veḷḷivaḷa was a forested area, though that detail is not mentioned in this version. Presumably these nine men, following the goddess’ instructions, start cutting down the trees of this forest and begin to plough its land. This may be why these same men soon find that the area dries up due to a serious drought (implicitly due to too much tree cutting?). But where they later migrate to, the land of Poṅṅivaḷa, is a place of true abundance, as if gold itself springs from the earth throughout that land.

3 This is the area the heroes’ brides are from, in all three generations of the story. The word Vāḷavaṅḍi does not have a clear meaning, though it could reference general prosperity. Instead, it simply refers to where they (the in-law’s ancestors) lived or first settled. This is an actual name for a place in the northern Koṅku area that still exists today and could have some historical validity, as it is possible that the heroes’ own ancestors came from the southeast (and were immigrants to the area sponsored by a Chola king) and that they then began to exchange women with another group of farmers who had found a place to settle somewhat further north. The dictated text of the story cited here, furthermore, does not mention that the initial nine brothers married their wives by simply placing a flower garland around the neck of the particular female selected. However, the graphic novel and animation artist Ravichandran Arumugam added this and many other details pertaining to the forest environment where these nine first appeared. He did this by referencing his own memory of how his grandfather (also a bard) used to sing as Ravichandran sat on this singer’s knee as a child. Unfortunately, the text dictated by the bard cited by this book is extremely thin at this point. See Beck 2013 (for the animation and graphic novel versions) that include more information on the original environment the story heroes first lived in.

Kavunṭar¹, set out for the Chola Country. Arriving there, he learned that there was ripe paddy² and prosperity in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows³.

The three lines of kings, Chera, Chola and Pandiya, were ruling in the Chola Country and in neighbouring smaller areas. At the time of Kōḷattā Kavunṭar’s arrival, the three kings were holding a public assembly. Kōḷattā Kavunṭar went there, and, on seeing the kings, he greeted them respectfully.

KING: Blessings to you! Who are you? Who are you? Where are you from? What is your name?

KōḷATTĀ: I am from the Land of Abundance. My name is Kōḷattā Kavunṭar. In my country, there has been no rain for ten years. It is unbearable. So, I have come to you with my wife thinking I might take refuge in your country for a while.

KING: So be it! All right, good Kōḷattā Kavunṭar! I will give you sixteen vaḷḷam of grain a month.⁴ Will you accept work from me?

KōḷATTĀ: Good King! But my wife is with me, so give me twenty measures a month if you can.

KING: Okay, I will give you the latter.

One day when Kōḷattā Kavunṭar was working in the king’s palace:

SONG:

*See the monarch rule thus:
Day after day, time followed time
See the good age in progress
It was said to be good, there,
See how it was done with love
The king’s reign was just,
His commands were authoritative,
The one who has a signet ring on his finger is ruling
The king rules authoritatively
It rained at the proper times,*

1 The name Kōḷattā might be linked to the word kōl, meaning strength or power, but this is not certain. Kavunṭar is the name or title of the main agricultural caste of the Coimbatore District. It is a prestigious term even today. Originally, it seems to have been a term used for addressing or describing kings.

2 Paddy can mean unhusked harvested rice for seed or food or the fields where rice is grown.

3 This is not the land the Chola king rules, but rather the place where the king will send these nine farmers to. Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu is the Land of the Golden River, also called the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. All three terms are synonymous.

4 One vaḷḷam equals about ten cups. There are 128 cups in the English bushel, so this offer is slightly more than a bushel of grain per month. One hard-working man is said to eat about eight measures of grain in a month (the other six vaḷḷam could be exchanged for vegetables, cloth, etc.).

*The Kaṭuku sampa paddy prospered,
It rained abundantly in that country
The miḷaku sampa paddy prospered,
There was so much paddy that the excess
Was sprouting on the threshing floor.*

At that time the younger brothers of Kōḷattā Kavunṭar who were still in the Land of Abundance began to think: "Our elder brother went to Chola Country, but we have no word of him." So, the eight of them set off to find him. When they saw the king, they greeted him respectfully.

KING: Blessings to you! Who are you? Where are you from? Why have you come?

EIGHT MEN: King, we are agriculturalists from the Land of Abundance. A year ago, our eldest brother, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar, left to see you. Since then, we have had no news of him. So, we have come looking for him.

KING: So Kōḷattā Kavunṭar is your elder brother?

EIGHT MEN: Yes, he is our elder brother.

KING: Oh, he is your elder brother. Oh, servant! Kōḷattā Kavunṭar is over there. Bring him here!

SERVANT: Good, oh, King!

So, the servant went and brought Kōḷattā Kavunṭar. When Kōḷattā saw the king, he greeted him respectfully.

KING: Oh, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar! Are these eight men your younger brothers?

KŌḶATTĀ: These are my brothers. It seems that they have come looking for me.

KING: So be it.

Then he looked at the eight men and said, "Will you eight accept work from me? I will pay you the same as your elder brother: twenty measures of grain a month."

EIGHT MEN: Good, oh, King! We agree.

So, the eight younger brothers of Kōḷattā Kavunṭar took up work with the king and time began to pass. While the nine agriculturalists were in the Chola Country, it rained three times a month, and once a year hailstones fell. This happened both in the Chola Country itself and in the affiliated Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Both lands flourished.

SONG:

*The Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The famous large country,
The country with brave males,
The country with a king
The beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The country that contains the town of Cilukkāmpuliyūr
In its lesser division,
The country where gold springs from the earth,
The famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The country where the threshing is done with elephants.*

At this time, when its name was growing, the king called an assembly of the fifty-six local rulers and said: "Our country was without a farming community for so long. Now that the agriculturalists have come our country has begun to prosper. Therefore, the land that the artisans have been ploughing must be returned to these Kavunṭars." This was the agreement the rulers made. So, they called the artisans, and said: "Oh, artisans. The agriculturalists were the first to plough the land. Therefore, you must give the land back to them!"

ARTISANS: We have ploughed the land for so long. We cannot return it to the agriculturalists now.

Saying this, they began to argue. "It seems that the artisans will not listen to what we say," thought the kings. So, they called Vishnu,¹ who set out for the palace and appeared there seated on a snakelike throne. All the assembled rulers greeted him.

VISHNU: Oh, kings, why have you called me?

KINGS: Lord! For many years the artisans have ploughed the land. Now agriculturalists have come here from the Land of Prosperity.² We have told the artisans to give the land to them. But the artisans are refusing to give it up. You must find a settlement for this dispute.

VISHNU: Oh, artisans. You are to give the land to the agriculturalists today. But you refuse.

ARTISANS: Lord. Excuse us! We won't give up the land.

VISHNU: Oh, artisans. If that is so, then I will ask for a covenant. Will you abide by it?

ARTISANS: Lord. That is a good idea!

¹ The bard uses *Mayavar* as his preferred term of address for Vishnu here, as in most other places in the original transcript.

² Taṅkāvala Nāḍu.

VISHNU: Okay. I will take the agriculturalists below the earth. After eighteen ritual offerings have been completed, I will let one of them rise up. If you can cut off his head with one blow, then the land will be yours to plough forever. If you fail, then the land will go to the agriculturalists. Having given it to them, you will have to purchase food to eat. This is my covenant.

Having made this covenant, the land came under the trust of the agriculturalists, after the artisans failed to cut off the head that rose from the earth in front of them. The land went to the nine agriculturalists: Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu to the eldest, Kōḷattā Kavunṅar, and the Land of Prosperity to the other eight. A stone marker was set up on the boundary between these two countries by the kings.

The goddess Cellāttā of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows had been without any pūjās for three generations.

The land that was donated to the lady contained enormous paddy fields. The seventy-nine countries were so big that, even if all the water from Matura Vaṅṅūrāṅ tank and the river Kāveri flowed in through the Viraṅamataku sluice gate to the Veḷḷāṅ tank, it would not be sufficient even to soak the paddy seeds. Producing prosperity, seven or eight thousand calakai¹ of paddy were growing.

Kōḷattā Kavunṅar was told by the Chola kings to perform pūjā three times a day to Cellāttā of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

REFRAIN:

*See the monarch rule thus:
Day after day, time after time
See the good age in progress
It was said to be good, there,
See how it was done with love*

It rained three times a month and once a year hailstones fell.

There was so much paddy that the excess

Was sprouting on the threshing floor

The beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows

And threshing is done with elephants

Gold multiplies in that country heaped like sampā paddy

The grain grows heaped like the forthcoming sampā paddy crop.

Forty-five years after coming to Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, Kōḷattā Kavunṅar and his wife sat down one day in the courtyard where the public assembles and began to talk.

Kōḷattā Kavunṅar's wife's name was Ariyanācci. She now addressed her husband.

¹ One calakai= 64 measures (pakka = marakkals = 32 vaḷḷam). One vaḷḷam = two measures. It has been the practice of this area (before the survey and settlement was introduced) to estimate the area of a portion of land by the quantity of seed required to sow it. This quantity varies with the quality of the land and the variations of the local seed measure, so that great diversity exists. According to this, the measure of land is referred in terms of grain measures like calakai, vaḷḷam etc. One marakkal of land is equal to about 5 cents, 800 calakai of land is equivalent to about 381 acres. But the bard intended more than this measure.

ARIYA: Husband. It has been forty-five years since we married. Why do we not have even one child? Our house looks as new as when it was built.¹

SONG:

The chaste woman is crying, she is hot with

Indignation, she is wilting.²

The good woman, the woman is crying

The flower parrot is pining,

The good woman is crying.

The rare parrot is wilting, she is wilting there.

ARIYA'S SONG:

I am known all over the world as, all over the country as

A barren woman, a barren woman, my Lord

In the fertile country, in the fertile country,

I am known as

A fruitless, barren woman, as a fruitless woman.

Of all those who have teeth, half of them gossip about me

Of all those with tongues, many people gossip about me

All the people, and the people related to me, gossip about me.

Who have I wronged, oh, husband?

Did I ever send away people who came for food telling them to come later?

Have I ever sent people away, people who have come for alms,

Telling them to come later, my husband?

KōḷATTĀ: Oh, lady, we can wipe away black soot, we can swim the Kāveri River. But even Brahma cannot rewrite fate.

While Kōḷattā Kavunṅar lived in his mansion, a famine broke out in the Chola Country. The king had no food for his twelve black cows,³ so he tied a message to their horns and set them loose. The Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings intended this as a sign that the cows should pasture in whichever country was

¹ Since there has been no child to mess up the house.

² This is the first of thirty-seven places in this story where the Tamil verb *vāṭṭu* (in its various forms) has been translated using the English verb "to wilt." It is important to note this word's broad significance in the story. In Tamil, this verb root contains undertones that reference injury due to heat, dryness, scorching and also all the visible impacts on a human body that can follow deep disappointment or result from being the target of someone else's anger. *Vāṭṭu* or *vāṭal* also contain the idea of human pining, weakness, sadness, feeling diminished, losing weight, or changing color by growing pale. There is further vegetal metaphor in use here, as well: a tender plant may transform, shrivel or become dry and cracked when subject to a hot wind. Foods, likewise, can grow stale and lose taste. These themes intentionally contrast a person's sorry state of illness and approaching death with its opposite, good health and wellness. The latter is a joyful condition characterized by moisture, plumpness, good posture and good color. Consult chapter ten of Beck 2021b for an extended discussion of this duality. It points to a key hidden theme found buried in the words, and especially in the songs, of this story at large.

³ Kārām pacu, another term for the mythologically famous cows belonging to Indra, King of the Gods. His cows are said to have black ears and black teats.

fertile, and after the famine was over, they could go and collect them. The twelve cows set out searching for a country where there was prosperity. On the way, seven cows began to head for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The other cows made their way in other directions.

SONG:

*See the cows coming to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
That land where gold springs from the earth
See the cows searching, coming there.*

The seven cows arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. They arrived at the Veṅkala sluice gate near Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. There they stood and looked around. It was evening, the paddy and sugarcane were very green on Kōḷattā Kavunṭar's land. "If we eat our fill now, the owner will beat us and drive us out," the cows thought. So, they waited. As soon as the sun set, the cows entered, the sugarcane filled their stomachs and they ate their fill. Then they returned to the Matukkarai forest. In the morning, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar came to his sugarcane field and saw the damage. He thought some animals from the hills had raided his fields. He went home very angry.

KŌḶATTĀ: Oh, watchman! Go to the Land of Prosperity, quickly! Get men from the seven houses of artisans and bring them here fast!

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
Looking for the Land of Prosperity,
The watchman is coming fast like a bee, my Lord
He walks slowly, like a swan, when he sees someone
When he does not, he travels with the speed of a horse.*

The watchman arrived in the Land of Prosperity. He went and stood at the temple of the elephant-faced Pilliar.¹ "Come here, oh, artisans!" he called. The seven artisans came and asked, "What have you called us for?"

WATCHMAN: The ruler of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has ordered that you pick up your tools and come immediately.

The artisans of the seven families set out.

SONG:
*Leaving the Land of Prosperity
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
The watchman walked in front, my Lord,
The artisans followed behind
The land where gold springs from the earth
They are coming, searching for the famous Land
Where the Kāveri Flows.*

Arriving in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the artisans went to the palace and saw the ruler.

SONG:

*They paid obeisance at his feet,
They offered their services,
They fell at his feet,
They offered their services.*

KŌḶATTĀ: There is no death for those who take refuge in me! So, artisans! You have come!

ARTISANS: Yes, Lord. We have come.

KŌḶATTĀ: I have planted a huge field of sugarcane. Yesterday some forest animals came and ravaged it. Therefore, it will be necessary to build an iron fence around the field with spear points on it. Prepare a workshop in the courtyard where the public assembles and start immediately.

The artisans went to the courtyard where the public assembled and set up their workshop right away.

SONG:

*The bodies are sweating in the artisans' factory
The fold is melting in the artisans' factory,
The seven artisans prepared the required items
They finished the circular iron fence, putting spear points on it
Then they returned.*

KŌḶATTĀ: So, artisans. Have you finished the work?

ARTISANS: My Lord, we have finished.

¹ An important god, son of Shiva, who is worshipped everywhere in India, especially before one starts something new. Often called Ganesh or Ganapati.

KŌḶATTĀ'S SONG:

*Oh, who goes there? Oh, maids, oh, maids,
Oh, Alamēlu, oh Ceṅkamalam,
Oh, Mūppi and Karuppi, there
Chief maid, Ceṅkamalam, come here.*¹

KŌḶATTĀ: Oh, Kuppi! Get a measure of pearls from the treasury and give it to the artisans with betel and areca nut.

The artisans accepted the pearls, took leave of the Kavunṭar, and left.

SONG:

*The monarch ruled thus:
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress.*

It was night. The seven black cows crossed the Matukkarai forest and, arriving at the sugarcane field they saw the fence that surrounded it with sharp points. They thought they could jump the fence. But they could not. Instead they landed on the iron points and died. The life of all seven left to join Īswara (Lord Shiva).

ĪSWARA: Oh, life of cows! Why do you come to me?

COWS: Oh, Lord! There was no rain in our country and we went to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows to find food. There was prosperity there. There was a quarter of a vaḷlam² of sugarcane in Kōḷattā Kavunṭar's field. Because of hunger we went and ate. The next day we went again, at night. Oh, treachery! Pointed stakes were stuck into us and we died, oh, God!

ĪSWARA: Oh, Cittirapputtirā!³ Get the book leaves for earth, and come. They speak of Kōḷattā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Who is he?

CITTIRA: Oh, God! In the Land Where the Kāveri Flows there are: 1) Kōḷattā Kavunṭar, 2) Paccittā Kavunṭar, 3) Pavaḷattā Kavunṭar, 4) Appayyā Kavunṭar, 5) Toppayyā Kavunṭar, 6) Civamaṇi Kavunṭar, 7) Muttucāmi Kavunṭar, 8) Paḷanicāmi Kavunṭar, and 9) Ciṅṅacāmi Kavunṭar.

These are the nine. The eldest is Kōḷattā Kavunṭar. He lives in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He is the one who has caused the cows to die of being speared, oh, God!

1 Alamēlu, Ceṅkamalam, Mūppi and Karuppi are common female names. Kuppi is a general reference to a maid, a girl who can help.

2 Vaḷlam is a land measure equal to about four acres.

3 God who keeps account book of human lives. The name is spelled "Citragupta" in Sanskrit.

ĪSWARA: So! This is how the seven cows lost their lives. While going to eat, the villain speared and killed them. For that villain, for three times seven years let him be without a child!

This was the curse he gave him. While this was happening in Kailāsa,² on earth Ariyanācci Kavunṭar was thinking of her childless condition and crying.

Episode 2 ✪

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Oh, God, oh, Parantāmā!³
The one who reclines on the banyan leaf,
The one who reclines there
Oh, my Harirāmā,⁴ protect me, protect me here
The rare parrot cried there, she cried
Krishna,⁵ the source, that Nārāyaṇa.⁶
Oh, my Lord, I am a childless sinner
That is what they called me,
The people on the bank of the Koḷḷitam;⁷
The sonless sinner, the sinner, oh, my Lord,
That is what I am called all over the world, my Lord,
That is what I am called
Oh, God! Why is it forbidden to give me a child?
Release me from the rule of this curse.*

1 The conventional length of Shiva's curse, according to local bards, is twenty-one generations, essentially forever. After all, who can even imagine that length of time? Often this idea is phrased as being three times seven generations, thus referring to both three and seven, each a number with a certain magical significance. In his live performance, tape recorded just weeks earlier, the same bard uses the term twenty-one generations at this point in the story (as per the typed Tamil transcript, page 56). This description matches the only other reference to the exact length of Shiva's curse found in this text. The bard's error is interesting, as it illustrates that an oral performer may occasionally make a substantive mistake, even though such occurrences are rare. Basically, he is conveying that Shiva's curse will last for many generations and trouble every woman who marries into Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's formal descent line. It is important, furthermore, that the god's curse entails a magical workaround: For the heroes' family line to continue, each new generation must be immaculately placed in the heroine's womb by a god, here creating an opportunity later acted on by Lord Shiva himself. In particular, his curse ensures that Poṅṅar, Caṅkar and Taṅkāḷ will all be backed, as embryos, by his divine power. The author herself has sometimes stated that Shiva's curse was intended to last for "seven generations" in her writings. This footnote should be taken as overriding those earlier mentions. Other curses mentioned in this story are stated to last for lesser lengths of time. In sum, the length of a given curse's effect can vary and need not reach this "forever" maximum.

2 Place where Shiva and Īswari reside.

3 A name for Vishnu.

4 A name for Vishnu.

5 Krishna is Vishnu's most famous reincarnation.

6 A name for Vishnu.

7 A tributary of the Kāveri River.

So, she cried as she thought of Māyaṇ.¹ At that time, when Vishnu was asleep on the milk sea,² one of Ariyanācci's tears fell upon him.

VISHNU: Oh, what surprise is this?

Vishnu looked in his eye of knowledge. On earth, he saw the childless Ariyanācci thinking of him and crying. To find out the reason why she was without child, he set out for the gods' council chamber on his Garuda bird,³ and asked his brother-in-law Shiva.⁴

SONG:

*Our God saddles his Garuda bird,
He flies to the gods' council chamber
Our God is going to seek the presence of the Great One,
Our God Vishnu is traveling,
Our God is going to seek the presence of the Lord,
Our God Rāma⁵ is traveling to inquire there.*

Shiva saw Vishnu coming, called him, arranged a seat for him, and asked him to stay.

SHIVA: Vishnu, my brother-in-law, why have you left the human world and come to the gods' council chamber?

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law, why do Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows have no children? For twenty-four hours (sixty nāḷḷikai⁶), they have been calling my name and crying. I can't look in their eyes. What sin have they committed? Why have they no children? Tell me the details.

SHIVA: Cittirapputtirā! Who is Kōḷattā Kavunṭar of the earth? What sin has he committed? Look this up immediately and tell me.

CITTIRA: Oh, Lord. In the Chola Country, the Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings sent black cows that were hungry to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. There they grazed in Kōḷattā Kavunṭar's sugarcane field. Because of this, he put sharp stakes around the field and the cows were killed by impalement. For this, you yourself cursed him on that day, oh, Lord.

1 A name for Vishnu.

2 There is a long-standing Hindu mythical tradition suggesting that Vishnu reclines on a five-headed cobra that floats on a sea of milk (one of many seas that can be found in the sky) when he feels like having a rest.

3 A kind of white-headed eagle that Vishnu uses to fly, sometimes called his "Garuda vehicle."

4 In popular Tamil tradition, Vishnu is said to have given his younger sister Pārvati to Shiva in marriage.

5 Rāma is the name of another of Vishnu's famous reincarnations.

6 Technically nāḷḷikai = twenty-four minutes, sixty nāḷḷikai = one thousand four hundred and forty minutes or twenty-four hours.

SHIVA: Oh! That man. Villain! The traitor who killed seven cows who came to him hungry. You come to ask for grace for them? Return! Go back to where you have come from!

Thus Shiva refused the request with anger.

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! Do not be angry. Be patient. Give a boon for a child to be born to them. I will bring the child to the gods' council chamber and make it do penance for twenty-one years to expiate this.

SHIVA: Vishnu! Whatever you say, I cannot grant their wish.

VISHNU: Brother-in-law. If it is like that then, give them the boon to at least raise a child that was born in another's womb.

SHIVA: Vishnu! For you, I will agree to that bit of grace. Go!

Vishnu immediately left for the milk sea. After he had left the council chamber, Shiva began to think. To the west of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows lay a forest called Lizard Stone Field.¹ In that forest there were seven stones piled upon one another. In that pile, under six of the stones and inside the seventh, Shiva caused a child to be created in the form of Kāma.²

SONG:

*The monarch ruled thus:
Day after day, time followed time
See the good age in progress,
It was good, it was done with love
So this is what happened, see what occurred.*

At that time Kōḷattā Kavunṭar had twelve black cows that had calved. Each morning they were driven to a place called the Lizard Stone Field that lay west of his village to graze. At noon, the shepherds brought them back for water. But this time one cow hurried to the place where the child was hidden and climbed up on it. Suddenly, the rocks opened and milk immediately issued from the cow's udder and fell into the child's mouth. As soon as the cow climbed down from the stones, they closed again. The cow returned to the herd and behaved as usual. The shepherd was innocent of these events. A week passed like this. One day, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar went to his fields. He saw eleven calves playing

1 The story several times describes a place called Lizard Stone Hill. On that wild placel is a small field named Lizard Stone Field and in that field there is an important heap of stones underneath which Shiva had once hidden the infant Kuṇṇuṭaiyā, knowing that Kōḷattā would eventually find that little baby. The general idea is that Kuṇṇuṭaiyā's clan rivals, at the Chola king's insistence, assigned their cousin an undesirable piece of land that was semi wild and very challenging to plough. It seems that there were many lizards living there as well, indicating that the soil in this locale was very dry, that was filled with scattered rocks, and that had previously only been used to graze cattle, goats, and sheep.

2 In other words, this baby is so attractive that he looks like the god of love himself, generally known as Kāma or Manmatan, the Hindu form of Cupid.

beside their mothers. But one calf was without strength. The Kavunṭar called his shepherd and asked "What's this? One calf cannot walk. Are you milking this cow and drinking its milk?"

SHEPHERD: Oh, Lord. We have done no such thing.

KŌḶATTĀ: Okay, graze the cows.

The Kavunṭar returned home. Three quarters of an hour later, he returned to the field and stood at the foot of a tree where the shepherds could not see him. He thought he would see for himself what they were doing. At noon, the shepherds brought the cows back for water. One cow, as before, climbed up the rock pile. It stayed only five minutes there, and then climbed down and joined the other cows. Seeing this, the Kavunṭar ran to the stones and looked on top of them. But there was nothing on top of the stones. "There must be a secret in this," he thought to himself as he returned home.

KŌḶATTĀ: Hey, servant with a badge. Go to the Land of Prosperity and tell the thousand stonemasons¹ to come here with their tools immediately.

SONG:

*The servant with a badge, my Lord,
The one who carries the silver stick
Looking, my man, for the Land of Prosperity,
The servant is coming, my Lord.*

He arrived in the Land of Prosperity and went to the elephant-faced Pilliar temple. There he called, "Oh, stonemasons!"

STONEMASONS: What is it, man?

SERVANT: Oh, stonemasons. The ruler of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has asked you, the thousand families of masons, to gather your tools and come immediately.

So, the thousand men set off. Arriving in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they saw the ruler.

SONG:

*The masons paid obeisance at his feet
They offered their services,
They fell at the king's feet,
They offered their services.*

¹ The term *thousand* occurs over 235 times in the story, but its significance seems simply to stress grandeur or the idea of added significance or stature. This is clearly a term of positive emphasis, via exaggeration, but carries little other meaning.

KŌḶATTĀ: Protected ones,¹ there is no time to spare. Oh, masons, west of the village, in a place named Wolf Stone² there is work to do. Come, let us go.

So they set out.

SONG:

*The king walked in front, my Lord
He walked ahead of the stonemasons,
Looking for the Lizard Stone Field to the west,
He is taking the masons there, my Lord.*

Arriving, the masons gathered near the place called Lizard Stone Hillock and were told to drive a wedge into each stone and split it. In this way, the masons split six stones. There was nothing. The Kavunṭar ordered them to split the seventh stone. Agreeing, they split the seventh stone. The Kavunṭar ran to see. There lay a male child, shining like the sun itself.

SONG:

*There was a child as bright as the sun,
There was a child as shining as Indra³,
There was a child as bright as the moon.*

The Kavunṭar, who saw the child, picked it up in his abundant hand and kissed its jewel-like face. Gathering it in his hands and lifting it, he kissed it abundantly. "Oh, goodness! This child is ours by the mercy of Shiva," he thought. He returned to his palace with his masons. He was very happy. Ariyanācci Kavunṭar was sleeping in the courtyard where the public often assembles.

KŌḶATTĀ: Oh, wife! Open the door.

She jumped up immediately to open it.

ARIYA: Oh, husband! Who is this child? What raja's child did you steal without his knowing it?

KŌḶATTĀ: Oh, wife. Do not think such things. Ask the masons. Shiva has bestowed his grace on us.

ARIYA: Oh, masons! Is this true?

MASONS: This is no one's child. Do not start a fight with the ruler. On a hillock in Lizard Stone Field, under six stones and inside the seventh which we split, was this child whom we have taken.

¹ Technically, the word means men who have no sorrows because they are submissive, obedient and dependent.

² Later, this place is called Lizard Stone Hill, the one that can be seen in Lizard Stone Field. Since the terms are almost the same in Tamil, there is some confusion as to which translation is correct. The scribe has used different spellings in various places.

³ King of the Gods in early texts.

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Oh, Lord of a score of worlds in the universe,
He who holds a conch and a discus and lives in Vaikunta,¹
Oh, seer of Bāla mountain,² supreme penitent,
Poor pilgrim, my Perumāl,³ my Vishnu.*

ARIYA: Oh, God! Are you giving me this child after forty-five years? My breasts have sagged and become dry. How shall I give milk to this child?

SONG:

*She thought of Vishnu Perumāl and she cried there,
She thought of the shepherd Perumāl, the rare parrot cried there,
Oh, Master! Come quickly to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
Oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!⁴*

Hearing this, Vishnu realized that Ariyanācci was calling him. Mounting his Garuda vehicle, he came to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The Lord arrived at the place.

SONG:

*She paid obeisance at the shepherd's feet,
She offered her services,
She fell at Vishnu's feet,
She offered her services*

VISHNU: Oh, woman! There is no death for those who take refuge in me! Oh, woman, Ariyanācci. For what reason have you called me?

ARIYA: Oh, Lord. I have been forty-five years without an infant. Now you choose to give me my share of children? My breasts have sagged and become dry. How shall I give milk to this child and raise it, oh, Lord?

VISHNU: Woman! I will lend you my grace for that. Go to the Ganges river, bathe and come back.

Ariyanācci went immediately to the Ganges,⁵ bathed and returned.

ARIYA: Oh, Lord, I have bathed.

1 Vishnu's heaven, spelled Vaikuntha in Sanskrit.
2 A reference to one unidentified mythological event.
3 A name for Vishnu.
4 A name for Vishnu.
5 Here and at many other places, the Kāveri River is referred to as the "Ganges." This is in keeping with an old Tamil tradition in which there is a magical underground connection between the two rivers. The belief is that the Ganges secretly feeds the Kāveri. Later in the story, Kāci (Benares) is frequently mentioned as well as its riverbanks. It seems that these references are all intended as prestigious terms for the banks of the Kāveri itself. There is a Tenkāci (Southern Benares) in Tamil Nadu but it is not associated with the Kāveri. This second river system is too far away from identifiable geographic points mentioned in the story to be a plausible location for the actions described.

VISHNU: Good, woman! Stand right there!

Vishnu set up seven curtains, one of which was made of silk, between himself and Ariyanācci by throwing sacred ash. Immediately Ariyanācci's breasts swelled with milk, which flowed into the mouth of the child. Then Vishnu spoke again.

VISHNU: Oh, woman! Go to the Ganges and bring a pot of water. Place it in the elephant-faced Pilliar temple and pay respects to Vinayakar. Then take the water, wash your breasts, and feed the child well with milk. After three months, you can take the child to the Cellāttā temple and give it a name.

Saying this, Vishnu left to return to the milk sea.

SONG:

*So the monarch ruled thus:
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress
It was good, it was done with love
See it happening.*

So, three months passed for the child. Then, on a Monday, the day Shiva was born, two hours after dawn when the moon was setting and getting ready to go to the gods' council chamber in search of Indra, and when the sun was rising in search of the moon, on this day the villagers all brought milk to the goddess and gathered at Cellāttā's temple, bringing their milk offerings with them.

On the agreed-upon day, Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar took their child and went to the Cellāttā temple. The Kavunṭar went to the Benares riverbank and bathed. Then he called the goddess and completed the god's pūjā for the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā.¹ All the villagers gathered at the temple. Ariyanācci was hoping that Vishnu might come too. Realizing this, Vishnu set out for Cellāttā's temple and took a seat there. Cellāttā came running and paid her respects. Everyone else worshipped the god too.

VISHNU: Oh, people! There is no death for those who take refuge in me! Cellāttā! Sit facing east and take the child in your lap. Say three times: "Rolled from a hillock, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar!² Rolled from a hillock, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Rolled from a hillock, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar!"

As Vishnu had ordered, Cellāttā called the child by its name three times. As soon as the naming was over, the people all accepted sugar, betel and areca nut. Then, the villagers returned home.

VISHNU: Oh, woman, Ariyanācci. Take the child home to your palace and live well.

1 Kuṇṇuṭaiyā means "belonging to a hillock."

2 Fifty-eight small (very similar) stones dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Saying this, Vishnu returned to the milk sea.

SONG:

*He is ruling the country with justice,
The one who has the golden signet ring on his hand is ruling alone
It will rain at proper times and the kaṭuku sampa paddy will grow,
It will rain well in the country and the miḷaku sampa paddy will grow
There was no distress and the ripening paddy could be seen everywhere.*

In such a way, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā finished his first five years. And simultaneously, in the gods' council chamber—

SHIVA: Cittirapputtirā. Bring the account books for the world! Is the time of Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar up or not? Look and announce it!

CITTIRA: Oh, Lord. Their life has been expended. There are only two hours left. Within that time, oh, Lord, we must take their lives and bring them here!

Shiva immediately called Yeman.¹ Yeman arrived and paid respects to Shiva.

SHIVA: Oh, virtuous Yeman! The lives of Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar, both of earth, have been expended. Take your envoys and go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows immediately. Take their lives with a string ladder and bring them here.

YEMAN: Oh, Lord! Good!

So, he took his envoys and left for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He pitched a white tent at the elephant-faced Pilliar temple and stayed there.

YEMAN: Oh, envoys! Go to the palace of Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar. Tell them their time is finished and bring them here.

Immediately, the envoys set off for the palace. At that time, Ariyanācci had put her child in a cradle and was singing lullabies.

ENVOY: Oh, you, woman! Are you Ariyanācci Kavunṭar? Is your husband Kōḷattā Kavunṭar?

ARIYA: Sir! Yes, that's us.

ENVOY: Woman, your time is finished according to deliberations in the gods' council chamber. Shiva has sent Yeman's envoys. They are at the elephant-faced Pilliar temple. They have said to bring you two people there.

ARIYA: Oh, God!

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Has it been decided that our time is finished?
Has it been decided there?
Oh, Lord, has the verdict of the creator,
The verdict, has it come there?
Have all the eight letters become false,¹ have they become false, my Lord?
Has Yeman's verdict come to us, has the verdict come, my Lord?
Have all the ten letters become false, have they become false, oh, King?
Has Shiva's verdict come, has the verdict come, my Lord?*

ARIYA: Sir, I was forty-five years without a child. By the grace of Vishnu, I obtained a child five years ago. Therefore, grant me permission to love for five more years. You can come and take me when the child is ten.

ENVOY: Woman! You must not speak like that to us. We must follow Yeman's orders. Come, both of you, quickly. When we reach him, you may speak of your requests.

Ariyanācci left immediately to call her husband from the courtyard where the public assemblies.

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Oh, Lord! Our time is finished,
The creator's verdict has come,
All eight letters have become false,
Shiva's verdict has come to us,
All ten letters have become false,
Shiva's verdict has come to us.*

ARIYA: Oh, husband! Yeman has come and is at the elephant-faced Pilliar temple. His envoys have come to take us. Get up and come.

KŌḶATTĀ: Oh, wife! Is our time finished? Okay, then let's set out and go.

Saying this, the two got up and went to Yeman.

SONG:

*They paid obeisance at Yeman's feet,
They offered him their services,
They threw themselves at Yeman's feet,
They offered him their services,
They circled around and knelt before the sun,²
They circled around and knelt before the god.*

¹ A god who brings death. His name is spelled Yama in Sanskrit.

¹ The reference to eight letters of the alphabet here is unclear, as is the mention of ten letters two lines later.

² A way of referring to Yeman.

YEMAN: Oh, woman! Are you Ariyanācci Kavunṭar? Is the man standing near you your husband?

ARIYA: Sir, yes, that is us.

YEMAN: Oh, woman. Your time is finished. In one hour and twelve minutes, Shiva has ordered your life taken. Therefore, whomever you must speak to, do it quickly.

ARIYA: Sir! Our time is finished. An envoy has brought the verdict. Oh, Lord. I was forty-five years without a child. By the grace of Vishnu, I obtained one. And now, not even five years have been fully completed.

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Oh, God. Have the five syllables become false?¹
Oh, Lord, have they become false?
Still a five-year-old,
My king is a baby, a baby, my Lord
The child whose teeth have not yet fallen and regrown
Is a small baby
The child is just five years old
Oh, Lord, leaving a child of five years, not even five years,
If we leave now, who will look after this child?
Give us another five years of life, as alms to a beggar,
As soon as the child is ten and is married,
Then we will receive merit in heaven
If not, oh, God, the child will not be cared for properly.*

YEMAN: Oh, woman! Don't speak to me about that child. Ask Shiva at the gods' council chamber. He is the one to decide the future. There is only a little time left. Within that, you are to speak to whomever you think necessary and then we must set off.

ARIYA: Oh, servant wearing a badge! Go to the Chola Country and tell the three kings. Go quickly to the village, Kavunṭars, and bring them to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. When they ask the reason, tell them that the time of Kōḷattā and Ariyanācci Kavunṭar is finished and that Yeman's envoys have taken them to the gods' council chamber.

So, the servants went to the Chola Country and told the kings and the people. The three kings and the people heard the news of Yeman.

SONG:

*They are paying obeisance at Yeman's feet,
They are offering their services to him,
They are throwing themselves at the king's feet,
They are offering their services to him
They circled around and paid respects to the sun,
They circled around and knelt before the god.*

YEMAN: Oh, kings! Protected ones, there is no time to spare.

Then Ariyanācci saw the three kings and spoke of her problem.

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Our time is finished, it is finished, Lord,
The verdict has been brought to us,
The ten letters have been falsified,
God's verdict has arrived,
The eight letters have been falsified, oh, kings!
Yeman's verdict has come, my Lord,
It has come here.*

ARIYA: Oh, Lord, King! As to a beggar, grant five more years of life. When the child has reached ten years of age and is married, then we will come to the gods' council chamber with merit, oh, Kings!

KINGS: Oh, woman! One can wipe off black soot, one can cross the Kāveri River, but even Brahma cannot rewrite fate. The creator who wrote then does not rewrite now, oh, woman! We cannot alter the fate that lies ahead.

ARIYA'S SONG:

*Leaving my child behind, my Lord,
This lady is going to Shiva's abode,
My Lord, I am going,
Leaving the child behind, here,
I am going to Shiva's abode,
My Lord, I am going,
Leaving behind the baby, my Lord,
This tender vine¹ is going to Shiva's abode,
My Lord, I am going,
Leaving behind my son, leaving him behind my Lord,
Now the sinner is going to the gods' council chamber,
I am going there,*

¹ Na ma si va ya: These are five syllables used when praising Shiva.

¹ The key idea is that the woman is very tender at the time this metaphor is used (usually a moment of sorrow). At such a time the woman needs "a pillar" of support to help her become cheerful and look upward once, as a vine that wants to climb upward on such a support. All such references have been translated as "tender vine" here, referencing the term *anṇakkoṭi* in Tamil.

*Oh, Lord! Leaving the baby behind, the tender vine is going,
I am leaving behind my son; the sinner is going.*

Complaining thus, she circled around and cried.

ARIYA: Oh, King, You must be the one to protect my child. Oh, residents, you also should protect my child. As soon as he is of age, arrange his marriage. Do it in the way we would, oh, learned people. Oh, learned people, I beseech you all! When our child comes of age make him promise to perform pūjā three times a day at the Cellāttā temple.

Then, leaving everyone, the husband and wife took the string ladder and went to the gods' council chamber. The child, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, saw his mother and father disappear. As soon as they were out of sight, he fell on the ground and cried.

SONG:

*The whole body that wears perfumed paste,
The whole body there,
Was covered with dried leaves,
When he rolled on the ground and cried
He rolled and cried there,
The whole body that wears musk,
The whole body there on the floor and cried
He rolled and cried there.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*My mother, oh, I have lost my mother
Oh, Lord, I have lost my mother,
I stood there alone and cried,
I have lost my father, I have lost my father, my Lord
Now its time to let my hair hang loose,
It is time, my Lord,
I have lost my mother,
I have lost my father and its time to let my hair hang loose
What am I going to do?
Oh, King, how am I going to exist?
Having lost my mother,
Will I remain on this earth?
There is no shelter, there is no shelter, my Lord
There is no one to support me here,
There is no one, my Lord
There is no shelter for me to stand in, no shelter, my Lord
I don't have a staff to hang onto, I don't have a staff, my Lord
I have become like a chicken that has
Lost its hen, like the one that has lost its hen, my Lord.*

The child circled around and around. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā came close and ran about. As he called out and cried, the king ran and picked him up.

KING: Oh, son, your mother's and father's time have finished. They have gone to the gods' council chamber. Oh, son, we are all human beings, aren't we? We will look after you. Don't cry.

He picked the child up in his great hand and dried his jewel-like face. Consoling him, he took Kuṅṅuṭaiyā to the palace. The king and the people stayed in the palace of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows for eight days, consoling the child.

Episode 3 ◉

While these things were happening in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the thousand clansmen, hearing that Kōḷattā Kavunṭar had died, gathered at the elephant-faced Pilliar temple. Of these thousand, Paḷanicāmi Kavunṭar called his brother of the biggest house.

PAḶANICĀMI: Oh, brother! According to the king, you and I have been deceived for many years. Our father's elder brother, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar, took the good moist lands of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows for himself, while we of the Land of Prosperity were given poor, dry lands. Our uncle, Kōḷattā Kavunṭar, amassed a lot of wealth. For forty-five years he had no child. Then he brought home who knows whose child. It came from a field. Now his time is finished, and he has gone to the gods' council chamber. Therefore, let us go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and, having informed the king, divide it up. We will divide the lands and the wealth into a thousand shares, giving the child one. Let us go.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land of Prosperity
They are approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Oh, Lord!
Where gold springs from the earth,
They are approaching the famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The elephant-faced Pilliar, oh, Lord!
They are approaching the temple of the five-handed God.¹*

The thousand Kavunṭar clansmen reached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows at the time of the sun's greatest height. They gathered at the Pilliar temple at midday.

CLANSMEN: Oh, Paḷanicāmi! We should not all go to the palace together. First, ten of us should go. The journey could frighten the boy a little. The rest of us can come later.

¹ Pilliar, being an elephant-headed god, has two hands, two feet, and a trunk.

At that time, ten men left for the palace. While the child Kuṅṅuṭaiyā was playing, the clansmen attacked him.

SONG:

*They grabbed his hair, villains,
They struck him four times on the cheek,
They grabbed the hair on the nape of his neck, villains,
They struck him four times on the cheek.*

Not being able to stand it, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā wailed. Seeing this, the king ran and lifted the child in his hand, and kissed his jewel-like face.

KING: Villains, liars, murderers! Why have you beaten this child? Your country is a separate one. The borders are separate. Have you come here from the Land of Prosperity to behave badly?

CLANSMEN: Oh, King! Excuse us. But did our father's brother sire this child? Some unknown woman gave birth to it and ran away. Our uncle took it, brought it home and raised it. Therefore, we will not allow this boy to rule the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, plus the people, and the produce belonging to it. Even if we give him something, we will divide it into a thousand shares and give him just one.

KING: Oh, Kavunṭar clansmen! Your uncle raised this boy for five years after bringing him home. Now that his time has finished, you come and ask for shares. Have you been waiting for this moment? Why did not you come and ask while he was still alive? By coming now, you have no right and no more force.

CLANSMEN: Oh, King! We were thinking of coming any day, but before we could, his time was up. What's to be done? Oh, King! Does this land belong to you or to the child? Do not raise questions! There is nothing in this for you. We are the relatives and the shareholders. We will look after the child.

KING: Men. I know how you will look after the child. With a cruel bent in your hearts, you will be thinking of what you can do to him. I have no objection to you taking the child, but I want a contract from your side. There is a proverb that notes:

*Time having passed;
The one from the forest returned to the forest, (and)
The householder returned to his house.*

I want a contract from your side that when you die you will give the Land Where the Kāveri Flows back to the child.

Having said this, the king left for the Chola Country. The people left too. After everyone had gone, the clansmen divided the land and the wealth at the Pilliar temple.

YOUNGER CLANSMAN: Oh, elder brother! Did you hear what the king said? If the boy lives, we must give the land and its people over to him. We have agreed to this. If Kuṅṅuṭaiyā lives for a while, he will then say, "My mother and father built this palace." Let us knock down this palace now, plough over it three times and plant castor oil seeds.

They spoke like this and then acted on their words.

YOUNGER CLANSMAN: Oh, elder brother of the big house! Feed this child in your home. As compensation, you can take his share of the land and the wealth!

ELDER CLANSMAN: Don't you know about your brother's wife? Will your sister-in-law feed this child rice?

YOUNGER CLANSMAN: Oh, elder brother! We have the wherewithal to feed the boy. Do we have to give him other things as well?

ELDER CLANSMAN: Man. While knowing your sister-in-law, you speak like this? Okay! I will take him and keep him for ten days. If he does not receive proper food in my house, then I will bring him and give him to you. Okay. Let's get going. Hey, boy! Take this cloth and make a loin piece out of it. Get going!

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it,
They approached the Land of Prosperity,
They approached it, my Lord
In the relentless heat of the sun, my Lord
The Kavunṭars walked ahead, my God
Kuṅṅuṭaiyā followed behind.*

The sun was at its height, and it was midday when they arrived at the Pilliar temple in the Land of Prosperity.

CLANSMEN: Elder brother! You take the child with you.

The Kavunṭar with the biggest house went home and saw the door closed.

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, wife! Open the door.

The wife ran quickly and opened it. Through the open door she saw the child.

WIFE: Husband. Who is this child who walks behind you?

KAVUṆṬAR: He is called Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, the son of Uncle Kōḷattā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

WIFE: Husband. What have you brought him here for? Do you want us to keep him and feed him rice for nothing?

KAVUṆṬAR: We don't have to do it for nothing. We have in compensation: one share of the land and one share of the wealth. Keeping these, we shall care for him.

WIFE: Okay. We'll feed him for ten days.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, father. Give me rice. I'm hungry.

The child began to cry.

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, wife! Take this boy and give him rice. I will go bathe, and return.

WIFE: Okay, husband. You may leave, and I will feed the child.

She turned to the child and said, "You wilted gypsy!" Pulling his ear, she dragged him behind her and seated him on an outer porch. Then she handed him a tumbler of seven-day-old, hardened millet gruel, moistened with a little hot water, and said, "Eat it!" On seeing this, King Kuṇṇuṭaiyā, the precious king, the one like summer thunder, said:

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Oh my! Oh, Lord of a crore¹ of words in the universe,
The one who carries a conch, a discus, and who lives in Vaikunta,
The seer of Bāla mountain, supreme penitent,
Poor pilgrim, my Perumā, my Vishnu,
Oh, God with a thousand names,
I have handed over my enormous fields and seven crores of wealth.
To my clansmen
I have been subjected to this condition, oh, Vishnu!
Have you written on my head, on my head, my Lord,
That I must drink this gruel, drink it?
When I ate rice with vegetables and milk, rice and vegetables
There, oh, Parantāmā
Without appetite when I ate, my Lord,
That milk was not digested, oh, Vishnu,
It was not digested there
I did not have the pleasure of lying down, oh, Vishnu,
I did not have it there,
When I ate rice with ghee² and vegetables there,
Rice and vegetables,
When I ate them all in bulk, my Lord, then,*

1 A crore is a word meaning ten million.

2 Clarified butter.

*The ghee was not digested, it was not digested, my Lord,
I did not have the pleasure of sleeping there,
I did not have it, my Lord.¹
The Lord is crying. His body is wilting
Oh, Vishnu! Have you written on my head
That I must drink millet gruel?*

WIFE: Boy! Are you crying? Take that gruel and drink it, boy!

Kuṇṇuṭaiyā lifted the tumbler but he did not know how to drink from it, and half the gruel flowed out of the sides of his mouth onto the ground. He could not drink half the gruel and, leaving it behind, he came and stood in the entrance-way. At that time, the Kavunṭar returned from his bath and saw the boy. He asked, "Have you eaten?"

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, father! I did not get any curry and rice. I was given millet gruel. I couldn't eat it and so I have just left it there.

KAVUṆṬAR: Villain, liar! Shouldn't we feed good curry and rice to the child, as I asked? You have given blemished things and dealt cruelly with him.

The Kavunṭar, without eating at home, took the child to a commercial eating hall and they ate there. Ten days passed and still the child was served millet gruel and no rice. Seeing this, the Kavunṭar became sick at heart. He thought, "We have no right to keep this child here anymore." Taking the child, he went at midday to the Pilliar temple. He called the watchman. He asked him to bring the thousand householders to the temple. The watchman brought the thousand men to the temple.

HOUSEHOLDER: Oh, elder brother of the big house! Ten days have passed, and you have treated the child this? You have given him blemished things. Why have you done this?

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, man! I, myself, told you before! I said that your sister-in-law wouldn't serve rice. You take the child. Otherwise, all of you get together and find a solution to this.

Seeing that no one in the crowd spoke, Paḷanicāmi stood up. "Why is no one speaking? Let's make a solution."

PAḶANICĀMI: A thought has come to me. If we put the child in one person's house, it will come to this again. Therefore, let us buy Kuṇṇuṭaiyā a begging bowl. We have one buffalo in each of our thousand houses. When Kuṇṇuṭaiyā gets up in the morning, he can go to ten houses asking for food. Having eaten, he can leave his pot in the school barn and then take the cows to graze along the borders of the Benares riverbank. He can bring them back at noon and ask for

1 The song describes how well he used to eat (even overeat) when his parents were alive, and how he did not appreciate it then as he does now.

food from ten more houses. He can ask for food again at night and then go and sleep in the school barn. Let it be like this daily.

Everyone agreed that this was the best solution.

HOUSEHOLDER: Oh, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā! Go and bring the bowl.

Prince Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, the precious king, the one like summer thunder, the worthy one of few words said, "Oh, seer of Bāla mountain, supreme penitent. Poor pilgrim, my Perumāl, my Vishnu."

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Oh, Parantāmā, who wears perfumed paste,
Have you written on my head
That I should carry a beggar's bowl
In my, in my hand?
Have you written on my head
That I must carry cakes of dried dung fuel
In the hand that wears musk, in my hand?*

NARRATOR: Oh, child! Don't cry, be healthy, don't pine.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Oh, god who carries a conch and a discus and lives in Vaikunta,
My land and wealth have gone to my clansmen
I am carrying a begging bowl
And must take what alms are given from the clansmen's homes
Have you written this on my head,
Oh, Lord of Conjeevaram?¹
My body is shivering, my soul is tired, my voice is wilting
Oh, Lord, I lost my mother and father and attained this fate,
Oh, Lord, my God.*

Standing up, taking the begging bowl in hand, he went to his clansmen's homes to accept food. The clansmen and women, having agreed together, all gave the boy seven-day-old millet gruel. The little boy took this and ate it. Then, he left his bowl in the barn and took the thousand buffaloes to graze on the fine borders of Kāci.² At noon, he brought them home and then took his bowl and went for food. "In the morning I will receive day-old rice and at noon curry and rice," thought Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, and he ran into the street with his bowl. "Oh, Mother, give me rice," he called. But as they had agreed beforehand, the villains

¹ A temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu in the form of Varataraja Perumāl.

² Kāci is a term for Benares, a holy city which lies on the banks of the river Ganges. The Poṅṅi or Kaveri river, is here metaphorically referred to (by implication) as the Ganges due to a widespread belief that there is a secret underground connection between these two rivers. Hence the reference here to grazing the animals near the borders of Kāci is implying that they are feeding on the border of a very sacred place that lies along that river's banks, namely Benares.

gave him millet gruel again, just as in the morning. Thus, the little boy took the millet gruel and went to the barn and ate only half and left the rest.

At this time, Vishnu came daily to the Land of Prosperity to see what work Kuṅṅuṭaiyā was doing and what he was eating.

SONG:

*See what is happening at this time,
The events in the Land of Prosperity,
One day, one day
Look what happened one fine day,
It was good, in that land,
It was done with love.*

Five years passed in the Land of Prosperity. Every day the buffaloes were grazed and every day Kuṅṅuṭaiyā thought, "Today they will give me curry and rice." But every day he received only millet gruel. "I will never get curry and rice," Kuṅṅuṭaiyā began to think as he drove the thousand buffaloes to the Benares riverbank for grazing.

SONG:

*What is Lord Kuṅṅuṭaiyā thinking?
The one who is uniquely handsome,
He who knows neither the south nor the north,
He who doesn't (even) know the sacred place called Tiruvēḷāṅkāḍu.¹*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: How much longer must I live like this in the place of my clansmen?

"If I go to another town and help someone or other with work, I can get curry and rice," he thought.

He hurried the buffaloes along the borders of the Benares riverbank.

SONG:

*Our Lord, he turned to the north,
He is going, the lordly one is going,
The great Lord left the forest
Leaving the Kaṭṭapollī forest,
The neṛiñci elephant thorns there, the neṛiñci thorns
Are piercing the body of my Lord all over
The neṛiñci horse thorns, my Lord
See the thorn clusters pierce my Lord
In the scorching sun, the king, in the sun,
In the burning heat, in the heat, my Lord,
The sand, the thorns and the stones
Were thrown at his feet by the hot wind there.*

¹ Some important sacred place not clearly identified.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā ran five miles to the north. In that place, he saw a huge Alexandrian laurel tree¹. He went and stood at its foot in the shade, looked up and saw the tree was all dried up.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Ah ha. I'll climb this tree, cut the wood, let it fall, and tie up a large bundle. Then I will carry it to a nearby town, deliver it to someone and get rice and curry in exchange.

So, he climbed the tree, faced the northeast and saluted Vishnu.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*He who carries a conch and a discus and lives in Vaikunta,
The one who rescues people in trouble, orphan-saver,
I have come because I couldn't even get rice mixed with curry,
Oh, Vishnu.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: If it is true that I was born of god's creative power, then with your grace let this firewood fall (to the ground) as soon as I touch it, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!

Vishnu saw this from the milk sea. He thought, "Kuṅṅuṭaiyā has lived in his clansmen's place for five years without curry and rice. (Now) not being able to cut firewood, he is thinking of me." He immediately mounted his Garuda bird and started off.

SONG:

*My Lord, on his Garuda vehicle,
My Lord flies in the centre of the sky,
Leaving the milk sea, my Lord,
He approaches the earth, my Lord.*

Vishnu arrived in the forest. Without being noticed by the boy, he changed his form into a fly and sat in the trees. As soon as Kuṅṅuṭaiyā touched the wood with his hand, so many branches fell down that it was as if he had used the force of Krishna himself. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā climbed down and, with Vishnu's help, he tied up a bundle larger than what even fifteen people together could tie up. Taking the tied load, he stood and looked to the northeast.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Lord! This burden that is higher than two palmyra palms has to be placed on the middle of my head. Oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!

The divine Lord alighted on the load in the form of a fly. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā snapped his fingers.

¹ The Alexandrian laurel tree is *Calophyllum inophyllum*, known in Tamil as punnai.

SONG:
*My goodness! See what flies above!
With the help of the shepherd,¹
With the help of Vishnu,
See the load of firewood fly by itself!*

The load of firewood rose up the height of two palm trees and came to rest on Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's head.

SONG:

*Facing northward, facing northward,
Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is coming, the hour is hot
Seeing hills and climbing them, the Lord is climbing them,
Seeing ravines and crossing them, he is coming.*

While walking northward, the boy came across a town with a road through it. The boy started down the road. A nearby householder saw the firewood. "What is this? There is no noise of a cart, yet it moves at a great height." He peeped out between the walls. "Oh, younger brother! Will you sell this load of wood?" asked a woman next door.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Oh, Mother, my mother,
If you give me curry and rice,
If you give me this, I will give to you
This load of firewood, that load of firewood there
For five years, Mother, years,
I have had no rice,
No rice, my Lord, no rice.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Mother! If you please, give me curry and rice as you want. Set the wood on this side of this wall and then come in by the entrance on the other side.²

The little lord put the bundle of wood down and went to that side.

WOMAN: Oh, boy! What town do you come from? What is your caste?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Mother! I am from a land that has tall, fertile gooseberry trees, from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the country that is buoyed up by its wealth. I am the son of agriculturalists.

WOMAN: Why, boy, are you in this condition?

¹ Ayar, referring to Krishna who was raised as a shepherd.

² She asks him to enter through a side entrance because she does not know his caste.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Mother! My parents died when I was five years old. My clansmen took over the land and seven and a half crores of wealth. I grazed buffaloes for my clansmen for five years and was given only gruel to drink.

WOMAN: Oh, too bad! Oh, boy! There is water in that pot. Wash your hands and come into the house.

The little lord washed his feet and face and went into the house and sat down. The Kavunṭar woman placed rice in a large bowl, mixed curry into it and handed it to the little lord. The little lord accepted the rice bowl and set it down.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh my! Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe. After five years, today I have obtained curry and rice. Oh, Vishnu!

The little lord became happy. Seated near the door, he placed the rice in his left hand and then, taking it with his right hand, he began to eat. At this moment, the Kavunṭar head of the household returned for his midday meal.

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, wife! Who is that speaking inside?

WIFE: Husband! It is an agriculturalist boy from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He brought wood that will not be burnt up even after six months. In compensation I am giving him some curry and rice.

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh ho! So, you cannot sit still in the house! You accept wood from whoever should pass in the street and give them rice? There are thirty bundles of palmyra leaves in the fields. Instead of bringing those, you feed whoever passes in the street!

SONG:

*He grabbed her hair, villain!
He struck her four times on the cheek,
He grabbed the hair on the nape of her neck, villain!
He struck her four times on the cheek
Oh, Lord Shiva, the peahen cried
The peahen fell on the ground.*

Seeing the wife of the Kavunṭar beaten, Kunṇuṭaiyā got up from the doorway, left his rice, came outside, turned to the north and began to run.

SONG:

*Our little lord turned to the North,
He looked in that direction
King Kunṇuṭaiyā is running,
Looking behind him,
Looking there
For three miles, my God,
Our little lord ran, he ran.*

After Kunṇuṭaiyā had run for three miles, the road passed through the middle of a town. He ran northwards on this road. At that moment, the Kavunṭar of the biggest house was seated at the Pilliar temple. He was about eighty years old, owned one hundred vaḷḷams¹ of land, and had two sons. The watchman was standing nearby. The Kavunṭar of the big house saw Kunṇuṭaiyā run past wearing only a loincloth.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, watchman! Some boy or other is running there. He looks like an orphan. If he is the son of a farmer, we will take him into our place. Go bring him here.

When the watchman set out, the boy had already run a furlong. The watchman ran fast to catch up. When he got close, he called: "Oh, boy! Who runs there? Do stop!"

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, oh! Men, have you called me?

As he called out, the boy tripped and fell.

WATCHMAN: Oh, boy! The Kavunṭar of the biggest house has asked you to come. He is seated by the Pilliar temple.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Did I take, did I steal, Lord?
Have I committed an injustice in this land?
Did I commit such a thing there?
The whole body that wears perfumed paste with meekness,
The whole body there
Was covered with dried leaves when he rolled and cried,
He rolled and cried there
The good Lord is crying,
He is crying there
His body is wilting, my Lord!*

WATCHMAN: Oh, boy! You haven't done those things. He is only calling you to find out who you are.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, man. If you call him the man of the biggest house, how big he must be!

WATCHMAN: Oh, boy. He is a man like us. Do not be afraid. Just come.

So, like this, he brought Kunṇuṭaiyā to the Kavunṭar.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, little boy! What town are you from? Tell me what country.

¹ About three acres and thirty-three cents.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Lord! I am from a land that has tall, fertile gooseberry trees, from the Land Where Kāveri Flows. My name is KunṆuṭaiyā.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, boy! What is your caste?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: I am the son of a farmer.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, boy! What are your mother's and father's names?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Lord! My parents died when I was five years old. I don't know their names. My land and wealth went to my clansmen, and for five years I herded buffaloes for them and received only gruel to drink. After this I left.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, boy! Why did you leave your clansmen's house and come here?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: I came because I had no curry and rice for five years.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: I will give you as much curry and rice as you like. Will you stay with me?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: If it will be like that, I will stay.

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Okay, come. We will go to the fields and then directly to the house.

The Old Kavunṭar took KunṆuṭaiyā, and together they set off.

SONG:

*The Kavunṭar, the Kavunṭar, walked ahead,
The little lord, little lord, walked behind,
The master, the master, walked ahead,
The servant, the servant, walked behind.*

It was the month of Āṭṭi¹ and fifty men were working there. The two sons of the Kavunṭar were standing beside the tank. The younger one looked at the elder son, Caṅka.

YOUNGER SON: Oh, Lord. Our father is coming and bringing some boy with him.

They watched. The Kavunṭar came near.

YOUNGER SON: Oh, father! What is this? What town in this boy from?

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, sons! This boy is the son of an agriculturalist from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. His parents died when he was very young. His clansmen took his land. He grazed the clansmen's buffaloes for five years and

received only gruel to drink. He came thinking, "I have had no curry and rice for five years. I will go and stay in any town where someone will give me curry and rice." Oh, sons! We will incorporate this boy into our establishment. He will graze the cows. He will do whatever work we ask. I have brought him here for this.

ELDER SON: Father! We are not going to be deprived of anything by feeding this boy. But if we send this boy to our house to eat, will Mother give him rice? Don't you know Mother's character? Well, all right. He has already been brought here, so we can send him off after giving him lunch. It's noon. The workers are going to eat. We can go too. Father! Take the boy and show him the field to the east where the calves are grazing. Tell him to watch them, and then leave them in the field to the north to graze. Tell him to take this curved knife and forked staff, close the gate, and return. Afterwards, we'll go and eat!

OLD KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, KunṆuṭaiyā, boy! I'll go water the calves. You cut up the tree and come. Afterwards, we'll go and eat.

Saying this, he left to water the calves. Then Prince KunṆuṭaiyā, the precious king, like summer thunder, lifted his forked staff and his curved knife. Looking to the northeast, he saluted.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Seer of Bāla mountain. Supreme penitent!
Poor pilgrim, my Perumā, my Vishnu!*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: If it is true that I was born of god's creative power, then with one swing of the knife let all the thorn bushes to the north and to the south fall at one blow, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

With these words, he thought of god, and a huge bunch of thorn bushes fell down together! The elder son of the Kavunṭar saw all of this from a distance.

ELDER SON: Oh, younger brother! We must give this boy shepherd's work. Fifty men working for fifteen days would not cut half as much. Before this boy even swung his knife, see how many thorn bushes to the north and to the south fell to the earth!

Before he could finish, the Old Kavunṭar, the father, arrived. They told him what had taken place.

SONS: Father! We must not let this boy go. We will give him a share of the land and get him married. Okay, we will all go to eat. Let's go!

As soon as they reached the house, the elder son called, "Mother?"

WIFE: What is it, son?

¹ July – August.

¹ Thorn bushes are used as field fencing. They are periodically trimmed to yield firewood, but it is normally very hard work to cut them.

She came and opened the door. They all walked in, in a line, with the Kavunṭar father first and Kunṇuṭaiyā walking in last.

WIFE: Oh my! Who is that?

Looking at the Kavunṭar, she said, "You¹ must have brought him!"

The Kavunṭar looked at her and ordered, "First, let us see you feed the two boys. Then I will tell you." She began to pace up and down, walking south and north, not being able to stand her own anger. She was frightened of her elder son.

ELDER SON: Mother! Is the rice ready?

WIFE: Son. It is ready.

SON: Mother. We will eat curds with our rice. Take our curry, give it to the boy with lots of rice. Oh, Mother! You no longer have two sons. Join this boy with us and imagine that you have three! Fifty men working for fifteen days could not cut the thorns that fell to the earth before this boy even raised his knife! All the thorns of a sixty vaḷlam field² have been trimmed! Therefore, we have decided to give this boy a share of the land, marry him and let him be.

Saying this, he told his mother to give the boy rice.

WIFE: Son, I will serve the rice. You go bathe and come back.

So, the two sons left to bathe, but the elder son became doubtful and peered in through window. Thinking her sons had gone to bathe, the Kavunṭar wife said, "Come here, you gypsy!" Then she grabbed the little lord's ear, took him to an outer porch and poured some seven-day-old, hardened millet porridge for him.

WIFE: Drink, boy!

Seeing this, the elder son, having only half-finished bathing, jumped over the wall in the middle of the house.

ELDER SON: What did I say? And what have you done?

SONG:

*He grabbed her hair, villain!
He struck his mother four times,
He grabbed the hair on the nape of her neck, villain!
He struck her four times on the cheek
"Oh, Lord Shiva," cried the mother
The peahen jumped the height of a man.*

¹ Here the wife uses the term "ni," which is a very disrespectful way for her to address her husband.

² About two acres.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Villain, liar. Next, he will leave her and beat me.

Frightened, the boy tipped over his tumbler of millet gruel.

SONG:

*Our little lord looked northward,
He looked in that direction
King Kunṇuṭaiyā is running,
The gentle king,
Looking carefully behind him,
Looking there,
Looking northward our little lord is running
The Lord is running there
For three miles' distance,
That distance
Running without stopping,
The king is running.*

After running three miles, he stopped and looked behind him and saw that no one was following.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe,
He who holds a conch and a discus and lives in Vaikunta,
Rescuer of people in trouble, orphan-saver,
The Lord who has a thousand names, Parantāmā!*

Thinking in this way of Vishnu, he looked northward. Another country could be seen. It was called Vāḷavaṇḍi. Looking at it, the little lord approached.

SONG:

*See the seven sacred decorative pots looking beautiful,
See the five sacred decorative pots looking beautiful,
Surrounded by coconut trees. Around these are plantain trees,
See the mango trees and flowering bushes bloom,
Behold the king's palace, there,
Behold the palace there.*

Episode 4 ✨

As he looked, he saw the king's palace. "If I go here, someone is sure to stop me," thought Kunṇuṭaiyā. Frightened, he turned and took the road to the north. In the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, his maternal uncle's people, Marikkoḷūntā Kavunṭar and Civakkoḷūntā Kavunṭar, reigned. While Kunṇuṭaiyā walked northward, the two kings were seated at the Pillar temple in order to view Vishnu's Garuda bird. Two servants stood nearby. At that moment, the little lord ran northward right across the front of the temple. The kings saw the runner.

KINGS: Oh, servant! Go see who that running boy is. Go, bring him here.

The servants ran after the boy. By this time, the boy had traveled a furlong. The servants ran up to him.

SERVANTS: Oh, who is the lord running there? Do stop.

Hearing this, the little lord looked around.

SERVANTS: Our king has ordered us to bring you to him.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Have I taken, have I stolen something?
Have I committed a mistake in this land?
Have I?*

*The whole body that wears perfumed paste,
The whole body there was covered with dry leaves,
When he rolled on the ground and cried,
He rolled and cried there
The whole body that wears musk, the whole body there
Was covered with dust, when he rolled on the earth
He rolled on the earth and cried there.*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Man, why have you¹ called me? What mistake have I committed?

SERVANT: Lord. You have done nothing. He simply said to bring you because he wants to know who you are. Come, let's go!

The servant took the boy towards the Pilliar temple. When Kunṇuṭaiyā saw the king, he became frightened. He bent his arm and covered his mouth.

KING: Oh, boy! What is your country? What town?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Lord, I am from
The Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the land of famous kings,
The land of gooseberry trees,
The land of titled royalty
The land of brave males, the land with a king,
The beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The country that contains the town of
Cilukkāmpuliyūr in its lesser division,
The country where the threshing is done with elephants,
The country where gold springs from the earth,
The famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

KING: Oh, boy! Even if you are small, speak like a grown man. Oh, boy! What is your caste?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord. I am the son of a farmer.

KING: What were the names of your mother and father?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: My parents died when I was five years old. My clansmen took my country and for five years I drank only gruel at their hands. Because I was very young when my parents died, I don't know their names.

KING: Okay. What town are you headed to in the north?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord. I don't know what town I am going to. I have not had curry and rice for five years. I will stay with whomever will feed me curry and rice, oh, King!

KING: Oh, so! For five years the villains did not feed you curry and rice?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, Lord! I have not received any.

KING: Okay. Come and stay in our house. You will always get curry and rice.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: If it will be so, I will come, King!

KING: What is your name?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord, my name is Kunṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar.

KING: Okay, come! Let's go to the palace.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: King! On my way here, I was given curry and rice in one village, but the Kavunṭar came home and said, "Why did you feed that boy rice?" He took his wife and beat her. Seeing that, I got up, left the rice, and began to run towards the north. Again, in another town, an old Kavunṭar took me home to feed me rice. His wife was at home. Her eldest son said, "Mother, give this boy rice," and left to bathe. When he had left, the wife took millet gruel, and put it in a tumbler. In a frightening manner, she ordered me to drink it. Seeing this, her son came running, saying, "What did I say? And what did you do?" He took his mother and beat her. So, I got up, left the tumbler and began to run to the north. Now I have arrived at your place. Oh, raja, I have—

Kunṇuṭaiyā's SONG:

*Oh, King! I have experienced a crore of sufferings,
I have experienced three crores of sufferings,
I have been beaten a crore of times,
I have been beaten three crores of times.*

¹ He uses the impolite form here (ni) because he is addressing a servant, even though this man is certainly much older than Kunṇuṭaiyā in terms of age.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Will this happen even in your house?

KING: Don't use women's speech with me!

They walked to the palace.

SONG:

*Oh, women, women, who is there?
Oh, Alamēlu, Ceṅkamalam, Ceṅkamalam,
Oh, Mūppi, Karuppi, all of you,
Oh, head maid Ceṅkamalam. Come here!*

KING: Oh, Ceṅkamalam! Is the water heated?

SERVANT: Lord. It is heated.

KING: Good. Take this boy and tell him to bathe.

As soon as he finished bathing, the servants brought him clean clothes and ornaments. After finishing this, the little lord went outside.

SONG:

*He shone like the sun itself, there,
The Lord who was there,
He was full, like the moon, there,
The Lord who was there,
He was like Indra, there,
He was shining, the Lord who was there.*

The king looked at Kuṅṇuṭaiyā.

KING: Oh ho! What beauty! What a shape! He is like Kāma himself! oh, women!
Take this boy, lay a banana leaf and feed him curry rice.

The women took him and fed him as much as he wanted. After eating, the king went and stood in front of the courtyard where the public assembles.

KING: Kuṅṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Did they feed you lots of curry and rice?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, King! They gave me a lot.

KING: Good. Oh, Kuppi.² Bring a fine carpet and a pillow. Kuṅṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar!
You sleep until evening.

Saying this, he left to eat.

SONG:

*So the monarch ruled thus,
Day after day, time followed time, there,
See the good age in progress.*

While Kuṅṇuṭaiyā was there, Vishnu—Parantāmā, the ruler of the earth, Lord of Paṅṭarīpuram—saw Kuṅṇuṭaiyā resting.

VISHNU (thinking to himself): Oh, oh! Today, after ten years, at last Kuṅṇuṭaiyā's life has changed. He spent five years at the place of his birth, and five years in the place of his clansmen, making ten years altogether. Now he has come to his mother's brother's place, the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, where he has eaten well and is resting. Ten years are now over. Let him be there twenty more years. As soon as he reaches thirty, he will get married. We will see what happens after that.

He then left for the forest of palm leaf flowers. Kuṅṇuṭaiyā finished his rest and got up.

KING: Kuṅṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Shall we go together north of here, to the garden called Nattakkāḍu?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord! That is good.

SONG:

*The king walked ahead, he walked ahead there,
The little lord walked behind, he walked behind,
The king walked ahead, he walked ahead
The jewel-like king walked behind, walked behind,
Looking for the cattle fold of Nattakkāḍu, looking for the cattle fold,
They are approaching, the king and the little lord.*

KING (walking with Kuṅṇuṭaiyā): Kuṅṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! You must not address me as "Lord." Upon seeing me, you must not bend your arm and cover your mouth. Be simple. It is enough if you address me in an ordinary manner.

As they spoke, they approached the cattle fold.

KING: This! This is our cattle fold, Kuṅṇuṭaiyā. Our cattle and goats have multiplied impressively. From today, your work will be to graze the two cows and ten goats, and in the evening when they return, put the goats in the cattle fold. Then milk our two cows and come to the palace. Draw water and fill the vessel for heating bath water. There, the swing of my younger sister will be swinging. You must push it twice. Then eat and take the leftover rice to the dog. Go with it to sleep with the cattle in their fold, at night. You are to do these things each day.

1 Kāma (Manmatan) is the god of love. He is very similar to Cupid. His name is spelled Manmatha in Sanskrit.

2 A name for a maidservant.

Having said this, the king left for home. The little lord did as the king said. He did the milking and went to the house, filled the big vessel with water, and swung Tāmarai on the swing.

SONG:

*The great swing is swinging for the chaste girl,
For Pārvati, who is like a gold sculpture, who sways as she walks,
The great swing is rocking for Pārvati,
For Pārvati, who is like a tender garland,
Who walks as if she floats on air,
In the great swing Pārvati,
The chaste girl is sleeping deeply.*

When Kuṅṅuṭaiyā had finished swinging the swing, he came and stood in front of the king.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: King! Is the princess in the swing your younger sister?

KING: Yes, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! My mother, thinking that she had no daughter, went to a lotus pond and performed penance there for twelve years. Shiva and Pārvati came to earth and seeing this, spoke as follows:

PĀRVATI: Lord. Has this woman done penance for twelve years? What does she want that she is doing penance like this?

SHIVA: Oh, wife! She is doing penance because she wants a daughter.

PĀRVATI: Lord! Why haven't you given this woman a boon? What a pity! You should give her one.

SHIVA: Pārvati! Do you want me to give boons everywhere I go?

PĀRVATI: Lord. We have looked in the eyes of the penitent. Therefore, it's best if we grant (her) a boon.

SHIVA: Pārvati! What animal form shall we take to make love now, at midday? Why don't you take the form of a doe and I will take the form of a stag and we will play together.

While they took the form of deer and played, Shiva's semen came forth and fell on a lotus leaf in a pond. It immediately took the form of a baby girl, which began to clamour and cry. When she heard the noise, my mother opened her eyes.

MOTHER: Lord. I hear a baby girl crying. Whose child is it, Lord?

PĀRVATI: Mother! It's your child. Take it and raise it.

Then, she and Shiva left for Kailāsa.¹ My mother picked up the child and took it home with her. Her name is Tāmarai² and she is my only sibling. This is her story.

This is what the king said.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: King. I am pleased.

SONG:

*Powerful Lakshmi, sweet one
Fulfilling her title, she reigns, she reigns, she reigns there,
Silver-fingered authority, sweet one,
As a solitary dignity she reigns, sweet ruler,
It rains three times a month, it rains there,
Once a year hailstones fell there.*

When Kuṅṅuṭaiyā came to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, there were only two cows. Afterwards, this number grew to one thousand. There came to be a cattle fold for every veli³ and three harvests a year. This is how the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi prospered.

SONG:

*It was good, see how love reigned,
See what happened at that time*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā had spent five years in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, five years with his clansmen, and twenty years in the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. Thirty years, therefore, were now completed. At this point, Cellāttā⁴ of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows had been twenty-five years without a pūjā.

CELLĀTTĀ: In my country is an enormous paddy field with seventy-nine subdivisions. In Maturavaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam, one crop yielded seven or eight thousand calakai of paddy. The seven fine rice fields yield eight lakhs⁴ of golden grain and the other five fields yield ten lakhs of golden grain. And even if all the water in the Kāveri flows into Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and through the sluice gate, there is not enough to soak the seeds before planting them. When Kōḷattā Kavunṭar was alive, he performed three pūjās a day for me. After his death when the thousand clansmen got the king's blessing, they took my land and also took Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar with them. Now, twenty-five years have passed. Has Kuṅṅuṭaiyā died? Or is he alive? I don't know. The clansmen are eating all my wealth. They left me without even one pūjā a day. If there was a devotee of mine, would he leave me without a pūjā?

1 Shiva and Pārvati's main residence, high in the Himalayas.

2 Tāmarai means "lotus."

3 A measure of five or six acres.

4 A lakh equals one hundred thousand.

So Cellāttā suffered. "I will go and ask Vishnu if Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is alive or dead. He will know," she thought. So she veiled herself in seven thousand golden veils and set off for the milk sea.¹

SONG:

*Searching for the milk sea, searching,
Cellāttā is traveling at midday,
She is searching for Krishna, she is searching,
Now she is drawing near,
She is searching for Vishnu, she is searching,
She approaches joyfully
She runs to the milk sea, she runs,
Cellāttā is searching for Vishnu,
There Vishnu is not to be seen.*

Cellāttā stood and looked, but Vishnu was not on the milk sea. She thought, "I will go and look in the gods' council chamber," and set off for that place.

SONG:

*Searching for the gods' council chamber, searching,
Cellāttā walked quickly along the route,
To God's divine presence, divine presence,
The chaste lady is going there.*

Cellāttā arrived at the gods' council chamber in the palm leaf flower forest. There, in the palm leaf flower forest, was Vishnu. He was seated with his legs crossed. Vishnu saw Cellāttā coming towards him and welcomed her.

SONG:

*She paid obeisance to Vishnu,
She offered him her services,
She fell at the sacred feet of Vishnu,
She offered him her services,
She circled the sun and fell at his feet,
Approaching from the right side she fell at the feet of the God.*

VISHNU: Mother! There is no death for those who take refuge in me! You will live long! You will receive honours in your palace hall! You will attain the feet of the Lord! You will live like Īswara himself.²

He said that and he embraced Cellāttā, kissing her precious face. He hugged her and kissed her abundantly.

¹ There is a long standing Hindu mythical tradition suggesting that Vishnu reclines on a five-headed cobra that floats on a sea of milk (one of many seas that can be found in the sky) when he feels like having a rest.

² Īswara is Shiva.

VISHNU: Cellāttā! How are you?

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother. I am fine. Oh, Vishnu! When Kōḷattā Kavunṭar was alive, I was given a pūjā three times a day. After he died, the clansmen came to his son Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's place. There they took my land and divided it into shares. Then they took Kuṅṅuṭaiyā away with them. It has been twenty-five years since he left. They seized my land by fraud and took Kuṅṅuṭaiyā with them. Twenty-five years have now passed. Since then, no one has performed pūjā for me. I have become a pitiful beggar. If Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's time is up, then I don't know if I can continue to live. Elder brother! You must look and tell me if he is alive for me, oh, elder brother.

VISHNU: Cellāttā! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar left twenty-five years ago, you say. Therefore, how can I know?

CELLĀTTĀ: Oh, Vishnu! No one can exist on the earth without you knowing it.

VISHNU: Oh, lady! Truly, I don't know.

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother! You'll look and tell me now, won't you? I am coming to ask after having no pūjā for twenty-five years. Now, you are telling me that you don't know. Are you talking in self-conceit because you are on the throne? I will uproot these trees, the bushes, and your throne. You should go to earth and see where Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is and what has happened to him and tell me about it in three days.

VISHNU: Cellāttā! It has been twenty-five years since he left and now you bring the complaint before me!

All right, I will go now to earth and, if Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is there, I will bring him to your temple within two hours of Friday's sunrise. You go home now and be content.

After Cellāttā left in the middle of the night, Vishnu mounted his Garuda bird and set off for earth.

SONG:

*Searching for the earth, searching,
Vishnu is coming now,
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi,
Vishnu is coming
Looking for the Nattakkāḍu cattle fold,
Looking for the cattle fold,
Vishnu flies there invisibly.*

Vishnu came and stood near the Nattakkāḍu cattle fold. He came to the right side of the cattle fold and stood facing south. He had three namams¹ on the forehead and carried a right-spiralled conch and a sacred box on his shoulder. He looked like an ascetic, a penitent, a wandering renouncer, a Vaisnavite mendicant. He called, “Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar,” three times. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar was lying inside his hut. He came out and said angrily, “Who is calling me at this time?”

As he came out, he saw someone standing to the north inside the field.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, mendicant! This field has no gate. How did you get in?

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! There was a road leading north with thorns edging it. Without knowing that it led to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, I came here.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, mendicant! Who told you my name was Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar?

VISHNU: Oh, man! In the field lying to the right, on my way to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, I asked. I was told that the man sleeping in the cattle fold in the field to the south would be Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and to go to him.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, was it so? There is a cleft in the thorns. If you go in that direction you will find the road to the Land of Prosperity. Go!

VISHNU: Oh, man! The walk here was hard. I will stay here awhile and then go.

Saying this, he sat down near the entrance facing east.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! I am afraid. Don't get angry. Tell me, what is your country, your town?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Mendicant! Do not ask without reason at this hour about what town and what country this is. Be gone!

“This simpleton, it seems he doesn't listen to what I say,” Vishnu thought to himself. He took some sacred ash and threw it. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became quiet and went before Vishnu and sat down facing west.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! I am from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. My mother and father died when I was five. I then spent five years in the houses of my clansmen in the Land of Prosperity. Then, because it was not good there, I came to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi and am now attached to the palace of the king here.

VISHNU: Oh, man! The place you are in is not the palace of the king, but your own uncle's house.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, villain! You say this king's palace is my uncle's home!

He lifted his shepherd's fork in order to strike Vishnu.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Be still.

Vishnu threw some sacred ash.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: My goodness! Lord! Until now, I did not realize this was my mother's brother's house. I have learnt it from you.

VISHNU: Oh, man! Your own mother was born here. These men are your mother's brothers. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! When you go to the house each day what work do you do?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! Each day when I go to the palace, I draw water to fill the hot water vessel for bathing. Then I swing the king's younger sister in her swing for a while. Then I eat. Then I must feed the dog, return to this cattle fold and take care of the work here.

VISHNU: Oh, man. You say you push a swing. That girl is your mother's brother's daughter. I am going to marry you to her.

As he said this, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became angry. “You say a king's daughter is my mother's brother's daughter?”² He raised a shepherd's crook to hit Vishnu.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, be still.

As soon as Vishnu threw some more sacred ash, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's anger subsided.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! What did you say? Tāmarai is my mother's brother's daughter?

VISHNU: Oh, man! She is truly your mother's brother's daughter.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord. If that is so, then you must marry me to her.

VISHNU: I will do just that! Come, let's go to the palace.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: All right.

The two of them set off for the palace.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! There are guards. How shall we enter at night?

¹ The mark of a Vaisnavite devotee, made with three vertical stripes.

¹ The term used is māman, meaning (in this context) mother's brother.

² The most marriageable of all relatives, according to Kavunṭar caste tradition, is the matrilineal cross-cousin.

VISHNU: I am here to take care of all that. You must not be afraid. Come.

As soon as they drew near the palace, Vishnu took some sacred ash and threw it. The guards became dizzy and fell down in a faint. Vishnu asked Kuṅṅuṭaiyā to take him inside.

Episode 5 ✨

When they reached the inner front porch, Vishnu said:

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā! You rest here. I will take the form of a fly and fly above the house. At the time when the cocks crow, your mother's two brothers will come out to go to view the Garuda bird at the Pilliar temple. If, on the way they ask, "Who are you?" answer, "Uncle, it's me, of course. Give me my rightful woman!"¹

Saying this, Vishnu took the form of a fly and went into the house.

SONG:

*It was said to be good:
See how things were done with love,
At this time, the Lord Vishnu
Was there, he was there at that time
Before it became light, before dawn,
The cocks crowed there.*

The two kings got up and set off to view the Garuda. On their way, they saw Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's sleeping form.

TWO KINGS (speaking together): Who is that?

At the sound of this, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became frightened and forgot what Vishnu had told him.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: It's me, of course, oh, King.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*Lord. There is a pain in my stomach!
Reduce your harshness, oh, King,
Lord. My bowels are in turmoil now!
Oh, King, be gentle with me,
Lord. My bowels are in turmoil now!
Be gentle with me!
There is a pain in my stomach, oh, King,
Reduce your harshness towards me, oh, King.*

The kings saw him crying.

KING: Oh, maid! Come quickly. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar has stomach pains! Put some ginger in hot water and come quickly.

The maid did this and brought it to him. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā took it and drank it. Vishnu was watching all this from above. He thought, "Now nothing that I planned will happen," and he set off for the milk sea. After a time, the king returned.

KING: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Is your stomach-ache gone now?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: King! I am fine! I am all well now!

KING: Good, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Go to the cattle fold, do the milking and come.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā went, did the milking, and returned. He did the required work around the palace. He went to the cattle fold, drove the calves to the field and secured them there. Then he sat down at the foot of a tree and began to think.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: I have heard the ideas of a learned man. I have heard the speech of a dramatist. Would I still be alive if I had listened to his words last night, and asked the king for my right to marry my mother's brother's daughter? Will he come again? If he comes today, I will kill him with a single blow.

When the sun had set in the west, he finished his work, did the milking, and finished all the palace chores. Then he ate, and went to the cattle fold to sleep, laying his shepherd's crook near him. At this moment, Vishnu looked down from the palm leaf flower forest and thought, "Today I must get Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar married and send him to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows." So, he mounted his Garuda bird vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the gods' council chamber,
He is coming, searching for the earth,
That uprooter of giants
Harirāmā¹ is coming!
He who restored Alkalikai,²
The creator Krishna is coming!
Looking for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi,
The supreme Vishnu is coming!*

As before, the Lord went to the cattle fold and took the form of a mendicant. On the path to the north, he stood facing south. He called out, "Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar." Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar heard the noise, got up angrily and raised his crook to strike the mendicant.

VISHNU: Man! Be still!

¹ A man has a "right" over his maternal uncle's daughter and can demand to marry her.

¹ A name for Vishnu.

² A girl in the *Rāmāyana*, turned into stone for having been deceived by Indra, and whom Rāma (an incarnation of Vishnu) restored to life.

And he threw some sacred ash.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: What is it, mendicant? Yesterday you said you would enter the house. Were you really there? If I had listened to you and asked for the hand of the palace girl, would I still be alive?

He raised his staff again.

VISHNU: Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. Be still! If you hit me with such a big staff, would I survive?

Vishnu went to sit near the entrance of the cattle fold. Again, he threw some sacred ash. As soon as the ash was thrown, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar's anger was softened.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ (speaking softly): Lord. You said you would be in the house last night. Were you really there?

VISHNU: Man. I was there, but when the king came, you forgot everything I said. So, I came away.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord. However you do it, please marry me to my uncle's daughter.

VISHNU: All right, come! Let's go to the palace. But you must not forget what I told you earlier.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, Lord. That's good.

SONG:

*The mendicant walks ahead, walks ahead,
The Kavunṭar walks behind, walks behind,
Searching for the palace, searching,
They walk along quickly; they are walking quickly.*

The two men arrived at the palace and Vishnu, seeing the guards, threw some sacred ash and they became dizzy and fell down in a faint. As soon as the guards had fainted, the two men went inside. Just as before, Vishnu first told Kuṇṇuṭaiyā to lie down to rest. Then he took the form of a fly and went in the house. Just as on the first day, he repeatedly threw sacred ash on him to keep him awake. And just as before, the two kings got up, and as they were leaving to view the Garuda bird, they saw Kuṇṇuṭaiyā sleeping outside. "Who is this?" they asked.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: My uncle! I am Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, of course. Give me my rightful girl.

KING: Oh, villain! I raised you and have fed you for twenty years now. Having eaten well, you now come and suddenly say to me, "Uncle, give me my rightful girl!" Are you the father's sister's son or the mother's brother's son?

You dare to address me using kin terms? Oh, servant! Take him and beat him well.

The servants took hold of him. They tied him to a house post, brought a whip and beat him. Seeing this from inside the house, Vishnu thought, "I'll look after this later," and returned to the milk sea.

SONG:

*For five hours with a whip, my Lord,
See the whip thread fly in strands like fluffed cotton, my Lord,
For six hours with a whip, my Lord,
They beat him with insolence, my Lord,
With a whip having a blunt tip, my Lord
They are beating until the end breaks, my Lord
Not being able to stand the blows, my Lord,
He is jumping the height of a man, my Lord
Kuṇṇuṭaiyā's blood flows,
The blood is flowing, the blood is flowing,
With tired hands and body,
And with a heavy head that was tired,
The Lord fell to the earth and was unconscious for three nāḷikais.¹*

KING: Oh, servant. He who came as a beggar thought he would become a bridegroom. The villain! Fetter his chest, his wrists, his feet, his shoulders, his thighs. Tie him in twelve places, lay him down in front of the Pilliar temple, put a stone on him so big that even an elephant cannot lift it, and leave him. Villain! Let him die there.

The servants did all this. After a little while, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā came to consciousness and opened his eyes. He realized that there was a huge stone on top of him.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe. He who holds a conch, and a discus, and lives in Vaikunta. You have brought this condition upon me.

Thinking of Vishnu, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā cried. Vishnu saw Kuṇṇuṭaiyā crying from his place on the milk sea.

VISHNU: Oh ho! The boon I granted is lacking in something. My help has been thwarted.

Mounting his Garuda vehicle, he set off from the milk sea.

¹ Periods of twenty-four minutes each.

SONG:

*Our Lord has left the milk sea
He is coming, Lord Vishnu is coming,
He comes searching for the earth, my Lord,
Making it his target, my Lord
Our Lord is searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi
The Lord, Parantāmā, is coming.*

Arriving, he dismounted at the Pilliar temple. What form will the solitary divine being take? He took the form of a mendicant, a wanderer in a time of famine. He held a right-spiralled conch and a sacred yellow box on his shoulder.

VISHNU: Oh, man. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar!

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā opened his eyes.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, you big-mouthed mendicant! As long as I was alive, I should have stayed with the king and served him. But, listening to your words, I have ended up in this condition!

VISHNU: Man. These impediments along the road won't last. However much we have to suffer, it is only with suffering that things can be achieved. Be still!

He turned back to the west to look at the king's palace. As soon as the sacred ash was thrown on the palace, it caught fire.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*The fire burns with flames reaching to the sky!
Is that the palace of my uncle?
It's burning on account of its own fire
Is that the palace of my uncle?*

KING: Oh, servant. Run here. The palace has caught on fire and is burning. What's to be done? Whose curse is this? What sin have we committed and towards whom? Bring someone who knows magical fire-controlling verses here quickly! And on the way back, see if Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar is alive or dead.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Is the stone very heavy?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! Of course, it is a little heavy.

VISHNU: Man. That won't cause any problems. I am here. Stay like that for a little while.

As this point, two servants came running. As they approached, they saw Vishnu seated at the Pilliar temple. They thought, "Who is that great penitent there?" and they greeted him respectfully.

VISHNU: Man. Blessings to you!

SERVANT: Lord. Do you know any magical fire-controlling verses?

VISHNU: Man. I don't know any magic about such things. I am traveling from the north to the sacred waters of Kanyākumari.¹ I am resting here awhile to recover from the fatigue of walking.

SERVANT: Our king's palace has caught on fire and we can do nothing. He is asking if you can.

VISHNU: Man. There is nothing I can do.

The servants returned to the house and saw the king.

SERVANT: King! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar is lying there still alive. A mendicant is sitting nearby. We asked if he knew any magical verses. He answered, "I don't know any."

KING: Oh, is it so?

The two kings set off for the Pilliar temple. At the temple, they saw the mendicant and greeted him politely.

VISHNU: Man. Blessings to you!

KING: Lord. When I look at you, you seem to be a great man. Our palace has caught fire spontaneously and is burning. Do you know any way of halting it, Lord?

VISHNU: Man! I don't know anything about that. Have you beaten someone? What sin have you committed? That is why, perhaps, that a spontaneous fire has started.

KINGS: Lord! We haven't committed any wrongs like that. This dirty stray that you see before your feet came from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows twenty years ago. He said his name was Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and that his mother and father died at an early age. We gave him work and protected him for twenty years. He always slept in the cattle fold. Last night he came in the dark and slept on the front porch. As we left to view a Garuda when the cocks crowed, we found him and asked, "Who are you?" He answered, "Uncle! Give me my rightful girl!" We asked him if we were to understand that we were his mother's brother's sons,² and we beat him, not being able to suppress our anger. We left him to die under the stone that is before you. Except for this, we have not done anything heinous.

¹ The southernmost tip of India.

² Kuṅṅuṭaiyā addresses them as "mother's brother" for respect. Actually, they are the sons of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's mother's brother.

VISHNU: Oh, villains! You placed a stone on him and left him to die! Did you think about who he is? What more heinous crime is needed? Why shouldn't an angry fire seize the palace? Lift the stone quickly.

So, the kings lifted the stone to one side. When the stone was removed, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā got up and paid his respects to Vishnu.

VISHNU: Men, kings! Who is Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar? Do you know?

KINGS: Lord. We don't know.

VISHNU: Where was Ariyanācci, your father's sister, married? Where did your father marry your mother?

KINGS: Lord! Our father's sister was married in the Land of Abundance. Our father brought our mother from the Land of Abundance at his wedding.

VISHNU: Good. If it is so, then of course Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar is your father's sister's son. Because he was born when evil planets were in the ascendancy, he suffered for five years in the place of his clansmen and then came to you for twenty more. At the end of his troubles, he suffered pain. Man! Marikkolūntā Kavunṭar! In his land, the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, there is a river for which there is no equivalent in your land. Therefore, in the correct way, he is asking you for a girl. Give him the girl, your sister, without argument.

KING: Lords. Until now, we did not know he was our father's sister's son. Only now that you have said it do we know. Lord! Even if he is the father's sister's son, he has been with us for twenty years, and made a livelihood from us. We won't marry him in our palace. He is not a proper brother-in-law for us.

VISHNU: Man. If it is your wish, perform the wedding in the palace. Otherwise, send your sister to me and I will do it.

KING: Lord! It is good like that. I will send my sister. Oh, maid! Bring Tāmarai here quickly. There is a mendicant at the Pilliar temple. Take her to him and come.

So, the women took Tāmarai, left her at the Pilliar temple and returned. Tāmarai looked into the eyes of the mendicant and realized that he was Vishnu.

SONG:

*She paid obeisance to Vishnu,
She offered her services,
She fell at Vishnu's feet,
She offered her services.*

VISHNU: Oh, lady! There is no death for those who take refuge in me! You will live long! You will receive honours in your palace hall. Oh, lady, Tāmarai!

As long as you live, I will be there to convert the symbol of famine into the symbol of fertility. I will make the family that belongs to the poor become a family of the rich. Tāmarai! I am now going to marry you and your father's sister's son, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar.

TĀMARAI: Lord! At your pleasure, but I need some females for assistance.

Vishnu immediately called some heavenly maids, then he created an entire canopied structure. He invited the heavenly beings and kings to come. He performed the original wedding rituals of the Koṅku¹ farming community. As Kuṅṅuṭaiyā had no sister to perform the uniting ritual,² Indra's wife herself arrived and did this. For music, the eighteen instruments heard in heaven were played. Vishnu created a wedding thread with his divine power. A Brahmin recited the wedding chants and lit the sacred fire in the correct way. He performed the wedding necklace pūjā and handed the necklace to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, telling him to tie it on the girl's neck. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā thought of Vishnu and tied the necklace with three knots. After the bride and groom had bathed, they viewed the God of the Pilliar temple. Then they paid their respects to everyone. The kings and everyone else gave them their good wishes, saying, "Blessings to you." Soon after, all the gods left.

VISHNU: Man! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Now go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, with my blessings.

Having said this, he left for the milk sea. After he left, Tāmarai said to her husband:

TĀMARAI: Husband! You were a member of our household for twenty years! Was it not possible to tell me during this time that you were my father's sister's son?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Wife! I did not know myself until now that this was my uncle's house. Vishnu came to the cattle fold only three nights ago, woke me up and said, "Tāmarai is your aunt's daughter. That is, your mother was born in the Land of Abundance. I am going to marry her to you." It was only after that I knew you were my mother's brother's daughter. If I had known, would I not have told you?

TĀMARAI: Husband! What is our country?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Wife! The Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Do you have land?

¹ The region called Koṅkunāḍu, where the Kavunṭar community is found.

² A special ritual stressing the unity of brother and sister, performed only by the Koṅku Kavunṭar community and their associates.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! When my mother and father were alive, there was an enormous paddy field with seventy-nine subdivisions in my country, in Maturavaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam. One crop yielded seven or eight thousand calakai of paddy. And even if all the water in the Kāveri flowed into the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and through the sluice gate, it would not have been enough to soak the seeds before planting them. All this property was ours. But when I was five years old, my parents died. Then the clansmen came from the Land of Prosperity. They came, took the land, fraudulently seized everything, and distributed it amongst themselves. Then they took me back with them and made me graze buffaloes. After receiving only gruel there for five years, I gave up and left for your country where I have spent twenty years. Now Vishnu, in his grace, has let me know the true story and married me to you. The clansmen have now ploughed our land for twenty years and are paying tribute to the king. Will there be land for us now?

TĀMARAI: Husband! Don't you have even a little land?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife. Not even one acre.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*They imprisoned you there, imprisoned you,
Has Brahma written this fate on my head, alas, has he written it?
Not imprisoning you on sight,
Parantāmā took you to the prison
And imprisoned you there
The maiden is crying there,
She is wilting there being there, she is crying,
The flower parrot is pining there, she is pining.*

At this time, the kings in the palace called their servants and said, "Go see if Tāmarai is there." The servants went to look and returned.

SERVANTS: King! The two of them are at the Pilliar temple.

The kings laid out Tāmarai's gifts. They brought together dried-up cows, blind goats, a broken pot-hanger,¹ a quarter of a measure of crumbled lentil pieces, a quarter of a measure of kampu millet, and a loan of oil, fire and water.

KINGS: Oh, servants! Take all this to Tāmarai at the Pilliar temple and return.

The servants took it all and gave it to Tāmarai.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! What's all this?

TĀMARAI: Husband! These are our gifts.

Kunṇuṭaiyā came close and looked at the things.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! What is this?

TĀMARAI: Husband. That measure of tinai millet symbolizes that we must never touch this land again. The measures of varaku millet symbolizes that we must not come back. These are a villain's gifts, oh, husband! What is your clan?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. It is the Great Clan of Varaku Millet Non-Eaters of the farmers' caste.¹

TĀMARAI: Husband. You must not touch varaku millet with your hands.

She threw both the varaku and tinai millet on the path in front of the Pilliar temple. She put the rest of the things in a basket, placed this on her head, and said, "Husband! Let's set out for our country!" So, they set out.

SONG:

*Leaving the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, leaving that country,
Approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Approaching the country,
Leaving the great field, leaving the field,
Leaving the Kaṭṭapoḷḷi forest, leaving the forest,
Leaving the forest where the bamboo grows tall, grow tall,
Leaving the bamboo forest,
The Lord walks in front, walks in front,
The chaste woman walks behind, walks behind,
At the sun's Zenith, at midday, in the boiling sun,
In the unrelenting heat,
The bodies move swiftly, sweat pours forth
The two approach, walking in the heat.*

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Husband, my ankle is really hurting,
I am losing control,
Tie me, leave me and go
My kneecaps are hurting a lot,
I am panting,
I am very thirsty for water, husband
My tongue is parched,
I am yearning for cold water,
My teeth are becoming dry.*

TĀMARAI: Husband! I need a handful of water for my thirst. Husband. My face has not seen the sun for sixteen years. I cannot walk.

¹ A special device for hanging pots from the ceiling.

¹ Some Kavunṭar clan names imply such totem-like restrictions.

She set her basket down at the foot of a banyan tree and laid down under it.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! I will go and fetch some water.

And he set off. After Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai had left the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi and were in the forest, the kings ordered:

KINGS: Oh, servant! Tāmarai must never return to our country. Cut some thorns along the riverbank using the boat and use them to build seven fence rows. Let it be a fence that will ensure that the villain will never come back to our country.¹

The servants put up the thorn fencing as the kings ordered. At this time in the forest, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā returned with water and gave it to Tāmarai. After washing her face and quenching her thirst, Tāmarai stood up.

TĀMARAI: Husband. How much farther is it to our country?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife. It is close by now, only a little further.

They continued to walk a little further.

Episode 6 ✨

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! Look at that. There are the subdivided lands and the Cellāttā temple of Matukkarai. That, there, is our country.

SONG:

*It was good,
They came lovingly
To where gold springs from the earth,
They came to the sweet Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The one who defined the boundaries of countries,
The one with a tank that was dug through stone,
To the temple of thoughtful Cellāttā.*

The two of them arrived at the temple. Looking at it, they saw garbage scattered about the entrance. Tāmarai took a broom and swept it well.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! We must perform a pūjā for Cellāttā on Monday, the auspicious day.

The two went to the bank of the Kāci river to bathe and then returned and set out carefully a quarter measure of maize.² Then the two of them went to look at Cellāttā.

¹ This is the height of improper behavior towards a sister, who should always be welcome in her natal home.

² Kampu, a kind of field corn.

SONG:

*Falling at her feet,
Offering their services to the goddess,
Paying obeisance at her feet,
Offering their services to her.*

CELLĀTTĀ: Man! There is no death for those who take refuge in me! You will live long! You will receive honours in your palace hall! You will go to Vishnu's heaven! You will live like Shiva himself!

Then Cellāttā got to the point:

CELLĀTTĀ: Man! Who are you?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Mother! I am Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar.

CELLĀTTĀ: Man! It has been twenty-five years since you left. Where have you been for so many days?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Mother! I spent five years in the houses of the clansmen, grazing buffaloes. Then I set off from the Land of Prosperity and spent twenty years in the home of my mother's brother. After twenty years had passed, Vishnu came and married me to my mother's brother's daughter, Tāmarai. Until then, I did not know it was my mother's brother's house.

CELLĀTTĀ: That is good. Is this your wife?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, oh, Mother.

Tāmarai looked at Cellāttā and worshipped her.

CELLĀTTĀ: Blessings to you, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! For the past twenty-five years since your father's death, I have had no pūjā. Do a pūjā for me now!

So right then, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā made the eighteen decorations. He broke a coconut and set it before her with bananas and began a pūjā.

SONG:

*"Ting, ting!" He rang the bell,
From below he lifted the pot of water on high,
A bath of milk, a bath of honey,
A bath of rose water, a bath of sacred ash,
It was all performed properly.*

When he had finished the pūjā for the god, the pūjā for the family deity, and the pūjā to the fifty-eight lingams, he paid his respects to the goddess. He was blessed by Cellāttā, his shoulders straightened, the hall of his heart became peaceful and he was happy.

CELLĀTTĀ: Man, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! This is the first time my heart has been at peace in twenty-five years. From this day onwards, three pūjās must be performed for me daily.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Good, oh, Mother. I will do just that.

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
It was done with love,
See how things were done for Īswari.¹
After this it rained three times a month
In the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
Each year hailstones fell.*

When Kuṅṅuṭaiyā came to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, it began to rain and there were floods everywhere on that day, as soon as the moon set in search of Indra.² The sun rose in search of the moon, the thousand clansmen harnessed their oxen to the ploughs and came to the enormous paddy field in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. When Tāmarai saw this, she said, "Husband. All those oxen, where are they going?"

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Wife! As I told you earlier, our clansmen fraudulently seized the land. Therefore, it is they who are coming to plough it.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*The slave, my husband, was not fed candy,
The slave taken in hand by Vishnu was not fed
They will make you a slave, again enslave you,
Brahma has written this fate on my head,
The chaste woman is crying, she is hot with indignation,
She is wilting
The woman is crying, the flower parrot is pining.*

TĀMARAI: Husband. You gave all these prosperous lands freely to your clansmen. Now, have you come back here for your food?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! How many times have I told you? When I was a child they behaved fraudulently. Okay, come and feed me. I'm hungry.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā lifted his heavy feet, washed his hands, ate food, drank cow's milk and chewed betel leaf and areca nut. "Oh, wife," he said. "Stay here. I'm going somewhere and will return." He then put a shawl on his shoulder, took his staff made from the branch of a tree, and set out.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it
Looking for the Chola Country, looking for it,
Seeing hills and climbing them, climbing,
Seeing valleys and crossing them, he goes
He reached the Chola Country, came to the palace and saw the king
He paid obeisance to the king,
He offered his services,
He fell at his feet,
He offered his services.*

KING: Man. There is no death for those who take refuge in me. Man, who are you?'

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: King! I am the son of Kōlattā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

KING: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. You left with your clansmen twenty-five years ago. Where have you been all this time? Are you all right?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: King. I spent five years with my clansmen, herding buffalo and drinking only millet gruel. For five years, I had no curry and rice so then I gave that up and went to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. I spent twenty years there. After twenty years, Vishnu came and told me that place was the home of my uncle. He then married me to my mother's brother's daughter, Tāmarai. Yesterday, he sent me off to my own country. As soon as I arrived, I performed a pūjā at the Cellāttā temple. Oh, King, when I came yesterday, a fine rain fell on the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Today in the morning, the clansmen from the Land of Prosperity came with a thousand teams of oxen. My wife saw them and asked, "Husband, where are those oxen teams going?" I answered, "Wife, the clansmen are coming to plough the thousand shares of land." She said, "Husband. How much land was given to the clansmen? Husband. In your time of want, how can you bear to see them come to plough?" She began to argue with me like this. Without telling her, I decided to come here to see you.

KING: Okay, good. Oh, badge-wearing servant! Go immediately to the Land of Prosperity and bring the thousand Kavunṭars here.

SERVANT: Good, King!

SONG:

*Like that, the servants said, "fine."
They served with love,
They left the Chola Country,
The servants are going now to the Land of Prosperity.*

¹ Cellāttā is a form of Īswara, the wife of Shiva.

² Looking for him in the gods' council chamber.

When the sun was at its zenith at midday, the servants arrived at the Pilliar temple in the Land of Prosperity. At that time, the thousand Kavunṭars had left their ploughs and come home to eat. On the way, they saw the servants waiting at the Pilliar temple. "What news is there?" they asked.

SERVANTS: Oh, Kavunṭars! The king told us to bring all of you thousand people to him quickly.

"Fine," said the Kavunṭars. They went home to eat and then set off for the Chola Country.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land of Prosperity, leaving it,
The Kavunṭars are approaching the Chola Country,
They take large running steps, large steps,
They come with swift dispatch, the Kavunṭars,
In the burning sun, in the sun,
In the unrelenting sun, they are approaching
The thousand Kavunṭars arrived in the Chola Country and addressed the king
They paid obeisance to him, they offered their services,
They fell at his feet; they offered their services.*

KING: Men. Blessings to you! Good, have all thousand of you come?

KAVUNṬARS: King. We have all come.

Showing them Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, the king asked, "Do you know who is standing here?"

KAVUNṬARS: Who is it? We don't know, oh, King.

KING: Okay. I will tell you. This is Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, son of Kōlattā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, whom you took with you twenty-five years ago.

The Kavunṭar clansmen looked at Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and said to themselves, "Oh, brother! Do you see him? We thought he died twenty-five years ago when he took the buffaloes to the Kāci or the Benares riverbank to graze. Now, he stands before us as strong as an elephant."

So they spoke between one another, and their hearts became weak.

KING: Oh, Kavunṭars. You took Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and fed him millet gruel for five years, thinking he would die. He escaped and spent twenty years in the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. After this, at a time when Cellāttā has not had a pūjā for twenty-five years, she went to Vishnu. "My enormous paddy field was fraudulently seized by the clansmen and my devotee taken away by them. I have been without a pūjā for twenty-five years. Go immediately and bring my devotee," she said to Vishnu, asserting her rights. Vishnu went

to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi and married Kuṇṇuṭaiyā to his mother's brother's daughter. Then he sent him off to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Now that he has arrived, Cellāttā is getting all three pūjās each day. Therefore, as the proverb says:

*The one from the forest returned to the forest,
The one from the city returned to the city.*

And so, as I said to you earlier, give him back his country and his land.

KAVUNṬARS: Good. Oh, King. But we will take this harvest first. We will then turn it over to him before the next replanting.

KING: Okay. Let it be so. But you must give some land to Kuṇṇuṭaiyā now. He is now married and has family. Only by having a little land to plant will he be able to live. Therefore, whatever happens, give Kuṇṇuṭaiyā a little land now.

KAVUNṬARS: Oh, King! One mile west of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows is a little field. It is three-quarters of a vaḷḷam in size. Let him plough that. We will give him the rest of the land after the next harvest.

KING: Man. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! As they have said, plough and reap that three-quarters of a vaḷḷam for this harvest. If you are lucky, you will be able to grow a little. They will turn over the enormous paddy field to you at the next harvest.

So the clansmen took leave of the king and returned to the Land of Prosperity.

KING: Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. You go and plough too.

"Good, oh, King," said Kuṇṇuṭaiyā, and he set off for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, where Tāmarai was standing, waiting for him. As soon as Kuṇṇuṭaiyā returned, he ate, took betel and areca nut and sat down.

TĀMARAI: Husband! You have come from the west. Where have you been?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! I have come from seeing the King of the Chola Country.

TĀMARAI: For what reason did you go to see the king?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! When I was five years old and my parents died, the clansmen came and asked for the land. At that time the king said, "Take the land and the child, but when the child becomes an adult, you must give the land back to him." This was the contract agreement he announced. Therefore, today I went and asked for my land. The king immediately sent for the clansmen and at their arrival told them to give the land to me. The clansmen answered, "King, let us reap the coming harvest and then we will turn it over." The king replied that some land was to be given to me now. The clansmen said that to the west of our town on Oñciṛukkanuvāy

Hill; there is three-quarters of a vaḷlam of land that I can plough for the coming harvest. The king has asked me to do this. So, I will finish the pūjā at Cellāttā's temple, and go to the Land of Prosperity. I will ask the men there to bring the ox teams, and then return.

TĀMARAI: Husband. As long as we live, we must never ask the clansmen for anything. Go and ask for an ox team from the Kavunṭars of Aṇiyappūr, one of the thousand revenue villages that belongs to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

SONG:

*It was said to be good
He went with love
Looking for Aṇiyappūr
He's going, the Lord is going
When he saw someone, he walked like a swan
When he saw one, he had the speed of a horse.*

On arriving in Aṇiyappūr, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā went to the house of the biggest Kavunṭar and was received there.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. What is your town?

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Man. I am Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, the son of Kōḷattā Kavunṭar of Poṇṇivaḷa Nāḍu.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Lord! Twenty-five years ago, weren't you taken by the Kavunṭar clansmen? Where have you been all this time?

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Man! I spent five years in the houses of my clansmen. After that, I went to the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi and spent twenty years there. I married my mother's brother's daughter, Tāmarai. Now I have returned to my own country.

The powerful Kavunṭar immediately called all the men of the town.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, men. Our Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, of the biggest house, who left twenty-five years ago, escaped and has returned, announcing his mother's name.² He has just now come to my house.

Hearing this, the Kavunṭars of the town brought Kuṇṇuṭaiyā gifts, revered him and poured a few crores of jewels before him.

KAVUṆṬAR: Oh, King! Now that you have come, there is rain in our country.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭar men! It has rained. I have returned to you.

KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. Why have you come looking for us?

¹ Possibly named Calf's Teat Hill. Later, the same place is called Lizard's Stone Hill.

² Actually, he uses his father's name, Kōḷattā, to identify himself.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭars. I must plough a field tomorrow. I came to ask for your oxen team.

KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. We will bring an oxen team to your house tomorrow. Gather your seeds together in readiness.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Good. Okay, I will take leave.

SONG:

*So the monarch ruled thus:
It was said to be good,
It was done with love.*

Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar returned from Aṇiyappūr to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

TĀMARAI: Husband! What did the Kavunṭar of the biggest house say to the pair of oxen?

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. He said he would bring it here tomorrow morning, and that we should get the seeds ready.

TĀMARAI: Husband. I forgot to tell you to ask him for seeds. Return to the Kavunṭar of the biggest house in Aṇiyappūr and ask him for six measures of maize and six measures of kollu millet.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! They are bringing the plough. We must not ask them for seeds too. I will go to the Land of Prosperity and get them from the clansmen.

TĀMARAI: Husband! As long as we live, we must never ask the clansmen for anything. Go to Aṇiyappūr.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. I will do that.

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
He went with love,
He walked with big, running steps,
He moved with great speed,
Looking for the Land of Prosperity,
A fine king is approaching.*

¹ The village Aṇiyappūr in the story area still exists today. It lies just a few kilometers from where Tāmarai will eventually have a small shrine built to honor her two dead brothers and where a larger shrine has now been constructed which has become the focus of a major local festival celebrating these dual heroes' storied lives. Both Brahmins and Kavunṭars live in Aṇiyappūr. Whether other castes are resident there as well is not made clear but seems likely.

As Kuṅṅuṭaiyā approached the land of Prosperity, when the sun was at its zenith at midday, the Kavunṭar clansmen were already gathered at the Pilliar temple. In the crowd, the men said to each other, "It looks as if Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar is approaching, oh, elder brother." At this moment, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā arrived. The clansmen said, "Come here, elder brother. How are you? You have come in strong sun. For what reason are you here?"

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Men! Tomorrow morning, I will plough the land. I have come to ask you for some seeds.

CLANSMEN: Okay, good!

Then Paḷanicāmi, the son of the Kavunṭar of the biggest house, spoke with malice in his heart.

PAḶANICĀMI: Oh, elder brother. I will go and bring you seeds.

Having said this, he went home and said, "Mother! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has arrived and asked for seeds. Take six measures of maize and six measures of kollu millet, toast them until they are golden, and bring them."

Then the mother roasted and delivered what was ordered. Paḷanicāmi tied them in separate cloths and came to the Pilliar temple. He handed them to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, saying, "Elder brother, here are the seeds."

SONG:

*Kuṅṅuṭaiyā the lordly king, who was like summer thunder,
The one with a golden plough, one who speaks sparingly,
The one who does not take revenge when treated unjustly,
The virtuous lord,
The one who praises God when it rains,
The one who suggests a pūjā should be conducted
On hearing the pounding of grain.*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā accepted the seeds, saying, "Good, man! I will take my leave."

CLANSMEN: Good. Goodbye.¹

As Kuṅṅuṭaiyā approached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, Tāmarai stuck her head outside and stood watching.

TĀMARAI: Husband. Are you coming from the Land of Prosperity when I said to go to Aṅṅiyappūr?

She looked at the seeds and noticed that they were toasted.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Not imprisoning on sight, not imprisoning too,
Parantāmā took me and put me in prison, put me in prison,
He imprisoned you, imprisoned you too,
Has Brahma written this fate on my head, alas, has he written it?
Husband! Not imprisoning on sight,
He took me and put me in prison
The chaste woman is crying, she is hot with indignation,
She is wilting
The good woman is crying, the flower parrot is pining,
What has been given is twenty years old, these seeds won't sprout.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. I did not know they had toasted what they gave me. There is always Vishnu, no matter who ever deceives me. If he is full of grace, then never mind if the seeds won't sprout. You must not pick arguments with me, oh, wife.

The next morning, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā got up, bathed on the Benares riverbank, performed pūjā for Cellāttā, ate, chewed betel and areca nut, and sat down. At that time, the Kavunṭar of the biggest house came to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā. A thousand ox teams from Aṅṅiyappūr were brought and stood ready at the Pilliar temple.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. We have brought the ox teams. Get the seeds and come, let's go.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā answered, "Okay, we'll go," and started off.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! Tāmarai, the ox teams have come. Let's start for the field.

TĀMARAI: Husband. If I come and sow, the seeds will not sprout. Later the people of the town will say, "The villain! Because she sowed the seeds at first, nothing has grown." The people who have tongues, the good people, will gossip. The people in the town, our relatives, will gossip. Husband. Because of this I will not come. You go and do the seeding and return.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became angry. "Okay, you need not come," he said. He put the seeds in a basket, placed it on his head, and took it to the Pilliar temple. He placed the seeds in front of the god, prostrated before him, and said, "Oh, Kavunṭar men! Let's start, we'll set off." Everyone left.

SONG:

*The lord walks ahead, walks ahead,
The Kavunṭars walk behind walk behind,
Looking for Lizard Stone Hill, looking for the hill,
They come as a group, the Kavunṭars, the Kavunṭars.*

¹ Literally "go and return."

When they arrived and looked at Lizard Stone Hill, they saw so many stones and thorns that there wasn't even room to place one's feet. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā stood facing north.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, oh, my Vishnu, my Vishnu! I have not the strength to gather up all these stones and thorns. You must come and assist, oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam.

From the milk sea, Vishnu saw that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā was calling him to come. "The conspiring clansmen have given Kuṅṅuṭaiyā three-quarter of a field on Lizard Stone Hill, covered with stones and thorns," he thought. "I must go and oversee this." Vishnu mounted his Garuda bird and set off.

SONG:

*Vishnu has left the milk sea,
He is approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The one who removed the curse on Akāḷikai,¹
Harirāmā is coming.*

Vishnu arrived at Lizard Stone Hill and stood there, unknown to all. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar stood facing north, thinking of Vishnu, with his curved knife in his hand. Vishnu stood facing him, looking south. Before Kuṅṅuṭaiyā could cut down a single thorn, or lift a single stone, a field spread before him with Vishnu's grace, free of stones and thorns and with an extra quarter of a vallam added to it. As soon as the land was cleared, the Kavunṭar of the biggest house addressed Kuṅṅuṭaiyā.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Holding his curved plough, he ploughs his agricultural kingdom. Holding his crooked plough, he ploughs his Koṅku² agricultural kingdom. Lord, you are a man of women's speech.³ You take the plough in your hands first and make three furrows and then hand it to us.⁴ After that, you can sow the seeds.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā said, "Okay," took the plough in his hands, ploughed three furrows and then handed it to the Kavunṭar of the biggest house.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. We will plough now. You sow the seeds.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā put the seeds in his waist cloth fold and stood facing north, thinking of Vishnu. Before the seeding, and without anyone seeing him, Vishnu came running. He stood facing south in a northern place, took the grain and said, "The caste men, the clansmen gave you toasted maize. Let the toasted maize grow into heavenly pearls. Let the roasted kollu millet grow into gold

1 Akāḷikai is Tamil for Ahalya, wife of the sage Gautama. The god who removed her curse is Rāmā (here called Harirāmā).

2 Name of the area where the Kavunṭars live.

3 Soft spoken, reserved.

4 This is a traditional ritual. Even important Kavunṭar leaders must touch the plough.

pearls." As he said this, he took three handfuls of grain and sowed them.¹ Then he set off for the milk sea.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā sowed maize on one side and millet on the other, until it was all gone. The thousand ox teams and Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar all set off for the town.

Episode 7 ✪

SONG:

*The lord walked ahead, walked ahead,²
The Kavunṭars followed behind, followed behind,
The divine one walked ahead, walked ahead,
The Kavunṭars followed behind, followed behind.*

As they all drew near the Cellāttā temple, Tāmarai stood watching them. When they arrived and saw Tāmarai, they asked, "Lord, who is this?"

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Men. This woman is my wife, Tāmarai Kavunṭacci.³

All the Kavunṭars paid their respects to Tāmarai.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Kavunṭars! Blessings to you! Oh, Kavunṭar of the biggest house. Do me a favour, all of you. Oh, Kavunṭar! We are now cooking in Cellāttā's temple. It is not good to cook in her place. In the time when my parents-in-law were alive, there seems to have been a palace standing to the west of the temple. The caste men, the clansmen, knocked it down and levelled it, and planted castor oil seeds. We must build a house here where we stand. You all must bring the necessary materials and help us build a thatched house.

KAVUṆṬAR: Okay. We will build it within eight days.

They went home, brought the necessary materials, and finished it. Then the Kavunṭar of the biggest house went to Tāmarai and said, "Wait for an auspicious day and then move into the house." Then the Kavunṭars went back to Aṇiyappūr. Tāmarai waited for Monday, the good day, the day Shiva was born. As soon as the moon had set and the sun had risen, she went to the new house, ritually boiled a pot of milk, cooked rice,⁴ ate and the two were happy.

1 This is a parallel for the ritual ploughing of the first three furrows.

2 The reference to "lord" in this line and "divine one" two lines later, refers to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, who is greatly respected by these other Kavunṭars. They are not lineage rivals, but rather distant relatives from Aṇiyappūr. They are allies who support the heroes' family.

3 Female form of the title "Kavunṭar."

4 A special ritual, Pongal (poṅkaḷ in Tamil), performed on many occasions during which the newness of a circumstance is celebrated.

SONG:

*It rained three times a month,
Hailstones fell there once a year,
Where the threshing is done with elephants
Oh, beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The paddy was so abundant that the surplus
Was sprouting on the threshing floor.*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar finished the pūjā at the Cellāttā temple and then went to his field, thinking, "Let's see if the maize has sprouted yet." When he looked, fifteen days had passed but no maize stalk had any lovely little shoots emerging from the earth that were standing up proud and plump. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā returned home.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Has the maize sprouted?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. Not one grain of maize has sprouted yet.

Then he ate and sat down to chew betel and areca nut. After another week had passed, he went to the field thinking, "Let me look again." At a distance, there was one sprout. After thirty days had passed, the field was full of maize shoots. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā went to see and returned home.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Has the maize sprouted now?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. Are you going to pick a fight with me saying that the roasted seeds I accepted and brought back won't sprout? Go and look now. We will have four mota¹ at the harvest.

TĀMARAI: Husband! If it rains three times a month, it will sprout well, but it won't grow and flower.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Okay. We'll see, oh, wife!

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
See how things were done with love,
One day, one fine day,
Look what happened at this time.*

At this time, the clansmen came and seeing the field said, "It looks like Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar will have four mota of ripe grain. Okay, let it be. We will send our cows to graze."

Vishnu saw the clansmen speaking.

VISHNU: Oh ho! The boon I granted has misfired. It is being affected by the blemish in the penance. I must go and look after matters.

Immediately, he mounted his Garuda vehicle and descended. At dawn, the clansmen had already brought their cows and released them in the crop. At that moment, without anyone knowing it, Vishnu threw sacred ash and locked the basket-mouth of each cow, so that they couldn't eat the sprouts. After a time, the clansmen drove the cows back to the Land of Prosperity.

SONG:

*See the monarch rule thus:
It was said to be good, see how things were done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress,
The king's reign is just,
The king is ruling authoritatively.*

It was a time of heavy rains in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The Kaṭuku sampa paddy prospered. It rained abundantly in that country. The miḷaku sampa paddy prospered.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar got up in the morning, went and bathed on the Benares riverbank, performed the pūjā for the god, the family deity, and the fifty-eight lingams, then came home. He put his Koṅku blanket on his shoulders, took his metal-tipped walking stick made of a tree branch, and went to look at his crop. As he looked, he saw the grain all bent over. He looked on all four sides. It was the same everywhere. He thought, "Some cows must have come during the night and grazed." He returned home.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Has the grain begun to bud?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! It has budded, and besides, last night some cows came and grazed, but they did not bite the sprouts, only trampled them.

SONG:

*It was a time of heavy rain there, of heavy rain,
There were budding, ripening tracts of paddy, tracts of paddy,
Pouring rain covered the land there, heavy rain,
It rained abundantly in that country,
The country where elephants were used to thresh the paddy,
Beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Where gold springs from the earth,
The famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows and
The country that contains the town of Cilukkāmpuliyūr in its lesser division.*

After another week, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā went again to see the field and saw that the fifteen-day-old buds had not yet opened. He returned home with a faint heart.

TĀMARAI: Husband! You went today to see, have the buds opened?

¹ A mota equals sixteen vaḷḷam which equals 31 measures.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! They are still as they were before. The buds have not opened.

TĀMARAI: Husband! It has been three months since we planted the maize and still the buds do not open, husband?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. You have not yet been to the field to see. Tomorrow we will go together to look.

The next day, the two set off.

SONG:

*The husband walked ahead,
The chaste woman followed behind,
The divine one walked ahead,
The rare parrot followed behind,
Looking for the Lizard Stone Field,
Tāmarai is coming along too.*

The two arrived at the field, looked at its four sides and then halted at the right edge. Tāmarai, wondering why the spikes had not opened, went to the centre of the field and forced open one spike to look. Inside were pearls, nine kinds of gems, onyx, topaz, cat's eyes and coral. Seeing it full of these jewels, Tāmarai exclaimed. "Oh, husband! Come here! Look at this spike!" KunṆuṭaiyā went to see. "Oh, wife! did you say that roasted maize wouldn't grow? Look, it has produced pearls and cat's eyes!"

TĀMARAI: This is all by Vishnu's grace.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! When shall we cut off the spikes?

TĀMARAI: Husband. If we leave it to paid labour, everyone will come to know and they will kill us. Therefore, you go to Aṇiyappūr, to the Kavunṭar of the biggest house and ask him for someone to come and cut off the stalks. Afterwards, we two will open the spikes. Okay, let's go and see the millet.

On looking at the millet, these plants, too, were full of the nine kinds of gems. Seeing this, the two set off for home.

SONG:

*Leaving Lizard Stone Hill, leaving the hill,
The two people are coming
The lord walks ahead, walks ahead,
Tāmarai walks behind, walks behind,
The divine one walks ahead, walks ahead,
The rare parrot follows behind, she follows behind.*

When the two returned home, KunṆuṭaiyā ate, and chewed betel and areca nut. Then he said, "Oh, wife! I am going to Aṇiyappūr," and he set off.

SONG:

*Searching for Aṇiyappūr, searching,
He travels with great speed, my Lord, he is coming,
When he sees someone, he walks like a swan, like a swan,
When he sees no one, he has the speed of a horse,
Seeing hills and climbing, climbing,
Seeing valleys and crossing them, he is coming.*

KunṆuṭaiyā arrived in Aṇiyappūr and addressed the Kavunṭar of the biggest house.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭar! On Monday all of you come to our house to cut the stalks of grain, please.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Okay. How is the crop in your field?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Whatever there is, there will be four mota of maize and one mota of millet. You come on Monday.

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Okay, good, I will come then.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Good, oh, Kavunṭar! I will take leave.

And he returned to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

TĀMARAI: Husband! What did the Kavunṭars say?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! They said they would all come on Monday.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good. Come and eat.

KunṆuṭaiyā sat down, ate, and was content.

SONG:

*See the monarch rule thus:
It was said to be good, see how it was done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress,
It rained three times a month,
The monarch is ruling in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

KunṆuṭaiyā got up before dawn on Monday, before the cocks crowed, went and bathed on the Benares riverbank, performed a pūjā for Cellāttā and returned home to wait for the Kavunṭars. In a short while, all the Aṇiyappūr Kavunṭars arrived. They said, "Okay, we've all arrived. Let's get started."

SONG:

*The lord walked ahead, walked ahead,
The Kavunṭars walked behind, walked behind,
Tāmarai, too, walked ahead, walked ahead,*

*The thousand men walked behind, walked behind,
Searching for Lizard Stone Field, searching for the field,
They are coming, all of them.*

The thousand men arrived at the field, and two stood near each furrow. They cut the grain and stacked it in hillocks. They also stacked the millet in hillocks. By noon, when the sun was at its zenith, the work was finished and the Kavunṭars took leave of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and returned home. After they had left, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai took a basket and sat down facing north on a hillock.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ AND TĀMARAI (praying): Vishnu, creator of earth the creator of forms, owner Rescuer of people in trouble, orphan-saver. How can just two people break off so many spikes of grain? You must come and assist us, oh, ruler of Conjeepuram!

While thinking of Vishnu, they broke open just one pod of grain. Vishnu saw this and thought, "Oh ho! My boon must not be faulted. They are calling me because they cannot break off the spikes of so much grain." So, Vishnu mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:
*Leaving the milk sea,
Vishnu is coming,
Searching for the earth,
Vishnu is coming,
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
He is coming, our Vishnu.*

Vishnu arrived at Lizard Stone Hill and stood there unknown to anyone. Vishnu threw sacred ash, at which point Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai broke off two spikes of grain and put them in a basket. Five thousand spikes of grain broke off and fell into the basket in half a second, and the hillock disappeared. Then the hillock of millet was tackled. As the two lifted sticks to break off seed pods, Vishnu again threw sacred ash. Without anyone knowing about it, a thousand sticks beat the pods and it was finished.

TĀMARAI: Husband! In your parents' time they did the threshing with elephants. Go to the Chola Country and ask the king for some elephants. We will do our threshing with them.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Good, oh, wife!

"I will go," he said and set off.

SONG:
*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving the country,
Approaching the Chola Country, approaching that country,
Leaving the dark forest, leaving the forest,*

*Leaving the Kaṭṭapoli forest, leaving the forest,
Leaving the ginger fragrant forest, fragrant forest,
The lemon fruit forest, fruit forest.*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā arrived in the Chola Country and greeted the king.

KING: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. Blessings to you! How are your crops?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Whatever there is, with your grace there will be four mota of maize, oh, King! In my father's time, the threshing was done with elephants. My wife has said that we must thresh with elephants in the same way. Therefore, I have come to you to ask for elephants.

KING: Your wife is very able.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: It is true, she is very able.

KING: Yes. You are innocent. It is good that she should be like that. Oh, servant! Tell the elephant driver to bring an elephant.

SERVANT: King. Good.

And he told the elephant driver to bring an elephant.

KING: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Go, finish the threshing, and bring the elephant back.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, King! Good.

And he took the elephant and started off.

SONG:
*Leaving the Chola Country, leaving it,
He approaches the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Where gold springs from the earth, gold springs up,
He approaches the famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā took the elephant and arrived at Lizard Stone Field.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. I have brought an elephant.

TĀMARAI: Husband. Good. Now begin threshing.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā spread the heads of grain out on a stone outcropping, and, thinking of Vishnu, he stood with the elephant facing north and began to drive it. After three rounds, the husks had fallen off. He drove three more rounds and stopped, as all the grains had settled together. "Oh, wife," he said, "You sweep the grain into a basket and I will winnow." As he lifted the basket onto his head, he thought of Vishnu who, in his mercy, winnowed with a thousand baskets in no time.

When the winnowing was finished, all the grain was gathered together in big, measured heaps.

TĀMARAI: Husband. Return the elephant, get the king's blessing, and come back.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, said to be good,
He is approaching with love, approaching,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving that country,
The lord is approaching the Chola Country.*

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā reached the Chola Country and paid the king his respects.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord. I have brought back the elephant.

KING: Okay. Good! Have you finished the threshing?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, King! It is finished. I need your golden measure. When all is measured, I will bring it back.

KING: Okay. Good! Oh, servant women! Come and bring the official vaḷḷam measure.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā took the vaḷḷam measure and set out.

SONG:

*Our lord has left the Chola Country,
He is approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The forest of sleeping lions,
The forest of small dozing tigers,
The forest of sleeping yāḷis,¹
The forest of sleeping owls, my Lord.*

He arrived at Lizard Stone Field and said, "Oh, wife! Take the basket and I will measure. We will see how much there is. If you see some beggar coming along the path, let me know. Instead of giving one measure of raki millet and one measure of maize, we'll quickly cover the raki and give only maize."

Then Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar sat down facing north, thought of the god's council meeting and counted "One measure, two, three, five, seven, nine." While he measured, Vishnu watched and thought, "Will he give alms or will he refuse?" So Vishnu gathered the shepherds grazing goats and cows in all the fields, placed them off to the right, and put Vaisnavite forehead marks on them. Then and gave them conch shells and metal gongs to hold in their hands. There were nine hundred and ninety-nine boys in all. With Vishnu's aid, the total number of persons disguised as mendicants numbered one thousand. All of them came to the field and approached the stone outcropping.

¹ A mythological animal with the head of a lion and large, protruding eyes.

Tāmarai saw the wandering beggars coming from the north and realized in her heart that it was Vishnu approaching. She was happy and her shoulders straightened in joy. When the mendicants were near, she said, "Husband! Some wanderers are approaching."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! Tell them, "go away!"

But Tāmarai faced the beggars and called them, saying, "Lords, come!" Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became angry, saying, "You stupid fool. I said to tell them to go away. Instead, you call them saying, 'Come, Lords.'" In anger, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā raised his shepherd's crook.

TĀMARAI: Husband. Be calm. Why are you distressed? All this was given to us as alms by Him, God.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: What's that? Did that big-mouthed beggar give all this to us? I earned all this with my hard work, in three months.

By this time, a thousand beggars had come to the rock outcropping and were standing there. The king was like summer thunder. "To give a vaḷḷam to one or two people is one thing," he said, "But when a thousand people stand here how much must be given!" He became angry and sat on the heap of grain. He lifted the vaḷḷam measure in his hand and said, "Oh, wife! Hold this! Give to whoever you want," and he began measuring. Tāmarai took two vaḷḷams and offered this to the lead beggar. Then she gave one vaḷḷam apiece to each of the others. When everyone had been given something, they looked around and found there were only five vaḷḷam of grain left.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: You widow¹ who has given away too much grain. I had planned to exist a long time on that, but you have distributed it all to beggars, villain!

Thus, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā picked an argument with Tāmarai. Meanwhile, Vishnu caused the thousand beggars to disappear. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, becoming angry, took the vaḷḷam measure in his hand. He went to the place in the Chola Country to return it, and then came back. After he had left, Tāmarai took the remaining grain, put it in a basket on her head, and set off for home. Before either of them reached home, however, the thousand beggars had carried the thousand vaḷḷam of pearls and put them inside. The Kavunṭar returned from the Chola Country, and on arrival, he angrily reached to open the house door. But the door would not open. Tāmarai arrived home at the same time.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife! Why can't I open the door? It seems that the latch has fallen into place. Come, together we will lift the door.

When they lifted the door together, pearls began to slide out through the crack underneath, making a *jala, jala* sound. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā saw the pearls and said,

¹ A very derisive term when used to address one's own wife.

"Oh, wife! All the pearls the thousand beggars took have been brought here! Why did not they take them away? What is the reason for this?"

TĀMARAI: Husband. God would not take away the wealth he gave us. He was just testing to see if you were generous, that is all. Husband! I have seen you perform a good deed, have I not?

SONG:

*It was a time of justice, a sweet time,
The king is ruling authoritatively,
The one who has a signet ring on his finger is ruling, is ruling,
Is ruling the country alone.
It rained three times a month, it rained three,
It poured in the land, and once a year, hailstones fell.
A good time, a sweet time
See the monarch rule in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
The fine tender vine, Tāmarai, the all-knowing one,
Goddess of the agriculturalists, woman pregnant with revelation.*

One day, one time, she had a thought in her heart. "Oh ho!" Tāmarai thought, thinking of Vishnu. "When my parents-in-law were alive, they had a palace. Now Vishnu, in his grace, has given us seven and a half crores of wealth. Therefore, we must build a good palace like that of my parents-in-law." Parantāmā responded, "Oh ho! Tāmarai is thinking of building a house and is calling on me." He mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Our Lord leaves the milk sea,
Our Lord, Parantāmā, is approaching,
Our Lord is searching for the earth,
Vishnu, our Lord, is flying,
Our Lord, to where gold springs from the earth,
Our Lord is approaching the famous Land Where the Kāveri
Flows.*

Vishnu arrived at Kuṅṅṅaiyā's home in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Kuṅṅṅaiyā and Tāmarai paid him their respects.

VISHNU: There is no death for those who take refuge in me. Oh, lady Tāmarai! For what reason have you called me to come?

TĀMARAI: Oh, Parantāmā, ruler of earth! From the beggars you gave us seven and a half crores of wealth, oh, Lord! In the time of my parents-in-law, there must have been a palace. We must build a similar one. I thought a little, and called upon you. Shall we build it where my parents-in-law built, or at a different spot? You must look at the horoscope and tell us.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Without my looking at the horoscope for building a house, there are many fortune-tellers in this country you could approach.

TĀMARAI: Lord! What did you say? You created a wedding necklace by your grace alone, stood me in front of you and married me. When this is the case, nothing can be done without your presence, no matter what circumstance!

As soon as Tāmarai had said all this, Vishnu was pacified. His shoulders straightened, the hall of his heart was full, and he was happy.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Lay out the four corners of the great hall in a square, form a Pilliar image there and break a coconut, and lay it there with bananas.

TĀMARAI: Lord. I have done all that.

Vishnu got up and sat near the Pilliar temple. Using palm leaves, he took an astrological handbook and a horoscope, laid them in front of Pilliar and performed a pūjā. Then, Vishnu took the palm leaves and studied them for an auspicious day.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. This is indeed the spot on which your parents-in-law built. You may build on this spot. Next Friday at five in the morning, before the sun rises and outshines the moon, place a milk post¹ here, and after this, begin the work of building.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Very good. On Friday morning you must come for the erection of the milk post.

VISHNU: Good, Tāmarai. You must announce to all that you are building a palace. Therefore, tell the Kavunṅars of Aṅiyappūr to come on Friday. I will take my leave.

And Vishnu left for the milk sea.

SONG:

*It was a good time, a sweet time,
The rule that was in progress in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
Was said to be good, look at how it was done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good things that happened, the good that happened there.*

TĀMARAI: Husband. Go to Aṅiyappūr. Tell the Kavunṅars that Friday we are erecting a milk post for (a new) house and tell them to be sure to bring milk with them when they come.

¹ A special ritual post made from a branch of the "milk tree," *Wrightia tinctoria*, that is used in many auspicious rituals. This particular ceremony is known as "pālakal poduthal" or "pālakkal puja."

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, I will go and return.

And he set off for Aṇiyappūr.

SONG:

*Searching for Aṇiyappūr, my Lord,
Traveling with great speed, my Lord,
Seeing hills and climbing them, my Lord,
Seeing valleys and crossing them, my Lord.*

KuṆṆuṭaiyā went to Aṇiyappūr and greeted the Kavunṭar of the biggest house. "Oh, Kavunṭar of the biggest house! I am going to erect a milk post on Friday for the building of a palace. Therefore, on Friday, as soon as the cocks crow, you and ten other men come to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, bringing milk with you."

BIG KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. We will come then.

Episode 8 ✨

KuṆṆuṭaiyā took his leave and set off, returning to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. On Friday, at the time when the day began and before the sun had risen, Vishnu arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The Kavunṭars of Aṇiyappūr (also) arrived. KuṆṆuṭaiyā and the other Kavunṭars revered Vishnu.

VISHNU: Blessings to all! Tāmarai. Tie nine kinds of grain in a cloth and place this on a plate, along with coconuts, bananas, betel leaf, and areca nut.¹ Put water in a small pot. Bring all these things here. KuṆṆuṭaiyā! We must have a branch of the pāccāṅ tree.² Bring that.

As Vishnu ordered, all these things were brought.

VISHNU: Kavunṭar of the biggest house. Take the plate in your hand and come.

Vishnu stood looking to the northeast. Three people held the branch of the pāccāṅ tree with their hands, water and milk were poured, and the pūjā was performed. Then Vishnu lifted the nine grains, waved a flame in front of them, and tied them to the pāccāṅ tree branch.

Then the branch was planted in the ground and the Kavunṭar of the biggest house broke a coconut, put ghee on the fire, sprinkled water in circles, and thus performed a pūjā.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! The ceremonial foundation is complete. Call the stonemasons to break some stones and begin the house construction work. When you need me, think of me and I will come.

¹ Typical preparations for the milk post ritual.

² Also known as the pālā or "milk" tree, *Limonia acidissima*, the wood apple tree.

Vishnu set off for the milk sea. The Aṇiyappūr Kavunṭars took leave and set off for their town.

SONG:

*So the age progressed,
It was said to be good,
See how things were done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See what happened there, the good that happened.*

TĀMARAI: Oh, watchman! Go to the Land of Prosperity and bring the thousand stonemasons.

The watchman said, "Good," and set off for the Land of Prosperity.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it,
Approaching the Land of Prosperity, approaching it,
In the unrelenting sun, in the sun,
In the immense heat, the watchman is going.*

The watchman went to the Land of Prosperity and called the stonemasons.

WATCHMAN: Oh, men. The boss from the biggest house in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has told me to fetch you thousand stonemasons immediately.

STONEMASONS: Whatever it is, we are coming.

And they picked up their tools and set off.

SONG:

*Oh, Lord, leaving the Land of Prosperity,
Oh, Lord, they are approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Running, running with large steps,
The stonemasons are coming with great speed.*

The stonemasons arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and paid their respects to KuṆṆuṭaiyā Kavunṭar.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, stonemasons! Blessings to you! Have all thousand of you come?'

STONEMASONS: Lord. All thousand of us have come!

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, good. We want to build a palace. It must be built and completed within three months.

STONEMASONS: Fine. Good.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Tāmarai! Empty a vaḷlam of pearls on a plate alongside betel leaf and areca nut and bring it here.

TĀMARAI: Husband. I have done it.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, stonemasons. Break some stones quickly and begin the work.

The thousand men got together and began to break up stones.

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
See how it was done with love,
A thousand stones were broken and the foundation laid
At this sweet time,
See the good age, the good things,
Vishnu, Perumā,
Kopāla¹ who climbs trees,
He who restored Alkalikai,
Harirāmā came and stood.*

Vishnu came and stood. For every thousand stones that the stonemasons laid, Vishnu, without being seen, also laid a thousand. In this way, within three months, the palace audience hall, the hall of great pronouncements, the great open hall, the jewelled hall, the courtyard where the public assembles, the reading and writing room, the school room, the theatre hall, the gold storeroom, the dressing room, the bathing area, the kitchen and the armoury were completed. When these decorated halls (were finished), the palace was complete. When the work was all finished, the stonemasons came to Kunṇuṭaiyā and said, "Fine. We will leave."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, Good! Tāmarai! Bring another vaḷlam of pearls and give it to the stonemasons.

The stonemasons accepted the pearls and said, "Lord. We will leave," and, paying their respects, they returned to the Land of Prosperity.

After the stonemasons had left, Tāmarai said, "Husband! We must invite Vishnu and ask him when to perform the inauguration pūjā for the house."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, wife. Do that.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Parantāmā! Ruler of the earth! We have completed the building of the palace. You must come immediately, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

As soon as Vishnu heard Tāmarai's call, he mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*He saddled the Garuda bird, saddled it,
Vishnu is approaching the earth, he's approaching,
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, searching (for it),
Parantāmā is coming.*

Vishnu reached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and arrived at Kunṇuṭaiyā's palace. The Kavunṭar and Tāmarai paid their respects to Vishnu.

VISHNU: Blessings to you! Tāmarai. Has the work on the palace been finished? What have you called me here for?

TĀMARAI: Lord! The work on the palace is completely finished. I called you to ask when to perform the inauguration pūjā. You must select an auspicious day and perform the ceremony for us, Lord!

VISHNU: Tāmarai! An auspicious time will be at nine in the morning on a Monday, the fifteenth of this month, the day of Shiva's birth. We shall do it then. Invite the King of the Chola Country, the people and the Kavunṭars of the revenue area!

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good! You must come and perform a correct inauguration ritual.

VISHNU: Good. Tāmarai! I had thought that on the day of the inauguration ritual for the house we might give you a title and hold a great celebration ritual.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good.

Vishnu said, "Okay, I will go and return," and he set off for the milk sea.

SONG:

*At this time, at this time of sweet evens,
It was said to be good, look how things were done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
Look at what happened, the good things that occurred.*

TĀMARAI: Oh, black watchman! Come here! Go to the Chola Country and tell the king you have been told to tell him to come to the palace of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows for the inauguration ritual. He is to come before nine in the morning on Monday, the fifteenth of this month.

The watchman said, "Good," and set off for the Chola Country.

¹ Kopāla is a name for Krishna, one of Vishnu's reincarnations. Krishna used to climb trees as a child. In Sanskrit, his name is spelled Gopala.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it,
The watchman is approaching the Chola Country,
Running with big steps, with big steps,
He is coming, is coming with great speed,
Searching for the Chola Country, searching,
Our watchman is approaching.*

The chief watchman arrived in the Chola Country and, seeing the king, he paid obeisance at his feet and offered his services.

KING: Watchman! Blessings to you. For what reason have you come?

WATCHMAN: Oh, King! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has been building a new palace. He will perform the inauguration ritual before nine o'clock in the morning on Monday, the fifteenth of this month. He told me to invite you and the people to come.

KING: Okay. Good, watchman! Have invitations been sent to the thousand revenue areas?

WATCHMAN: Lord. The Kavunṭars of the revenue areas are invited.

KING: Okay. Good. Oh, watchman! On your way back, go to the Land of Prosperity and tell the thousand clansmen that I said for them to come to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows on the morning of Monday, the fifteenth. From there go to Aṅiyappūr and tell all the Brahmins to come.

WATCHMAN: Lord, good!

And he set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the Chola Country, leaving it,
Approaching the Land of Prosperity, approaching that country,
Running, with big steps, with big steps,
The watchman is coming with great speed.*

The watchman arrived in the Land of Prosperity and, seeing the Kavunṭars, told them, "The king has said for you to go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows on the morning of the fifteenth." He then went to Aṅiyappūr, told the Kavunṭar of the biggest house, told the Brahmins, told the Mela Drummers,¹ and then he returned to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He saw Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and said, "Lord! I have told everyone and returned."

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Okay. Good!

¹ A special festival drum played by a touchable caste group, often Mutaliyars.

SONG:

*This sweet time,
See the monarch rule thus:
It was said to be good,
See how it was done with love.*

On Monday the fifteenth, the day Shiva was born, before it got light and before the cocks crowed, before the sun rose and outshone the moon, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā finished the pūjā for the god, the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā at Cellāttā's temple, then returned to the palace. After a short time, the Kavunṭars and the Brahmins of Aṅiyappūr arrived. Next, the King of the Chola Country and the people arrived. After they had all come and entered the palace, Vishnu arrived. The king and the people paid their respects to Vishnu.

VISHNU: Blessings to all of you! Tāmarai. Give the necessary things to the Brahmins for the inauguration ritual and tell them to begin the ceremony.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good.

The Brahmins took the necessary things, tied a festoon of mango leaves on the house, and performed a correct festival inauguration ceremony in front of the building. Afterwards, the king addressed Vishnu, saying, "Lord. On this day of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's great celebration we are going to give him a title."

"Oh, Kings! Good. We will do that," Vishnu said, and seated all the members of the gods' council. He settled and created golden rings on their feet,¹ the eighteen instruments were played, the eighteen offerings (to god) were made, water from the Ganges was sprinkled, and the pūjā was completed. Then, Vishnu looked at the kings and said, "Oh, Kings! Adorn Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar with the eighteen marks of honour." The kings presented a golden swing, a golden flower chariot, an arrow, and a turban. Then Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai Kavunṭacci got up and paid respects to everyone.

VISHNU: Man! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar!

You shall flourish!

You shall prosper while you rule in your great hall!

When you die you will go to a fine place (Kailāsa).²

You shall live like Shiva himself.

Later you will live in Vaikunta,³ like Vishnu.

With these words, he blessed the couple wholeheartedly. The Kavunṭar of the revenue areas presented several crores of gifts and several crores of jewels. After this was finished, everyone feasted and was given betel leaf and areca

¹ A special ring for the second toe of the right foot.

² Shiva's heaven.

³ Vishnu's heaven.

nut to chew. At this time, the Kavunṭars from the Land of Prosperity arrived and gathered at the Pilliar temple.

KING: Oh, servant. It seems that the Kavunṭars of the Land of Prosperity are at the Pilliar temple. Go and bring them here.

SERVANT: Lord. Good.

And he went to the Pilliar temple and delivered the invitation. The thousand Kavunṭars came and seeing the king, paid him their respects.

KING: Men, oh, Kavunṭars. The country and land that must be given to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, give it to him today.

CLANSMEN: Oh, King, good. We will go and return.

And they set off. Vishnu took leave of everyone and returned to the milk sea. After everyone had left, the king turned to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and said:

KING: I am going to give you the topmost position. I am going to place you in a position where you are going to be a mother who sprinkles (holy) water¹ on all the destroyed and disrupted families, and on the fifty-six divisions and the thousand revenue villages. You must rule according to Manu's² book, following every law (therein) with justice. You must not beat nor do injustice to anyone. You should treat your people with kindness and rule the country well.

Having said this, the king got up, took leave, said, "goodbye," and returned to the Chola Country. All the Kavunṭars of the revenue areas also took leave and returned to their towns.

SONG:

*It was a time of justice, a sweet time
The just king
Rules, rules there,
The one who has a signet ring on his finger
Is ruling the country alone,
He is ruling now
At proper times, there, my Lord
It will rain there, it will rain
In that country, there is kaṭuku sampa paddy,
It flourishes, it flourishes there
There is enough rain (for King) Poṅṅayyā,³ it rains there,*

1 Life-giving water.

2 Like King Manu, a famous South Indian king who wrote a book about how to rule justly. After his son accidentally killed a calf while driving a chariot, King Manu himself ordered him to be killed. Lord Shiva later rescued both the son and the calf.

3 Here Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is referred to as "the golden one." This is the same epithet that will later be applied to his son Poṅṅar.

*In that country miḷaku sampa paddy
It flourishes, it flourishes there.*

There was abundant ripening paddy, so much that the surplus sprouted on the threshing floor. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā performed a pūjā for Cellāttā three times a day. Some days had passed since King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā had come to the throne.

TĀMARAI: Husband! What sin have we committed? Why are there no children? Our house looks like it was built today without any children to mess it up. It is without beauty, my Lord!

SONG:

*The maiden is crying, my Lord,
Now she is crying,
Now she is hot with indignation,
Is pining, is pining now
Oh, King, I have no son,
In that world, in that country
I was called sinner, a sinner there
Oh, King, since I don't have a child
In the Land Where the Koḷḷitam River¹ Flows,
I was called a sinner, a sinner there,
Husband, of those with teeth, half are gossiping about it,
Of those in the kingdom, some are speaking about it,
Of those who exist, the truthful ones are speaking about it
The chaste woman is crying. She is hot with indignation, she is wilting.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: This is not wanted, lady Tāmarai! Listen, lady, to my words. What god has written then cannot be erased. What Shiva has written no one can escape today. One can scrub off black soot, one can cross the Kāveri River, but what Brahma has written cannot be changed.

TĀMARAI: Husband! To whom have I been unjust? Who have I made to suffer? What sin have I committed? Why has god left me without a child?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Don't cry, oh, woman! What can we do? God has chosen this for us.

SONG:

*The gold-like chaste Tāmarai
Was spilling her tears on the earth,
The pearl-like tears of the chaste lady
Were spilling on her cheeks,
The coral-like chaste lady
Was spilling her tears all over the earth,*

1 A tributary of the Kāveri River.

*She was crying,
The chaste woman cries,
She is hot with indignation, she is wilting,
The good woman cries, the flower parrot is pining.*

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*If worms grow in cow dung, my Lord,
The whole sea, my Lord, will be
Full of fish attacked by worms, by worms there
If there are worms in my stomach, my Lord,
If there are worms there,
The Koḷḷiṭam river, my Lord,
Will be full of fish attacked by worms, by worms there,
I have become rotten wood, like a rotten oil press,
I have become a fallen tree; I have become a rotten oil press,
I was born as a woman, oh, Lord,
I was born, there
Why was I not born as sand?
Why was I not born as sand on this earth, my Lord?
Why was I not born as sand?
Why did I not grow as a plant on this earth?*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: This is not wanted, lady Tāmarai! Listen, lady, to my words. Can fate that has been written be changed by crying? Oh, rare parrot! Oh, fair lady! Oh, woman! We have had no child for forty-five years. We shall take a child from a clansman's house and raise it. Don't cry!

TĀMARAI: Husband. What have you said?

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Even if there were ten children,
The child of a clansmen will not do,
Husband, that will not do
Even if there were eight children,
An adopted child will not do,
Husband will not do
If we take a child of my brother-in-law,¹
Husband, if we take such one,
The hair will not burn,
Husband, it will not burn
If we take the child of my husband's brother,²*

¹ Note that she uses her maiden term of address, "maccan," rather than the term her husband would use, e.g., "paṅkāḷi," meaning "brother" or "clansman."

² Similar to the use of the term "maccan," but in this instance, Tāmarai uses the term "koḷuntan." This use of cross terms by a wife while addressing her husband's brothers is one of many indicators that Kavunṭar women are not fully integrated by marriage into their husband's clan,

*Husband, if we take such a one,
This hair bun,
This bun will not burn.¹*

TĀMARAI: Husband. Even if there were ten children, oh, King, a child of a clansmen will not do. The chaste woman is crying. She is hot with indignation, she is wilting.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: This is not wanted, Tāmarai! Listen to what I will say. Oh, woman, while we are here, we shall live well. If there is anything left over, let the clansmen have it.

TĀMARAI: Husband! You are igniting a fire in my stomach. If we have no children, our property should go to the local residents of the revenue villages, oh, husband! You speak of using our excess maize to support the clansmen, forgetting how they gave us toasted maize seeds, yet you say the wealth should go to them after our death. Don't you have any pride? The chaste woman is crying, she is hot with indignation. Oh, husband. Let us be childless. But people who are dependent on us for their living are also childless. What is the reason for this?

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*The cow that grazes in the forest
Is barren, my husband,
The goat that grazes around the fence,
The one that grazes there is barren,
The mouse that lives in the hole, the one that lives there
Is barren, my husband,
The cat that jumps all over,
The one that jumps all over there
Is barren, my husband,
The little sparrow
Living inside the little well, living inside,
Is barren, oh, husband,
The earless dog
That lives at our gates, living there,
Is barren, oh husband.*

TĀMARAI: Husband. I was destructive there, how many sins I committed. A good woman is crying. A flower parrot is pining, husband. Send a servant to the Land of Prosperity to buy two calves. We will raise them and see (what happens).

and that she does not "become one," in a social sense, with him.

¹ This refers to the idea that her hair will not burn properly if an adopted son is the one to light her funeral pyre when she dies.

She called a servant, gave him a hundred rupees, and ordered him to buy two calves, one male and one female, and bring them back.

"Lady, good!" he said and set off.

SONG:

*It was good, my Lord, said to be good,
He is coming with love, (crossing) the forest,
He is coming with great speed,
The servant, my Lord, is coming.*

The servant arrived in the Land of Prosperity, went to the stonemason's street and called them.

SERVANT: Oh, men, stonemasons! The lady of the great house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has given me one hundred rupees and asked to buy two calves. I will give this to you. You go and find two small-eared, big-eyed, small-tailed calves. Find one male and one female possessing a good ancestry, good, beautiful calves, and bring them here quickly.

STONEMASONS: Okay, good.

They left and soon returned bringing two calves of good ancestry. The servant took the calves, took leave of the stonemasons and set off. He arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, tied the two calves in front of the palace, and went inside. He saw Tāmarai and paid his respects. He said, "Lady. I have brought the calves. They are tied up outside." Tāmarai went and looked at the calves and was happy.

TĀMARAI: Man, servant! You have brought fine calves. Take them to the shepherd named Maccakkōr Ciṅṅāṅ at Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam and come back.

SERVANT: Lord, good!

And he took the calves and returned.

SONG:

*In the land at this time,
The monarch ruled thus,
It was said to be good,
See how things were done with love.*

A year had passed since the calves were purchased. The two calves had become big cows and were quite fat, but the ox did not impregnate (the cow) and it did not bear calves.

TĀMARAI: Husband! I thought I was the barren one, so I bought two calves and raised them. They are barren too!

SONG:

*He (has blessed) beggars, Lord,
Without saying "I'll come next week."
He has blessed food, oh, King,
Without saying "someday next week."*

TĀMARAI: Husband! I have been destructive. I have committed many sins, husband. I have one more thought. We shall buy two young, blue horses and keep them. We will see if they produce colts.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Good. Oh, wife! Do as you like.

TĀMARAI: Oh, badge-wearing servant! Come here! Come here! I am giving you two hundred rupees. Go to the Chola Country, buy two young, blue horses from the king and bring them here.

SERVANT: Okay, good! I will go and return.

Then the servant set off.

SONG:

*The guard who wears a badge, oh, Lord,
One of those who carries a silver stick,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
A guard is coming, my Lord,
In the scorching sun, my Lord,
In the burning heat, oh, God,
Searching for the Chola Country, my Lord,
The guard is coming, oh, God.*

The servant reached the Chola Country, arrived at the palace and seeing the king, paid his respects.

KING: Servant. Blessings to you! What brings you here?

SERVANT: King! The lady of the big house in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows gave me two hundred rupees to buy two young, blue horses, one male and one female.

KING: Okay, good! Oh, horse trainer! Catch two young blue horses, one male and one female, and bring them here.

"Lord! Good," he said and brought two young horses. The servant gave two hundred rupees to the king and took the two blue colts. He took leave of the king, set off and arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Seeing Tāmarai, he said, "I have brought the blue colts."

TĀMARAI: Okay, good! Take them to the enormous field and come back.

¹ In other words, God has granted the boon of children to so many others.

SERVANT: Lady. Good!

SONG:
*At this sweet time,
 See the monarch rule thus:
 Day after day, time followed time,
 See the good age in progress.*

A year passed, and the two blue (horses) grew to look like the Black Mountain¹ and its neighbour side by side. But the stallion and mare did not unite and did not produce a colt.

TĀMARAI: Husband! The blue horses are as barren as I am. What can be done? Buy some pigs. We will buy and raise two pigs and see (what happens), oh, husband!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Forest animals² are not appropriate for the house.

TĀMARAI: Husband, not for the palace! We will give them to the Kuruvar³ and tell him to raise them.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, do that!

TĀMARAI: Oh, badge-wearing servant! Come here. I am giving you ten rupees. Go to the Land of Prosperity and buy two pigs and bring them back. Give them to the Kuṛavar³ and tell him to raise them.

The servant took the money, went to the Land of Prosperity, and bought two piglets. He brought them back, gave them to the Kavunṭar, and returned.

SONG:
*See the monarch rule thus:
 It rained three times a month,
 Hailstones fell once a year,
 Pouring rain covered the land
 The kaṭuku sampa paddy prospered,
 It rained regularly in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
 The miḷaku sampa paddy prospered
 The pigs grew until they looked like the Black Mountain (itself),
 But they did not produce piglets.*

TĀMARAI: Husband. Everything that accepts water from us becomes barren. What can be done? The chaste woman is crying. She is hot with indignation, she is wilting. The good woman is crying. The flower parrot is pining.

¹ An actual mountain in the area called the Karumalai.

² The terms for pig and boar are not always distinguished in the local dialect, hence KunṆuṭaiyā's question.

³ The Kuṛavar are a very low-ranking community who weave baskets and trap small animals. They live in forests and travel about like gypsies.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:
*Oh, husband!
 When I go to bring water, the good water,
 I have no son, no son
 To crawl towards me, oh, husband!
 When I go to gather firewood, to gather firewood,
 There is no child to play with, to play with,
 There is no son, no son,
 To spill a full pot of water, to spill a pot of water.*

Episode 9 ✪

TĀMARAI: Husband. I went to the Cellāttā temple today. On the way back, I saw three clansmen's wives from the Land of Prosperity coming to worship Cellāttā. I saw them coming straight towards me.

CLANSMEN'S WIVES: Elder sister, the barren one, comes towards us.

SONG:
*The children will develop sores,
 The demoness, the demoness comes towards us,
 The children will develop some sores.*

TĀMARAI: Lord! The villains! They were speaking like this and when they saw me, they turned around and went back, they went back without visiting the temple. Have you reduced me to this condition, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram?

TĀMARAI'S SONG:
*If a cow is heartbroken,
 Heartbroken there,
 She will go to the edge of the herd, and console herself,
 Will console herself
 If a crow is heartbroken,
 Heartbroken there,
 She will go to the riverbank, my Lord,
 And console herself, will console herself
 If a sparrow is heartbroken, my husband,
 Heartbroken,
 She will eat the fruit on the branches and console herself, my Lord,
 Will eat and console herself there
 But when this woman is heartbroken,
 Heartbroken there,
 I go upstairs to cry,
 I cry here.*

TĀMARAI: The good woman is crying. The flower parrot is pining. The chaste woman is crying. She is hot with indignation; she is spilling tears.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, please don't, lady Tāmarai! Listen to my words, lady. Can fate that is written be changed by crying? Oh, rare parrot! Oh, fair lady!

TĀMARAI: Husband. Several crores of people in this world are talking about me. Several crores are insulting me. I am known as the barren one. The barren one, husband! I will go to visit my elder brothers, Marikkoḷuntā Kavunṭar and Civakkoḷuntā Kavunṭar of the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. The two of them have fourteen children. I will see them, stay one day, and return, Lord!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Why are you going to your elder brothers' house? The villains, the liars, the madmen. When I was there, there was food for the stomach at your brother's place. The goats, cows and other animals were abundant. After twenty years, Vishnu came and said, "Kunṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, go and ask for your rightful girl." At that time, I went and asked. Your elder brothers had me beaten with whips by the servants and then left me pinned under a stone in front of the Pilliar temple, despite twenty years of service. Then, Vishnu came and protected me and married me to you. When we set out for our place, they said, "Don't return," and blocked the path. To prevent our return, they employed watchmen for the (various) directions. When you know this much, woman, why do you say that you are going to your elder brothers' house? I say that if you go there, you will receive a harsh beating.

TĀMARAI: Husband. At that time, my elder brothers acted out of anger. If I go there now, they will treat me with great civility.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! The whole world knows we are childless. If we had a child and you took it with you, they would be pleased. If you go in this condition, they will say, "Barren woman," and not let you into the house. Therefore, I won't let you go there (for any reason).

Angrily, he got up and laid down on a cotton mattress.

TĀMARAI: Oh ho, my husband has left in anger. Okay, a little later I will get permission and go. When I go, my brother will think, "Here comes my children's aunt," and will come running towards me. (But) how can I go unprepared to my elder brothers' house? I don't know the path, and I must have some jewellery made for the children.

She called a servant and said, "Go immediately to the Land of Prosperity and bring the goldsmiths here."

SERVANT: Lord. Good!

And he went to the Land of Prosperity and returned with the goldsmiths. When they saw Tāmarai, the goldsmiths paid their respects to her.

TĀMARAI: Oh, goldsmiths! Blessings to you! Oh, goldsmiths. You must make a few pieces of jewellery. Set up a workshop here and make some. Oh, maid! Bring a vaḷḷam of pearls here.

The goldsmiths accepted the pearls, set up a workshop and began to work.

SONG:

*The pieces are softened and beaten, softened and beaten,
The goldsmiths in the workshop, in the workshop,
The gold is softened and beaten, softened and beaten,
In the gold beater's workshop, in the workshop.*

The goldsmiths softened the gold and stretched it until it formed fine wires. Then they went to Tāmarai and asked, "Lady, what kind of jewellery do you want made?"

SONG:

*Make some diamond jewellery, oh, men,
Some necklaces of coins necklaces of coins,
Make plenty of them, oh, goldsmith men,
Some hair ornaments, hair ornaments,
Make them correctly, oh, goldsmith men,
Some ornaments for the hair, for the hair,
Make them well, oh, goldsmith men,
Oh, men, goldsmiths!
For ten fingers, moulded seal rings,
For eight fingers, well-made seal rings,
Make everything well and lay it aside.*

The goldsmiths finished the work.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Bring two boxes and put all these jewels inside and seal them.

The maid brought two boxes, put the jewels inside and sealed them.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Measure out another vaḷḷam of pearls and give them to the goldsmiths.

MAID: Lord. Good.

The goldsmiths accepted the pearls, took leave of Tāmarai and returned to the Land of Prosperity. After the goldsmiths left, Tāmarai filled two more boxes with the children's jewels and food and sealed them. Then she hid the four boxes in the house. "Oh, maid!" called Tāmarai. "Feed six servants and give them betel leaf and areca nut. I will go to the boss and get his permission to go to my family's home." She went to the spot where Kunṇuṭaiyā was sleeping. "Husband. Husband," she called to wake him.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: What is it, woman?

TĀMARAI: Husband. I am going to my elder brothers' house and will return.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! No matter how much I have said, you have not listened. Must you go?

TĀMARAI: Yes, husband. I will go and return.¹

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. But if you go there and anything perverse happens, I will not take you back into (this) palace. How many days will you be gone?

TĀMARAI: Husband! If I get a good reception there, I will stay one day. If I am not welcomed, I will return immediately.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. Good, oh, wife! Are you taking anything from here to your elder brothers' house?

TĀMARAI: Husband. I am taking nothing. I am going with empty hands.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. If that is so, go and return.

Tāmarai bathed, washing her hands and feet. She ate, drank cow's milk and chewed betel leaf and areca nut.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! I am leaving. Look after the house. Husband, I am leaving,

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. Go and come back, oh, woman!

Having taken leave of her husband, Tāmarai came outside and called the six servants. "Pick up the boxes and come," she said. "We are going." The servants picked up the boxes and they all set out.

SONG:

*Facing north, my Lord, facing north,
The fine tender vine is coming, the fair lady,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
They are going, the chaste woman and the servants,
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, searching,
The fair lady, the fine tender vine is coming,
The ānai neṛiñci thorn and the neṛiñci thorn,
Are piercing her body all over
In the scorching sun, in the sun,
In the almost burning sunlight, the sunlight,
The sand, the thorns and the stones,
Are thrown by the heat at the feet of the chaste woman.*

¹ A woman always retains the right to visit her natal home and her brothers. Her husband cannot forbid it.

When the sun was at its zenith, at midday, they all stopped under a banyan tree out of weariness. Tāmarai's hands drooped, her body drooped, her heavy hair drooped. Tāmarai took the end of her sari, spread it on the ground and lay down.

TĀMARAI: Men, oh, servant! I am terribly thirsty! If there is water anywhere, bring me a little.

"Okay, good," he said and set off. After a little while, he returned with some water. Tāmarai took the water, washed her face and drank. Her alertness returned and she got up.

SERVANT: Oh, lady. How much further must one go to reach the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi?

TĀMARAI: Oh, servant! I think it is close at hand now. Oh, servant. There is the Kāḷiyatta temple of the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. One can see the row of seven sacred pots on it,¹ and to the left of that...

SONG:

*A line of five sacred pots,
See how decorative they are
Surrounded by coconut alms and they surrounded by plantain trees,
See how the mango trees and flowering bushes flourish,
There, one can see my elder brother,
Look, one can see the palace.*

TĀMARAI: Man, oh, servant! My elder brother's family is like my own. They are well off, too. For whatever cause, I am without children. That is all. Okay, lift the boxes. Let's go.

SONG:

*The chaste woman, oh, Lord, walked ahead,
The servants, oh, Lord, followed behind,
The rare parrot, oh, Lord, walked in front,
The servants, oh, Lord, walked in back.*

On reaching the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, they set the boxes down at the Pilliar temple.

TĀMARAI: Man, oh, servant. Look, there is our palace.

SERVANT: Yes, it is very beautiful.

¹ A tier of pots used on certain ritual occasions. A temple traditionally has a row of sacred pots along the top of its main shrine.

TĀMARAI: Okay. Descend into the neighbouring well, wash your hands and feet and return. I will also wash my face and feet, and return. Then we will go to the palace.

Saying this, Tāmarai went to the well. At this time, the two elder brothers' wives (spoke together). "It has been forty-five years since we married, oh, elder sister. On that day, we went to the Pilliar temple. We have not been since. Our two husbands are playing dice just now. We two (shall) go to the Pilliar temple and worship, and on the way back, we shall bring some water." And they set out.

SONG:

*The queen walked like a swan,
The hands of the chaste woman swung lightly,
The steps of the chaste woman were small,
The ornamented arms of the peahen swung,
They approached the temple of the five-armed God,
The elephant-faced Pilliar, Pilliar.*

On approaching the Pilliar temple, they saw the six servants from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows standing there.

YOUNGER WIFE: Oh, my, elder sister! We don't have such big men in our country. We don't know their town. Oh, elder sister. Why should we be frightened in our own country? We will go and find out who they are. Oh, man. What town are you from?

SERVANT: Lady. We are from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

YOUNGER WIFE: Man. You are from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. What town are you going to?

SERVANT: Lady. We have come to the palace of the king of this country.

WIVES: Man. We have no relations, (no comings and goings), with the Land Where the Kāveri Flows nor the Land of Prosperity. In such circumstances, what brings you here?

SERVANT: Lady. The younger sister of the king of this country, Tāmarai Kavunṭācci, married our king. Our lady Tāmarai Kavunṭācci has now come here. We have come with her.

ELDER WIFE: Oh, lady, younger sister! Now I remember. Two days after our marriage, I asked my husband, "Husband. How many siblings do you have?" He answered, "There are three, including myself." Then I asked, "Where is the third?" He answered, "My sister, Tāmarai. We gave her in marriage to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. We have said that she must not return, and we blocked the path. We have guards for each direction from which she might come. She must never come to our country."

BOTH WIVES: Men. Has Tāmarai Kavunṭācci come here?

SERVANT: Lady. (That) is she.

YOUNGER WIFE: Oh, man. How many children does Tāmarai have?

SERVANT: Lady. It has been forty-five years since she married. There are no children. She has come with the idea of seeing her elder brother's children.

Hearing this, the king's wives ran back to the palace to speak with the ruler.

BOTH WIVES: Husband! We are taking our children and going to our native towns. We will come back.

KING: Oh, woman! Why, all of a sudden, do you speak like this?

WIFE: Husband! Did not you say had given your sister, Tāmarai, (in marriage) to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows? After forty-five years, she has no children and now, thinking of seeing our children, she has come to the Pilliar temple. We have just seen her there and come back.

KING: Is that so? The villain. As she left for the south, just after her wedding, we blocked the path, saying she must not return. So what has brought her here? Oh, woman. She is a witch. If she comes and sees the children, they will suffer hardships. Thus, we will take everyone into the palace and bolt the door. We will post guards at the four gates, and not allow them inside. Oh, black watchman! My younger sister Tāmarai has come from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and is at the Pilliar temple. She was born of Shiva's creative power. If she comes and touches the door, it will turn to dust. If she comes, do not allow her near the door. If she asks, "Where is my elder brother?" tell her, "He has gone to the borders of Māntappūr to hunt peacocks. It will be six months until he returns. He left saying, if any relations or kinsmen come, do not allow them in the palace until I return."

Saying this, he went into the palace.

BOTH WIVES: Husband! You say your younger sister was born of god's creative power and that, if she touches the door, it will open by itself. If she comes inside and sees the children, they will develop sores. Husband! Get a large basket. We will cover all the children with it.

So, a large basket was taken and fourteen children were put under it. A stone was put on it, the door was closed and bolted, and earth put around it.

At this time, Tāmarai Kavunṭācci, after waiting a while at the Pilliar temple, said, "Man, oh, servant! It is time to set out. Let's go to the palace." They set out, and as they arrived and looked at the palace door, they found it shut with a watchman standing guard outside.

TĀMARAI: Man, Watchman! Why is the palace door shut?

The watchman did not answer.

TĀMARAI: Watchman. Don't you recognize me? It's me, your king's younger sister, Tāmarai Kavunṭācci. Oh, man! Where have my brothers gone?

WATCHMAN: Lady. Your brothers have gone to the borders of Māntappūr on a peacock hunt. They have gone to the borders of Kūntappūr on a quail hunt. As they left, they said to me, "If any relatives or kinsmen come, don't allow them into the palace." They went, having left these orders.

TĀMARAI: Okay. Watchman! Even if my elder brothers have left on a hunt, where are all their children?

WATCHMAN: They left the children in (their wives') hometowns.

TĀMARAI: Okay, so be it! I will go into the palace, look around the house where I was born and then leave. Step aside.

WATCHMAN: Oh, woman! You must not step inside. Be careful!

TĀMARAI: Oh, you villain! So, you speak without a trace of respect. Why do you prevent me from entering the house of my birth?

WATCHMAN: Oh, woman! A blow if you set foot inside. You'll see what happens.

Hearing what the watchman said, Tāmarai became angry. "Oh, man," she said. "If I go inside what will you do?" And she went a little way in.

SONG:

*He grabbed her hair, grabbed her hair,
He dragged the peahen, the peahen,
He sprang and grabbed the hair, the hair,
Alone, he dragged the peahen, the peahen, the villain,
With a whip having five jewels on it, the ship,
He beat her perversely, the villain,
She could not bear the blows, could not bear them,
She jumped the height of a man, the peahen.*

WATCHMAN: Villain! I said don't enter, and you proceed thinking, "Let's see."

The traitor hit Tāmarai. Where her hair drooped, blood appeared, blood flowed. (More) blood appeared and (more) flowed. Tāmarai fainted and fell on the ground. For three seconds, she was without breath. Then in a short while, her breathing returned. When she got up, she sat down and bent over, facing north.

TĀMARAI: Villain, you sent a man and told him to beat me? Oh, Vishnu! I am in such a state!

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Not listening to my husband's words, not listening there,
I have been wronged in this country
This has happened, this has happened now,
Not listening to my husband's words, not listening here,
I have been wronged in this country
This has happened, this has happened there,
Not listening to my husband's advice, not listening,
I have been wronged in this country
This has happened, this has happened there
The chaste woman, who is like gold, has tears in her eyes,
The fine tender vine is spilling her tears on the earth there,
The chaste woman, is spilling her pearl-like tears
On her cheeks, the fine tender vine
Is shedding her tears, is shedding her tears.*

Tāmarai shed coral-like teardrops.

TĀMARAI: Villain! You sent a man to beat me. Have you (meted out) injustice? If you hated me, I would accept your blows. You have given me the name of a woman who visited her elder brothers' house and was beaten by the watchman. Oh, sinner!

Having abused her brothers, Tāmarai bent one leg and extended the other and sat down, facing north.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Vishnu, creator of earth! Oh, ruler who shaped the world. Oh, Vasu! Oh, Varuna! Oh, Shiva, on those who attend the god's council meetings. If it is true that I was born in that chamber, oh, Vishnu, then let your fire ball descend to earth. The man who beat me, let me see him burn a little, oh, ruler of Conjeepuram!

When Tāmarai thought of Vishnu and cried, Vishnu noticed. "Oh ho," he thought. "She did not listen to Kunṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, and has arrived in the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi." He mounted his Garuda vehicle, arrived at the gods' council chamber and saw Shiva.

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! On earth, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, you have made Tāmarai Kavunṭācci childless, isn't it so? You and Pārvati took the form of deer and, while playing in the neighbourhood of a pond, once caused a child to form on a lotus leaf from your discharged semen. She has now gone to her elder brothers' house in the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi. She was not welcomed, and a misdemeanour occurred. That is, her brother left the law and sent a man to beat her. She is crying, asking for a fire ball to descend from the gods' council meeting. So, let the fire ball descend downwards for a time!

Vishnu immediately returned to the milk sea. As soon as he left. Shiva sent a fire ball to earth.

SONG:

*Searching for the earth, searching
For a path for the fire's descent,
Searching for the earth, searching
For a route for the fire's descent,
By Krishna's mercy, his mercy,
A path for the fire's descent,
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, searching,
The fire ball is approaching.*

Tāmarai saw the fire ball coming and, stretching out her two hands, it came and rested on them. "Oh, Lord of fire," Tāmarai exclaimed. "Make the man who beat me suffer a little. I want to see it with my own eyes." Saying this, she threw the fire ball upon the watchman and he began to burn. The watchman, not able to stand it, (cried):

WATCHMAN: Lady! I did not know who you were. When our king spoke, he gave such orders. Then everyone went inside the palace and the door was bolted. Oh, lady! Forgive me for what I have done and release me. Stop the fire!

The black watchman fell at Tāmarai's feet, begging.

TĀMARAI: Man, oh, watchman! You said the kings had gone to the borders of Māntappūr to hunt peacocks. How can you now say they are in the palace?

WATCHMAN: Lady. It was those villains who spoke thus and (then) left. Lady! Forgive me.

The fine tender vine, Tāmarai, the all-knowing goddess, called the fire back to her hand out of compassion, (and let) her thick hair fall loose in a thousand strands.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*You sent a man to do the beating, villain,
You have committed an injustice in this land
The goddess Kāḷi was in the temple,
She has left her dwelling place, the chaste woman
The goddess Kāḷi was in the palace,
She has left her palace, my mother (has left),
The chaste lady of the land has changed her dwelling
Standing firm, the chaste woman strikes,
The fine tender vine (now) circles her palace,
The chaste lady circles her fortress,*

*She beats her breasts, she beats her breasts there,
The fine tender vine, the delicate twig-like, fair lady.¹*

TĀMARAI: Villain! May you leave this womb-like place, may your sons die in front of your eyes, let the bamboo be without sprouts,² may you not have children to kiss, may you not have sons to perform your funeral rites for seven generations, may you not have children to lament your death for five generations.

Saying this, she thought of the god's council meeting and threw three handfuls of earth. Inside the palace, the fourteen children were killed in one cluster, as if they were termites. Tāmarai, the fine tender vine, then said, "Let your house be destroyed." Then turning, she called, "Man, oh, servants! Let's go, let's start for our town. Man. Oh, black watchman! Come here," she said and they all went to the Pilliar temple. "Man, oh, watchman! Watchman! Call all the children of the town." The watchman went and returned with all of the children.

TĀMARAI: Oh, servants! Take the ornaments and the food that are in the boxes and let them pillage. Let the children take whatever they can lay their hands on.

The servants did this, taking everything out of the boxes and allowing pillage.

TĀMARAI: Man, oh, watchman! Go and bring the stonemasons here, quickly.

The watchman left and brought back the stonemasons. When they saw Tāmarai they paid her their respects.

TĀMARAI: Man. Blessings to you! Oh, stonemasons. Prepare two stones, two feet high and four feet long.

STONEMASONS: Lady. We have done it.

TĀMARAI: Okay. Place one stone lying on the ground and the other standing vertically on it on the south side of the temple. If I were truly born of god's grace, then let these two stones stick together and stand by themselves, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

As she thought of Vishnu, the two stones stuck together and stood. Then Tāmarai (said), "Oh, stonemasons! Do you know how to write?"

STONEMASONS: Lady. We know how.

TĀMARAI: Okay. Write (the following): "The kings of the fifty-six countries and the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages must not drink water in the home of Marikkoḷūntā Kavunṭar and Civakkoḷūntā Kavunṭar of the Country Called

¹ A possible parallel exists between this description and the description of Kannaki in the Cilappadikāram epic just before she burns the city of Madurai.

² Infertile.

Vāḷavaṇḍi. They (also) must not give or receive women from these men for marriage purposes.¹ Oh, stonemasons! Have you written what I have said?

STONEMASONS: Lady. We have written it.²

“Okay,” said Tāmarai. “You may go home.” Then she ordered black beetles and wasps to come and guard the stone from anyone who might (try to) demolish it, and she sent the fire ball back to the gods’ council chamber.

Then (she said), “Men, oh, servants. Let’s get going.” After they had gone a short distance she said, “Men, oh, servants! Having come this far I must not leave without seeing our clan goddess, Kāḷi. Wait here a little. I will see her and quickly return.” On approaching the temple, she saw that the door was closed.

TĀMARAI: Kāḷi, Lady! Having eaten kicks,³ I come here, and you go and hide in a corner?

KĀḶI: Tāmarai. I did not know you had left your town and come here. I have learned just now that you have come. They sent a man to beat you. The villains!

TĀMARAI: Kāḷi, lady, Look at my body.

Kāḷi looked and saw it was bloodied.

KĀḶI: Oh ho! The villain. He has done this!

Episode 10 ✨

While the two were crying, the Brahmin priest responsible for the pūjā there arrived. As he approached, he saw the front door standing open.

BRAHMIN: Oh my! What is the injustice? The door is standing open!

As he entered, he heard the sound of crying. Brahmin entered and saw Tāmarai. “Lady,” he asked. “What town are you from?”

TĀMARAI: Oh, Brahmin! I am from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. I am the younger sister of your king, Tāmarai Kavunṭācci. I went to my elder brothers’ house and the villain sent a man to beat me, and to act unjustly.

The Brahmin looked at Tāmarai’s body. “The villain,” he thought, “To have beaten a chaste woman in this way. I don’t know what got into him.” Laying out the god’s offerings, he said:

¹ These prohibitions are the equivalent of “out casting” the family.

² Meaning that they have inscribed the words on the stone.

³ An idiomatic expression for having suffered degradation.

BRAHMIN: Lady. Stay here. I have forgotten to bring camphor!¹ I will get it quickly and come.

He set off towards the palace. Arriving and looking at the palace, he saw that the gates on the four sides were locked. The front door, though, was bolted from inside. He knocked on the door, thinking, “They must all be inside.” Inside, the knocking noise was heard.

BRAHMIN: Oh, servant women! It sounds as if the temple Brahmin is calling. Go and open the door.

The servants ran and when they opened the door, the Brahmin asked, “Oh, women, where is the king?”

SERVANT: Lord! He is inside the palace.”

BRAHMIN: Okay. Tell him that I have come.

The servants went and told the king and he came.

BRAHMIN: Oh, King. Why do you bolt the palace and stay inside? What is the news?

KING: Oh, Brahmin! My younger sister, Tāmarai, has come from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. She is barren and without children. If she comes and sees the children (here), she will cause (them to develop) festering sores. We will not allow her inside, and have therefore posted guards on the four sides, bolted the door and remained within. We don’t know whether she has come to the palace or not.

BRAHMIN: Oh, King! There is no one as prudent as you in the whole world. What have you done? How many barren women there must be in the world. If a barren woman comes towards one, will that cause festering sores? Oh, King! Where are the children?

KING: Oh, Brahmin! We hid the children under a large basket, thinking she might cast her glance upon them.

BRAHMIN: Oh, King. Lift up the basket. Let us look.

As they lifted up the basket to look, the fourteen children were all dead underneath, as if they had expired together. When he saw this, the Brahmin said, “Oh, King! You have brought bad luck. What can be done? Fourteen children are dead, oh, King!”

¹ An essential ingredient of a pūjā.

SONG:

*You sent a man to beat the chaste lady,
You beat her here,
An injustice in the land,
You have committed, you have committed there.*

BRAHMIN: You villain. You have beaten Tāmarai in such a way that she circled the fortress beating her breasts (and) then came to the Kālī temple with her case. She is there now.

KING: Oh, Brahmin. My fourteen children have died. What can be done?

BRAHMIN: Oh, King! Your children died by Tāmarai's curse. Only if she comes (here) can you receive them. I will tell you a trick. Come to the temple on horseback, as if you were just returning from a hunt. Dismount and fall at Tāmarai's feet, keeping your mouth shut and saying nothing. Tāmarai must not know that I have come here.

As soon as the Brahmin had set off for the temple, the two kings mounted horses and arrived at the temple as if they had just returned from a hunt. They fell at Tāmarai's feet and were speechless. At this time, the Brahmin performed the pūjā for god, the family deity, and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā, and, having finished, gave Tāmarai (a charge to revere) the (small camphor) flame (he had used). Then, referring to the men at her feet, he said, "Why have these kings come here and fallen at your feet?" The Brahmin then took the plate with the camphor flame back inside. Hearing this, Tāmarai said, "Oh, Brahmin! Who has come? Are you speaking to yourself?"

BRAHMIN: Lady! Your two elder brothers have come and are at your feet. Turn around and look down.

TĀMARAI: The villains! The villains! What have they come here for? Who said that I would be here? Oh, Brahmin. You must have gone and told them! After having sent a man to beat me, I will not look upon their faces as long as I live.

KĀLĪ: Woman, Tāmarai! Forgive your elder brothers their mistake. Having come such a long way, you must not leave without seeing the house where you were born! Go and see the palace and return, woman.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Goddess. For your sake I will go. Oh, Brahmin. I won't look at their faces. Tell them to get up and run off.

BRAHMIN: Oh, Kings! Get up and run off. Don't stay here.

The kings left. Then the Brahmin accompanied Tāmarai to the palace. As they circled the palace and approached the courtyard where the public assembles, (they saw) the fourteen children (laid out) and covered with a cloth.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Brahmin. What is this (laid out) and covered with cloth?

BRAHMIN: Lady. When you thought of the god's council meeting and formulated a curse, the fourteen children all died together.

Hearing this, Tāmarai became angry.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Brahmin! You give me a speech about that? I killed the children with a curse? They died when their time was finished. What can I do about that?

BRAHMIN: Lady. You must revive these children.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Brahmin! What game are you playing? Am I Shiva, that I can revive these children?

BRAHMIN: Lady. You were born of Shiva's creative power. If you put your heart in it, you can revive them.

TĀMARAI: All right. If I revive them, then I must be given the rightful daughter-in-law now.¹

BRAHMIN: Lady. If you wish, take her with you now.

Tāmarai said, "All right," and went to the well, bathed, bowed to the northeast, and sat down. Thinking of the gods' council chamber, she said, "Oh, Vishnu, creator of earth! Oh, ruler who shaped the world. If it is true that I was born in the gods' council chamber, then..."

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*A red needle, red yarn, give me this combined boon,
A gold needle, gold yarn,² give me these as boons,
Give me the grace to enable me, with your mercy,
To revive these children. Oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!*

As Tāmarai thought of Vishnu, he went to the gods' council meeting, took a gold wand and sent it to earth. The gold wand turned towards the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the gods' council chamber, leaving it there,
See the gold wand coming to earth,
With Krishna's grace, his grace,
See the gold wand coming, at this moment,
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi, searching,
See it coming, the gold wand of God.*

¹ A sister has the right to demand that her brother's daughter marry her son.

² To "sew" here seems to be an image of "connecting" and hence bringing the lifeless body and the soul back together.

Tāmarai saw the gold wand coming. She extended her two hands and grabbed it. Taking a small pot of water, she arrived at the palace. She sprinkled the water brought in the pot on the children and thought of Vishnu. She touched the children with the gold wand and all fourteen children, as if awaking from a sleep, had their lives returned. They rubbed their eyes, and, on seeing Tāmarai, said, "Take our respects (please)," and (then) they paid their respects to Marikkoḷūntā Kavunṭar's daughter, Vaḷḷiyāttā, and Civakkoḷūntā Kavunṭar's daughter, Poṅṅāttā.

SONG:

*The two chaste girls, she pulled their hair,
The two girls, Tāmarai tugged at them,
She caught a good hold on the hair, Tāmarai did,
By herself, she grabbed the two chaste girls,
By herself, she grabbed the two chaste girls.*

BRAHMIN: Lady, Tāmarai! Why do you now grab and tug at the children?

TĀMARAI: Oh, you Brahmin! What did you say previously? And what do you say now? Be careful! If you say anything more your life will (leave you and) ascend to the world above.

BRAHMIN: Lady! Don't be angry. What would I speak for? I said you might take them when you had sons. Okay. Do as you like.

Tāmarai took two girls and dragged them along. As they came outside, the watchman was standing at the door. She took him, went to the Pilliar temple (and said), "Oh, watchman! Go quickly and bring the stonemasons here." The watchman said, "Good," and went and brought back the stonemasons. When the stonemasons arrived and saw Tāmarai, they paid their respects.

TĀMARAI: Men, oh, stonemasons! Lift up the stone you inscribed earlier and lay it face down (in the earth).

STONEMASONS: Lady! We have done it.

"All right, stonemasons," Tāmarai said. "You may go!" Then she stood the two girls on the stone and thought of Vishnu in the gods' council chamber. "If it is true that I was in the gods' council meeting, then these two girls must turn to stone, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram! I will look (for them) when my sons have come. You married me here in this Pilliar temple. In the same way, when I have sons, I will bring them to this Pilliar temple to be married. Until that time, these girls must remain here like stone statues, Lord of Conjeepuram." As Tāmarai thought of Vishnu, the two girls changed into stone. As before, she had black

beetles and wasps stand guard over the girls' statues. Then she took the servants and set off for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

SONG:

*Leaving the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi, leaving that country,
Approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, approaching that country,
The servants walked behind, walked behind,
The rare parrot walked ahead, walked behind.*

Tāmarai and the servants arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

TĀMARAI: Oh, servants! You must not tell anyone here about the things that happened there.

SERVANTS: Lady. Good.

Tāmarai, having arrived at the palace, looked at the maid and asked, "Where is the king?"

MAIDS: Lady. He has just finished eating and has gone to lie down on the cotton mattress.

TĀMARAI: Good. I am a little tired from the walk. I will sleep awhile and then go and see the king.

Tāmarai went to the courtyard where the public assembles, pulled her sari over herself and slept. After Tāmarai had slept a little, King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā finished his nap and got up.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, maid! Has Tāmarai come back yet or not?

MAID: Lord! She has returned. She said she was tired from walking and is sleeping in the courtyard where the public assembles.

"Okay," said Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, and as he went to the courtyard where the public assembles to see, he found Tāmarai's sleeping body, hidden by her sari.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Tāmarai, why have you covered yourself up?

TĀMARAI: Husband! I am tired from the walk. Thinking I would sleep a little and then come to see you, I came here and lay down.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! When you went to your elder brothers' house, you were not welcomed and were treated disrespectfully, it seems. This is why, when you returned, you slept without even coming to (see) me. Therefore, I have my doubts. Take off your sari and let me see.

TĀMARAI: Husband! I walked too far in the sun. My body is blistered. If I remove my sari, the pus will ooze, husband!

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! I know your tricks. You must not say all that to me.

¹ The term used is "papan," a disrespectful way to refer to a person of the Brahmin caste. In the next sentence, "ni," the disrespectful form of "you," is also used.

He approached her and lifted her sari to see. There were whip marks and her body was bloody.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, the villains! The liars! Not listening to my words, you went to your elder brothers' house. Having seen their (true) character, you return? I have acquired a bad name. This name will never fade at any time. From now on, you must not see my face. You must not remain in the palace for (one) minute. Run, be gone!

He went angrily to his mattress. After Kunṇuṭaiyā left, Tāmarai thought, "I must not live any longer," and she sent for a servant and asked him to call the stonemasons of the Land of Prosperity. The servant said, "Good," and set off.

SONG:

*Like that, my Lord, saying it is good,
The loving servant is coming,
The badge-wearing servant, my God,
Shining like silver, my Lord, such a man,
Running, running, look at the steps,
He is coming with great speed, my Lord.*

The servant arrived in the Land of Prosperity, stood at the Pilliar temple and called the stonemasons. The stonemasons arrived and asked: "What's the news?"

SERVANT: Men, stonemasons! The lady of the biggest house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has ordered the stonemasons of the thousand houses to come.

The stonemasons said, "Good," and the thousand men set off. Arriving in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they saw Tāmarai and paid their respects.

TĀMARAI: Oh, stonemasons! Blessings to you! Men, stonemasons! You must build (a structure) sixty feet high, with sixty steps leading up to it on a square base in front of our Cellāttā temple. The work must be completed within fifteen days.

STONEMASONS: Lady, that is good.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Bring a vaḷḷam measure of pearls, betel and areca nut for the stonemasons.

MAID: Lady. I have given it to them.

TĀMARAI: Okay, stonemasons! Begin the work on Monday.

"Lady, good," they said and began to work on Monday.

SONG:

*At this time, this sweet time,
See Tāmarai rule thus,
It was said to be good, said to be good,
See how it was done with love,
See what is happening there.*

Tāmarai, the fine tender vine, the all-knowing goddess, said: "Oh, Vishnu, creator of earth! Oh, ruler who shaped the world. With your grace, you must finish a sixty-foot-high square tower quickly within fifteen days, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!"

Vishnu, seeing this, thought, "Oh, the villain! Having gone without listening to her husband, having seen their (true) character and returned, she has decided to kill herself." Vishnu came, and unknown to anyone he placed a thousand stones for every thousand stones the thousand stonemasons laid. The following day, as the work proceeded, King Kunṇuṭaiyā returned from doing pūjā at the Cellāttā temple and saw the stonemasons. The stonemasons saw the king and paid him their respects.

KING: Men, stonemasons! Blessings to you! Who told you to build this structure?

STONEMASONS: Lord! It was our lady who told us to build a sixty-foot square tower.

KING: Oh ho! Is that so? Good!

And he returned to his house.

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
See how it was done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See what is happening, the good that was done,
With Vishnu's grace,
See the square tower grow.*

At this time, the work of building the square tower was continuing in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

TĀMARAI: Oh, badge-wearing servant! Go quickly to the Land of Prosperity and bring the artisans.

SERVANT: Lady, good.

And the servant set off.

SONG:

*The badge-wearing servant, my Lord,
Shining like silver, my God, such a man,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
Searching, my God, for the Land of Prosperity,
My Lord, the servant is approaching.*

The servant arrived in the Land of Prosperity and called the artisans.

SERVANT: The lady of the biggest house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has told me to fetch you.

ARTISANS: Good. Right away, we will come!

They picked up their tools and set off. When the artisans reached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they fell to their feet on seeing Tāmarai and offered their services to her.

TĀMARAI: Men, artisans! Blessings to you! A sixty-foot square tower has been built in front of the Cellāttā temple. You are to embed pointed (metal) stakes and (metal) spear heads all around its circumference.

"Lady," said the artisans. "That is good." And they started to work. They finished within two days. Afterwards, the artisans took leave and returned to the Land of Prosperity. The stonemasons finished the building of the square tower within fifteen days and came to the palace. Seeing Tāmarai, they said, "We have finished the square tower. We will go."

TĀMARAI: Okay, good. You may go.

The stonemasons took their leave and returned home. Later:

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, maid! Come here. Did you know that Tāmarai has ordered a sixty-foot square tower built in front of the Cellāttā temple?

MAID: Lord! When the lady returned home, you started an argument with her, saying, "Ignoring my words, you returned after having seen their (true) character. From now on, you must not look upon my face and you must not enter the palace." She then decided that since her husband had spoken in such a way, she must not continue to live. She has ordered a sixty-foot-high square tower built so that she can climb it, jump off and take her own life.

"Okay, good!" he said and returned to his cotton bed.

The fine tender vine, the all-knowing goddess, rose before dawn and before the cocks crowed on Monday morning, the day of Shiva's birth. She went to the Cellāttā temple and performed the pūjā for god, for the family deity, and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā. Having finished that, she circled the square tower seven times. Then she stopped at the entrance to the steps. "Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe. Oh, he who holds a conch and a discus. Oh, the one

who lives in Vaikunta. Oh, the one who rescues people in trouble, orphan-saver. Parantāmā! When I climb the sixty-foot square tower and jump off, let my feet, hands and head become separated, oh, Lord of Conjeevuram!"

SONG:

*The chaste woman climbed the first step,
On the second, the chaste woman paused,
Then Tāmarai left the second step,
The fine tender vine then stood on the fourth step,
Then the chaste woman left the fourth step,
She arrived and paused on the sixth step, the fine tender vine,
Then Tāmarai passed over the sixth step,
The chaste woman came to rest on the eighth step,
Then she passed over the eighth step, the chaste lady,
And Tāmarai came to rest on the tenth step.*

In this way, the sixty steps were climbed and, on reaching the top of the square tower, it seemed to Tāmarai's eyes as if heaven and earth had met.

TĀMARAI: Seer of Bāla mountain, supreme penitent,

Poor pilgrim, my Perumāl, my Vishnu,

When I fall down, I must lose my life, oh, Lord of Conjeevuram!

At that time, Vishnu of the milk sea noticed her and thought, "Tāmarai is about to kill herself by jumping off a square tower she has climbed. I must go and protect her." He mounted his Garuda vehicle. Before an eye could wink, he had arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He stood at a distance, on the earth's northeast corner.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Come here, woman, come here, Tāmarai,
I will grant you a son, I will give you a son,
The woman, there, without a son,
I will give her the boon of a son.*

VISHNU: Tāmarai. You must not climb, fall and die a violent death. Climb down and come.

TĀMARAI: Ah ha! Who is saying they will grant the boon of a child? Let's go and see.

As she climbed down and came running to see, there was no one there. "Oh my!" she thought. "Who called? There is no one to be seen. Was there a ghost or an evil spirit? I don't know." She climbed the square tower again, but before she jumped, Vishnu went to the southeast corner of the structure and called again.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Climb down and come, woman, Tāmarai,
I will grant you the boon of a son,
To the woman there without a son,
The boon of a child, the boon of a child, I will grant it.*

"Oh ho!" thought Tāmarai. "Who calls again, from that corner?" She climbed down and ran to see, but there was no one to be seen. "Who could be? I don't know. Who speaks, but when I come, cannot be seen?" So she climbed the tower again and was about to jump when Vishnu went to the southwest corner of the structure and stood.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Come here woman, oh, Tāmarai, oh, Tāmarai,
The boon of a son, the boon of a son, I will grant it to you,
The childless one, the childless woman,
The boon of a son, I will grant it.*

"Oh ho!" thought Tāmarai. "Who calls again from the southwest corner?" She climbed down and ran to see, but no one was there. Again, she climbed the square tower and was ready to jump when Vishnu went to the northwest corner, stood there and called.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Climb down and come, woman, Tāmarai,
The boon of a son, I will grant it,
To the woman without a child, to that woman,
The boon of a child, I will grant it here,
Good Vishnu, Vishnu Perumā,
The one who calls there is Vishnu.*

"What is this?" thought Tāmarai. "It is a big nuisance. Whoever is calling, when I go to see there is no one there."

She climbed down again, but when she ran to see, no one was there. "This must be an illusion produced by the gods," she thought. Again, she climbed the square tower and was ready to jump, when Vishnu came to the Cellāttā temple and, sitting behind Cellāttā, called out:

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Come here, woman, come here, lady Tāmarai,
The boon of a son, I will give you,
To the woman without a child, to that woman,
The boon of a child, Tāmarai, I will give it to you,
To the woman without a child, the boon of a child,
I will grant it, climb down and come, woman!*

TĀMARAI: Who is calling from the inside the Cellāttā temple?

She climbed down and went into the Cellāttā temple to see. Tāmarai saw no one except for Cellāttā, and again she climbed the square tower and was ready to jump when Vishnu called.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Climb down and come, woman, lady Tāmarai,
The boon of a son, I will grant it, come, woman,
To the woman without a child, to that childless woman,
He who uprooted the giants, the giants,
Harirāmā, Vishnu, it is he who calls.*

TĀMARAI: Oh ho! Again, someone calls.

Before she could climb down, Vishnu, in disguise, sang.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*I have grown grey, like nāṇal flowers,
I am a little grey, like flowering kōrai,
I am greying like a tumpai,
Like the flowers of tūtuvilām,¹
No teeth in my mouth
No entrails in my belly,²
(My) eyes are like kīrai seeds,³
(My) ears do not hear,
Like a dried-up old man
Who is ninety plus ten,
Like an old grey man
Who is four hundred plus ten,
The skin and veins of the old man sag,
This Lord holds in his hands
A worm-eaten almanac.*

Episode 11 ☼

Vishnu took the disguise of an impoverished man, a wandering mendicant, and sat in the temple. Tāmarai climbed down, came running, saw Vishnu seated and looked in his eyes. "Oh, heavenly one! Have you been deceiving me all this time?" she said and paid Vishnu her respects. "Lord. By this time, I would have died. Crows and eagles would have eaten my body! Not allowing that, have you been calling me saying, 'Climb down and come! I will grant you the boon of a child?' Where is my boon-given infant?"

1 Nāṇal, kōrai, tumpai, and tūtuvilām flowers are all characterized by their white blossoms.

2 The stomach is concave.

3 A small black seed, suggesting that his eyes are narrowed with age so that only the pupils are visible.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Instead of saying there is no child boon to give you, in my haste my tongue slipped and I said I would grant one. Am I Shiva, that I can grant you a child?

TĀMARAI: Oh, heavenly one! You are the world's all-knowing one. You are its destroyer as well as creator. Why can't you grant me a boon?

VISHNU: Tāmarai! I can't say anything here. You go to the palace. I will come and consult the almanac and tell you.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good.

Before she could get to the palace, Vishnu had already arrived and seated himself cross-legged. Then Tāmarai entered.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Spread cow dung on this place, form an image of Pilliar¹ and set it here. Bring some coconuts, bananas, betel leaf, areca nut and a pot of water.²

TĀMARAI: Lord! I have brought everything.

VISHNU: Okay. Bring your husband (here).

TĀMARAI: Good. Husband! Vishnu has come. He is calling you. Come.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! I thought you would be dead by this time. Are you still here?

TĀMARAI: Husband! I would be dead, and crows and eagles would have devoured all by now, but before that happened, Vishnu arrived, stopped me and brought me (here). Okay, he's calling you. Get up and come.

"All right," King Kuṇṇuṭaiyā said. He got up, saw Vishnu, folded his arms and greeted him respectfully.

VISHNU: Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Blessings to you! Are you in good health?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord! With your blessings, nothing has decreased.

VISHNU: Okay. Good! Go, bathe and return.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Lord. Good!

He went to bathe, then returned.

VISHNU: Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Sit on that plank. Tāmarai, go bring the offerings.

TĀMARAI: Lord. What quantity of offerings?

¹ This is a tiny conical form made of cow dung.

² The preparations described are standard for a pūjā to be performed at home.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Four lakhs for the four corners, and one lakh for the centre.

Hearing this, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā (said), "Oh, woman! What quantity of offerings did the mendicant say to bring?"

TĀMARAI: Husband! Four lakhs for the four corners and one lakh for the centre.

Hearing what Tāmarai said, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā became angry.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: If we give four lakhs for the four corners and one lakh for centre, what will become of our house? The mendicant is not to read the almanac. We do not want children. Tell him to get up and go.

Vishnu began to smile.

TĀMARAI: Husband! What you have earned is still there. Everything has been given (to us) by (Vishnu) as alms. Oh, maid! Bring four lakhs of offerings for the four corners and one lakh for the centre.

The maid brought all of this and set it down.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Split the coconuts, lay them out, and perform a pūjā for Pilliar.

Tāmarai finished the pūjā and offered the camphor flame to Vishnu and to Kuṇṇuṭaiyā. Then Vishnu took up almanac and looked at it. He took the page concerning luck in his hand (and said), "Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Take this gold thread and place it somewhere on the page,¹ so we can see." Kuṇṇuṭaiyā took the thread and placed it on the page. Then Vishnu said, "Give me the golden thread," and he stored it away. "Tāmarai! I will read what is on the page concerning luck. Listen."

SONG:

*In this birth, Tāmarai is to have no sons,
For another two births, Tāmarai is to have no children,
In the third birth, on the good third,
In the swarm of youthful things, there is no child for you,
In the fourth, in the fourth birth,
There is no son born to the lady,
In the good fifth birth of the fine tender vine,
There is no son born to the lovely parrot,
In the good sixth birth for Tāmarai,
For you, there is no son to be sure reaped,
In the good seventh birth for Tāmarai there is no child, none (at all).*

TĀMARAI: Lord! Stop. You have promised me something in my seventh birth. Why (even in the seventh birth) do you say "none?"

¹ Literally "leaf", as the ancient manuscripts used to be written on palmyra leaves.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! There is something but you cannot obtain it. This is why I spoke like that.

TĀMARAI: Lord! There is nothing I can do.¹ You say there will be no children for three times seven generations. Is this some fault of mine? Or some fault of my husband's? Or some sin committed by our ancestors? Lord! Tell me clearly why there are no children.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. I will tell you (what happened). Listen. When your father-in-law Kōḷattā Kavunṭar ruled in this Land Where the Kāveri Flows, he grew sugarcane in one-quarter of the enormous field. At that time, there was a famine in the Chola Country and the king's black cows,² finding no food, came here and grazed in that sugarcane field. Your father-in-law, not realizing that they were cows, planted pointed stakes and killed seven of them. The black cows' lives went to the gods' council chamber and pleaded their case with Shiva. Shiva became angry and uttered a curse that your father-in-law was to remain childless for three times seven, that is, twenty-one, generations. Learning this, I went to Shiva and asked him to grant (them) the boon of a child, somehow. I begged Shiva that after I did twenty-one years of penance at the gods' council chamber, the sin of that cow-killing would be set right. Shiva's heart softened and he created your husband under a stone on Lizard Stone Hill. Your father-in-law took this child and raised it. The sin of the seven cows has now fallen upon you.

TĀMARAI: Lord! Tell me what I must do about this.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Do you have the ability to spend some money?

TĀMARAI: Lord! As long as we have the seven and a half crores of wealth that you gave us, I have no fears. If a child is obtained that is enough.

VISHNU: All right. So be it! This is what you must do first. For each league of road,³ you must have a well dug, and at spaced intervals, burden-resting places.⁴ You must construct eating shelters, watering places, resting shelters, shelters for ox-carts, and places for keeping cattle straw. You must celebrate the marriage of a margosa and a pēpal tree.⁵ You must build five carts: one for the sonless, one for the childless, one for the mighty temple, one for the fiery temple, and a rare one for Cellāttā. Then, draw them (around the temple). Then you are to give food to a thousand devotees on the sixty-foot

1 She is suggesting that he give her some task to test her character.

2 More precisely, cows with black tongues and black nipples.

3 One league equals about ten miles.

4 Special stone head-resting platforms made as an offering by the childless couple for travelers to rest heavy loads on, carried on the head.

5 A fairly common ritual that "unites" these two specific trees, when they grow close to one another, by giving them a "wedding." The pēpal tree is *Ficus religiosa*.

square that you have built. You are to place an earthen lamp filled with seven measures of ghee and a big wick, and then light it. The light from this flame must be visible from the gods' council chamber. After you have done all this, you must set off for the place called Tāṅṅaci Kōmpai¹ in Benares on a Monday, the third day of the month of Kārttikai,² with your husband. When you get there, I promise to give you the boon of two sons for the land and a daughter for the house. Woman, Tāmarai, here is my right hand. I will come, afterwards.

TĀMARAI: Husband! We must do exactly as Vishnu has said.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! We will do it. Oh, badge-wearing servant! Go quickly to the Land of Prosperity and bring the stonemasons fast.

SERVANT: Lord! Good.

And he set off.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, my Lord,
With love, he followed the path, my Lord,
Seeing hills, the servant climbed them, my Lord,
Seeing valleys, he crossed them, my Lord.*

The servant arrived in the Land of Prosperity and called the stonemasons, saying, "Oh, stonemasons of the thousand houses, the Lord of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has ordered you to come."

The stonemasons set out immediately. When they arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and saw the lord and Tāmarai, they folded their arms out of respect.

TĀMARAI: Men, stonemasons! Blessing to you. All right, oh, stonemasons. A well must be dug for each league of land and burden-resting places must be built at measured intervals. Also, build eating shelters, watering places and ox-cart shelters, and complete all this within a month!

STONEMASONS: Lord. Very good!

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Measure out a vaḷḷam of pearls and give them to the stonemasons along with betel and areca nut.

"Good," said the maid, and she brought and presented these things.

TĀMARAI: All right, stonemasons! Go start the work.

The stonemasons answered, "Lady, good," and they started to work.

1 The name of a place in Benares, meaning "ascetic's pillar"

2 November - December.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, my Lord,
They are doing it with love, my God,
See the monarch rule thus.*

The stonemasons finished the work in a week, came to the palace, and on seeing the king paid him their respects.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Men. Stonemasons! Have you finished all the work?

STONEMASONS: Lord. All the work has been finished.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, maid! Measure another vaḷḷam of pearls and give it to the stonemasons.

The stonemasons accepted the pearls and said, "We will go." Taking leave, they returned to the Land of Prosperity.

TĀMARAI: Husband! We must plant a margosa tree and a pēpal tree at the Pilliar temple and marry them.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman. Do it.

TĀMARAI: Oh, badge-wearing servant! Go to Aṇiyappūr and bring the Brahmins quickly.

"Lady," said the servant. "Good." And he went to Aṇiyappūr and returned with the Brahmins. The Brahmins arrived and seeing the king they paid their respects.

TĀMARAI: Lords! Oh, Brahmins! We went to perform the wedding of a margosa tree and a pēpal tree. What things are needed for this?

BRAHMIN: Lady, Tāmarai! A wedding necklace must be made, plus a half a measure¹ of ghee, coconuts, bananas, betel leaf and areca nuts, a bundle of thread, and turmeric. That is all.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Bring the Brahmin the things he needs.

Brahmins received all these things and they all went to the Pilliar temple. The Brahmins selected an auspicious time, fed a sacred fire, and married the margosa and the pēpal tree. Then the Brahmins took leave and returned to Aṇiyappūr.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Now we must build and dedicate a temple chariot to Cellāttā. Tell (someone) to go get the artisans.

¹ A half a pari, or about one heaped cupful.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Good. Oh, badge-wearing servant! Go to the Land of Prosperity and bring the seven artisans quickly.

SERVANT: Lord, good!

SONG:

*The badge-wearing servant, my Lord,
Shining like silver, my Lord, such a man,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, oh, God,
He arrived in the Land of Prosperity, my Lord*

The servant arrived in the Land of Prosperity and called the artisans.

SERVANT: Men, oh, artisans! The lady of the biggest house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has ordered me to bring you men of seven houses quickly.

ARTISANS: For whatever purpose, we will come.

They all arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The artisans saw the king and paid him their respects.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Men! Oh, artisans. Blessings to you. You must build five carts: one for the sonless, one for the childless, one for the mighty temple, one for the fiery temple, and a rare one for Cellāttā. We have a venkai¹ tree in a Veḷḷāṅkulam tank.² Cut that and finish the work within thirty days.

ARTISANS: Lord, good!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, maid! Measure out a vaḷḷam of pearls, then bring them along with betel leaf and areca nut and give them to the artisans.

The artisans accepted the pearls and set off to the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. When they arrived at the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and looked at the venkai tree, they found it well dried. They immediately grabbed their saws, and while cutting the tree, a lizard on the very top of it chirped an omen.

ARTISAN: Elder brother! An omen is being spoken from on top of the tree. While the cart is being pulled around Cellāttā's temple, something adverse will happen, it seems. All right. We will tell the king later. There is nothing to be alarmed about now.

So, they cut down the tree, cut off the needed pieces, returned to the palace and saw the king.

¹ The venkai tree, also known as the Indian Kino tree or *Pterocarpus marsupium*, is a spreading tree that can grow 30 meters tall.

² This is the name of the great irrigation tank that belongs to the heroes' family.

ARTISANS: Lord. We have cut the tree. Tell someone to take the cart and transport the pieces to the Cellāttā temple. On Monday, an auspicious day, we will begin the work.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, good! Finish the cart construction work within a month.

ARTISANS: Lord, good. We will go and return.

They took leave and went to the Land of Prosperity. Then Kunṇuṭaiyā called the servants.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Go quickly to Aṇiyappūr and tell the Kavunṭar of the biggest house to bring the cart and transport the wood to the Cellāttā temple.

The servant set off, and upon arriving in Aṇiyappūr, delivered Kunṇuṭaiyā's message to the Kavunṭar of the biggest house. That Kavunṭar of Aṇiyappūr immediately brought a cart to the house and transported the wood to the Cellāttā temple. Then, coming back to the house, he saw the king and said, "Lord, I have transported the wood."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭar! Good. I will let you know when construction work on the cart is finished. You must all come (for the festival).

KAVUṆṬAR: Lord. Good. I will go and return.

And he set off for home. On Monday, the seven artisans returned and began construction work on the cart.

SONG:

*The cart building work proceeds at this time,
It is said to be good, they are building it with care.*

At this time, while the work of cart construction proceeded in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, Vishnu thought, "I must go (see);" and he mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord,
Coming to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
Harirāmā came and stood,
Vishnu (came) there.*

Vishnu came and took on the disguise of a fly. While the artisans worked on the cart to one side, Vishnu, in his grace, completed work for those on his other side. The next morning, while the artisans set out for work, the clansmen were seated at the Pilliar temple of the Land of Prosperity. Seeing the artisans, the clansmen (called):

CLANSMEN: Men! Oh, artisans. You are going back and forth to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows every day. What is the work?

ARTISANS: King Kunṇuṭaiyā of the biggest Kavunṭar house is constructing a temple cart for Cellāttā. We are going for that (work).

CLANSMEN: Oh ho. Is that so? Good, artisans! We have something in mind. If you do as we plan, you will acquire a lot of wealth.

ARTISANS: What do you want us to do?

CLANSMEN: Men! Oh, artisans! Tell us what day the cart is finished and is to be pulled (ceremoniously). We will come and pull it. After it has traveled southward and westward, and after all the goats and coconuts have been sacrificed under its wheels, you must stop the car with a long pole before moving northward. If they ask what (has happened), say that Cellāttā appeared in a dream last night and said that the pulling of the car was unsatisfactory to her. Say that Cellāttā said that Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai must place their own heads before the (wheels of the car). If you do this unflinchingly, we will give you half of the thousand shares of land and half of the seven and a half crores of wealth.

ARTISANS: Okay. We will do that. You (be sure to) come too.

In this way, the car was finished within thirty days. On the day the artisans finished the work, they went to the palace. Seeing the king, they said, "Lord. The cart construction work is finished."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: All right. We will pull the cart next Friday. Tell (me) what things are needed (for this).

ARTISANS: Lord. We will tell (you).

ARTISANS' SONG:

*Good country lentils, my Lord,
To be mixed, to be mixed there,
Five hundred kalams¹ of raw (husked) rice
Are needed, are needed there,
The tuvarai pulse, good tuvarai
To be mixed, to be mixed there,
Ninety bowls of raw husked rice
Are needed, King, are needed
Little coconuts to be broken, to be broken well,
A lakh is needed
There, oh, King,
To be broken well, oh, King,
Little coconuts, then little coconuts,
Ten lakhs of coconuts*

¹ One kalam equals approximately 72 litres, so the request is for 36,000 litres.

*Are needed there, oh, King,
Country bananas, oh, King,
Four hundred, four hundred there,
Are needed there, oh, King.*

ARTISANS: Oh, King! And three hundred plump bananas, and two rams. This is the gravity of things that are needed.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay, good! Oh, artisans! On Friday before the cocks crow, come get the things, prepare the poṅka!¹ and finish your work before dusk. We will come and pull the cart.

ARTISANS: Lord! Good. We will go.

The artisans took leave and returned to the Land of Prosperity. After the artisans had left, Kunṇuṭaiyā called a servant.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, servant! Go quickly to Aṇiyappūr, Poṇiyappūr, Cilukkāmpuliyūr, Ciṅṅapponṇivaḷanāṭu, Tarmavaḷanāṭu and Āḷattūrpaṭṭaṇam!² Tell the Kavunṭars of each household to bring a ram on Friday when coming to the Cellāttā temple.

SERVANT: Lord! That is good.

SONG:

*The badge-wearing servant, my Lord,
Shining like silver, my Lord, such a man,
See, his big running steps, my Lord,
The man is coming with great speed.*

The servant went to the thousand revenue villages, told each household to bring a ram when coming to the Cellāttā temple. (Then) he returned to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

SONG:

*It was said to be good in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
See how things were done with love,
Day after day, time followed time,
See what happened, what good things,
It rained three times a month in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
(And) once a year hailstones fell,
The production of gold increased, just like tani sampā³ paddy does.*

Early on Friday morning before five a.m., King Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai Kavunṭacci called the maid. They told her to decorate the palace. (Then) they

¹ Special ceremonial boiling of rice.

² These are all small hamlets located within Poṅṇivaḷa Nāṭu.

³ A fine type of rice that grows slowly.

called the ladies-in-waiting and asked them to bring out and decorate the pearl palanquin. The ladies-in-waiting did as they were told and brought the pearl palanquin. The king and Tāmarai climbed in, the ladies-in-waiting lifted the palanquin and placed it on their shoulders, and they set off.

SONG:

*Singing "ale lo"
They are carrying it at this moment,
Singing "ale lo"
They are carrying the palanquin,
She who has divided the earth,
The Cellāttā of Matukkarai,¹
She who has defined the borders of countries,
To Cellāttā's temple
They are coming quickly.*

The highly valued lady and Shiva² climbed down from the palanquin. They went to the riverbank, bathed, and returned. The Kavunṭars of the thousand revenue villages had arrived and paid their respects to Kunṇuṭaiyā. Then, Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai set out food and performed the pūjā for god, the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā. King Kunṇuṭaiyā made the eighteen types of adornment offering to Cellāttā, waved a camphor flame and passed it amongst all who were present. Then, to music, a moveable image of Cellāttā was placed on the temple cart, and the artisans were called.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Men, oh, artisans! You finish the pūjā.

The artisans finished the pūjā, as told. Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai circled the cart seven times with folded hands, paying respects. Then the Brahmin waved a camphor flame in front of Cellāttā and passed it amongst everyone present. The musicians, the Brahmins, and an artisan climbed on the cart.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭars! Has a ram been brought from each house?

KAVUṆṬARS: Lord! We have each brought one and are here.

After everyone was ready, sixteen clansmen arrived and joined the crowd. When it was time to pull the cart, after Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai had paid respects to the rope, everyone pulled the cables together. Tāmarai, that fine tender vine, the all-knowing goddess, (spoke).

TĀMARAI: Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe. He who holds a conch and discus, and lives in Vaikunta. With your blessings, we are about to move Cellāttā's cart. Without any difficulties, the car must endure (the trip) and return, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

¹ A place on the banks of the river Kāveri.

² A way of praising Tāmarai and comparing King Kunṇuṭaiyā to Lord Shiva.

She said this, thinking in her heart of Vishnu and taking hold of the cart's chain.

SONG:

*The cart is moving, look there how it moves,
With Vishnu's blessings, there with his blessings,
With the Lord's blessings, there with his blessings,
It moves, watch it, Cellāttā
The cart, the cart there,
For every foot it moves,
A coconut is broken there, a coconut,
For every cubit it moves,
A ram is sacrificed, a male ram,
Cellāttā's cart, the cart there
Is turning and is coming, see there, it is turning and coming!*

In this way the cart was moved southwards and then westwards. Before turning to the north, a full thousand ram and a thousand coconuts had been offered in sacrifice. When the cart had been turned to the north,¹ as the clansmen had said, the artisans made the axle stick to the earth and brought it to a halt. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai, having (overseen) the sacrifice of the thousand rams, were walking behind the cart with folded hands. When they saw the cart stop, they spoke out.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, artisans! Why has the cart stopped? Move it (forward).

At that moment, the artisan who had been riding on the car cried, "Oh my!" and fell off.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Man, artisan! Why did you slip and fall? Alas! Get up.

ARTISAN: Lord! Last night, Cellāttā came to me in a dream (and said), "Man. Artisan! Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai's pulling of the cart is unsatisfactory." Oh, my King! That disturbed woman, Cellāttā, how can I repeat what she said?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Artisan! Never mind. Tell the truth.

ARTISAN: Lord! She said, "The cart will endure (the trip) and return only if Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai place their two heads before it." Then, she left.

TĀMARAI: Men. Artisans! When did Cellāttā come and speak to you?

ARTISAN: Lady. Queen. She came and spoke (to me) in the night at twelve o'clock.

TĀMARAI: Oh, you, Cellāttā! You disturbed woman. The work of constructing the cart has gone on for one month. Why did you not tell me (then) that

¹ The turning of such a cart is a laborious process, and would be done with wedges, by the artisan community. The turning can cause the wheels to sink a bit in soft ground.

simply pulling the cart would be unsatisfactory? Villain! For how many days have you been planning this deceit?

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*The good woman, the woman is crying,
The flower parrot, my lady is pining, (she) is pining,
I came here to drive the cart for obtaining a son,
I came to have it pulled here,
I have lost, my King, my King,
The cart for obtaining children, obtaining a baby,
I have come to have it pulled
I have lost my monarch, oh, Vishnu.¹*

TĀMARAI: Oh, Vishnu. I came to have the cart for obtaining a son pulled, oh, Lord! I have lost my King. I came to have the cart for obtaining children pulled. I have lost my King. Husband, come. We will go to Cellāttā's temple and come back.

The two of them went to the temple. With falling tresses, Tāmarai, beat her breasts, (remembering) the thousand rams that had been sacrificed.

SONG:

*Oh, Cellāttā, in the temple,
Are you there, are you there?
You home in this country,
Have you left it, have you left it?
Oh, Cellāttā, in the palace,
Are you there, lady, are you there?
Have you left your palace Cellāttā?
Have you gone lady, have you gone?*

TĀMARAI: Cellāttā! You are thinking that you want to kill me, I who have had a cart made and pulled for you? For how many days have you thought of so deceiving me? Villain! The thousand clansmen of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows are here. From now on they will perform your pūjā. Take it and eat. We (are going) to die. You will be happy. Husband, place your head under a wheel.

King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became angry.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, villain! I don't want a child. I don't want anything. Did you hear, murderous widow? Following the advice of a mendicant, you ask me to kill myself under a temple cart in front of the people from all of the thousand revenue villages.

¹ She is anticipating the death of her husband here, so sure is she that he will die.

He cried and his body wilted. King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā—the precious monarch as strong as summer thunder, he who was like a female, he who kept quiet, the virtuous one who did not speak, the meritorious man—suddenly spoke, “Villain! We built a cart for Cellāttā and now it is time to place our heads under it and give our lives before this very cart.” He then placed his head under the east wheel and lay down. “Vishnu!” cried King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā. “You must let my life leave before the wheel goes over my head, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram.” He said this lying down and praying to Vishnu.

As soon as he did this, Tāmarai thought of Vishnu, put her head under the west wheel and laid down. Vishnu saw this from the milk sea and was overcome with anger. “Oh, the villain! The artisans, having listened to the words of the clansmen, have stopped the temple cart and are engaging in deceit. I must go and look after this,” he thought, calling his Garuda vehicle and immediately setting off.

SONG:

*The shepherd, the shepherd, Perumā,
Harirāmā, my Lord, is coming,
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
My Lord is flying with it as his target,
To the temple of Cellāttā,
The one who divided the earth.*

The movable and immovable things in the earth shuddered, the great subterranean serpent¹ trembled, and the gods shivered. Vishnu came to the place where the temple cart stood. He took the disguise of a fly and poised on top of the cart. As he came to rest on the cart, there was a great explosive noise that shook the earth and the heavens.

SONG:

*With the help of Vishnu, Vishnu,
The cart is rising above on its own,
The cart flies above
The (height of) two palmyra palms.*

The cart flew higher than two palmyra trees, and then jumped sixteen feet northward and came to a stop. With the speed of lightning, the cart landed upon its original place on earth. When the cart was traveling at lightning speed, it landed on the sixteen Kavunṭar clansmen and the six artisans, who were smashed to bits. At this time, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā cried out:

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Tāmarai! Why has the cart not yet crushed our heads?

Having spoken, he opened his eyes and saw that the temple cart and the people had all disappeared. As they got up, (they saw that) the cart had crushed and killed the clansmen and the artisans. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā then cried out:

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman. The clansmen and the artisans deceitfully tried to kill us. (But) the temple cart has killed them (instead).

The two went to Cellāttā’s temple to see what had happened. There they found the temple cart broken on the ground. They asked the ladies-in-waiting to bring them a palanquin. The two climbed in and returned to the palace.

TĀMARAI: Husband. Two of the things Vishnu said to do still remain unfinished. First, we must feed a thousand mendicants. We shall do this on Monday.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Okay, we shall do that.

On Monday at dawn, before the cocks crowed, Tāmarai called the ladies-in-waiting.

TĀMARAI: Decorate the palace immediately and prepare eighteen types of vegetables in various sauces. Husband. Go to Srirangam¹ and bring a thousand mendicants back with you.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: All right, oh, woman! I will return with the mendicants.

He set out, putting his blanket from the Koṅku² area on his shoulder and taking his walking stick with a metal tip.

SONG:

*Searching for the fertile Land Where the Kāveri Flows, searching,
The gentle King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā is coming,
Saying, “There are no mendicants to be seen, no mendicants,”
The gentle king, the gentle king is coming.*

While Kuṅṅuṭaiyā was on the way, Vishnu called together all the small children who were grazing cows and goats in the fields. He placed a Vaisnavite mark on each of their foreheads and gave them conches and gongs to hold. Vishnu himself (also) took the form of a beggar. On his neck, he wore a golden Vaisnavite mark. In one hand he held a right-spiralled conch and a box for holy powders, and in the other, a beggar’s bowl. He brought the other mendicants together and they stood facing Kuṅṅuṭaiyā from the direction he was heading towards. Seeing the beggars approach, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā became happy and thought, “Oh, men! Mendicants. After being absent for a week, now a thousand beggars are coming.” Looking at the beggars, he said, “Oh, men! Mendicants! From where are you all coming?”

¹ This huge serpent is called Āṭisēshan.

¹ Srirangam is the main Vaisnavite temple in the city of Tiruchirappalli.

² Koṅku is the name of the region in which this epic is best known.

MENDICANT: Lord! We were given a feast in a town to the west, from which we are returning. We want to be in Srirangam for the noon meal.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: All right. Good! I will feast you in my house at noon. All of you come and eat, and after that you can go to Srirangam.

MENDICANT: Okay. Good, Lord!

Kunṇuṭaiyā took the mendicants and as they were approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, Tāmarai was standing, waiting, thinking, "Still there are no mendicants in sight!" At that very moment she saw Kunṇuṭaiyā bringing the mendicants. She went inside and said, "Female, maid! Lay out a thousand leaf plates, and serve up the food." By this time the thousand mendicants and Kunṇuṭaiyā had arrived.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Have you brought a thousand mendicants?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, oh, woman! I have brought a full thousand.

When the leaves had been laid out and Tāmarai began counting the mendicants, there were only nine hundred and ninety-nine. One beggar was missing.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Is there not one more mendicant to be seen?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! One very old beggar came along. It is he who is missing, it seems. Never mind. I will sit in front that extra eating leaf.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Vishnu said that a thousand mendicants were needed. If that number is lessened by one, our boon will be reduced in kind. I will go and get one more mendicant. In the meantime, you keep track of all who eat and leaves.

And she set off looking for Srirangam.

SONG:

*Searching, searching for Srirangam,
She is going quickly, oh, Tāmarai,
Seeing hills, she climbs over them,
Seeing valleys, she crosses them and goes.*

Tāmarai arrived in Srirangam and looked on all four sides, but no mendicants could be seen. With a heavy heart, she turned around and started for home.

SONG:

*Leaving Srirangam, leaving it,
She is approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, approaching
"There are no beggars to be seen," says the chaste lady
She is returning, pining, (our) Tāmarai.*

While Tāmarai returned, pining at not having seen a beggar, Vishnu took the disguise of a mendicant and (stood) halfway along her route on the edge of the river (Kāveri).¹ On his neck, he wore a golden Vaisnavite emblem. He carried a right-spiralled conch and a box for holy powders on his shoulder, and he held a cracked beggar's bowl in his hand. In Tāmarai's direction of travel, where she could see him, he fell down with a flash of light.

When Tāmarai saw this she cried, "Oh my! What is that flashing like a light?" As she ran to see, (she found) Vishnu lay on the ground, choking. Seeing Vishnu, Tāmarai cried, "Lord! Having made all the mendicants in Srirangam disappear, you have come and lay down here, oh, Lord!" and she sat down and lifted Vishnu with her arms.

VISHNU: Woman, Tāmarai! Have all the mendicants arrived?

TĀMARAI: Lord. You brought them yourself and then (you) came here. All right. Come, let's go.

Tāmarai took him to the palace. At the table, she seated the great mendicant (Vishnu) facing east, placed two leaf plates (in front of him) and served eighteen kinds of vegetable dishes. She set out the coconuts, bananas, and gifts required for the pūjā. Then the mendicant began to worship. Vishnu took the right-spiralled conch and blew it. As he blew, the heavens shook. Shiva heard the sound of the conch in the gods' council chamber, and he spoke to the other gods.

SHIVA: Oh ho. My brother-in-law is performing a Vishnu pūjā down on earth, in Tāmarai's house. The sound of the conch has even knocked the crown off my head.

At the sound of Vishnu's conch, all except Tāmarai swooned and fell down. Vishnu threw some sacred ash, and suddenly everyone's dizziness dissipated, and they all got up.

"Tāmarai," said Vishnu. "Put an eating leaf in the apron-like fold of your sari and come here." Vishnu then took three handfuls of cooked rice and putting them in the folds of her sari. While doing this, he said:

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Take rice from two more mendicants, then sit down, sprinkle all of your rice with water and eat.

TĀMARAI: Lord! It is good that way. You (too) must eat a measure of cooked rice in our home.

"Good," said Vishnu. He ate a little rice, washed his hands, returned and said, "Have you done all the things I told you to?"

¹ Referred to by the poet as the "Banks of Benares," which is fitting, given that the Kāveri is often called the Southern Ganges in Tamil folk tradition.

TĀMARAI: Lord. It has all been done. Only one thing remains. A lamp must be placed in a square (enclosure). That is all, Lord!

VISHNU: Okay, good! Do that, and on the third day of the month of Kārttikai,¹ come to the mighty golden pēpal tree² in Benares. I will go and return.

And Vishnu left for the milk sea. When he had gone, the other mendicants also left.

TĀMARAI: Oh, maid! Put seven paṭi measures of ghee into a pot, place a large wick in it, and set it in the hole on the square platform in front of the Cellāttā temple.

The maid came immediately, did this, and returned.

SONG:

*At this time in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Things were happening, sweet things,
Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress,
It rained three times a month in this land
(And) once a year (there was) hailstones fell,
Threshing was done by elephants (there),
Oh, beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows!*

The Kavunṭars of the revenue villages, and the (other) residents came to know that King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai were going to the great golden Benares.³ They all came to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and brought King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai Kavunṭar several crores of gifts and precious stones.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, Kavunṭars of the revenue villages, and the other residents. It will be twenty-one years before we return from the great golden Benares. Look after everything well until we return.

"Lord. That is good. We will go," said the Kavunṭars and other residents, and they went home.

On Monday, the third day of the month of Kārttikai, before the crowing of the cocks at dawn, Tāmarai called the maids and told them to decorate the palace. Then King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai went to the banks of the river, bathed, cleaned the temple and performed the pūjā for god, the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā.

TĀMARAI: Oh, Cellāttā! Īswari! With your help I am going to the great, golden Benares to obtain a boon. You must come as a guardian and (help) get the boon for me.

Tāmarai paid her respects to Cellāttā. Afterwards, the couple returned to the palace.

The whole country had (now) come to know that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai were going in order to obtain a boon. When they heard the news, Tāmarai's two black cows came, saw her (and said), "Lady. So you are going to Benares to obtain a boon!"

COWS' SONG:

*Women, while obtaining a boon for yourself,
Obtain a boon for me.*

COWS: Lady. When your hoped-for son arrives, and when he goes to see the thousand fields, if he sees a calf born of my womb playing, then your son will become happy.

TĀMARAI: All right, oh, cows! I will obtain (that boon for you) and return.

The black cows said, "Okay," and became happy.

After (the cows) had departed, two blue horses came up to Tāmarai. "Oh, lady," said the horses. "So you are going to Benares to obtain a boon!"

TĀMARAI: Yes, I shall go there and then return, oh, blue ones!

HORSES' SONG:

*Women, while obtaining a boon for yourself,
Obtain a boon for me.*

HORSES: Lady. When the time of your hoped-for son arrives, let him mount my colt to cross mountains and hills with lightning speed (and) great bravery. Obtain this boon for me.

TĀMARAI: Okay, blue ones! I shall obtain it for you.

HORSES: Lady. Good.

After the blue horses had left, a black, childless Paṛaiyā woman of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows came to the palace. She had heard that Tāmarai was going to obtain a boon. Seeing Tāmarai, she said, "Lady! So you are going to the great, golden Benares!"

WOMAN'S SONG:

*Mother, while obtaining boon for yourself,
Obtain a boon for me.*

¹ November – December.

² Araca maram in Tamil, the great pēpal tree is *Ficus religiosa*.

³ Kāci Poṅṅampalam, meaning "Golden Benares."

PARAIYĀ: Lady! You must not obtain an inferior boon for me. When the time of your hoped-for king arrives, you must obtain for me the boon of a son who will be his assistant. He should be a man with the strength of sixteen elephants who can run with the speed of lightning and who can grab and bring the clouds to a halt.

TĀMARAI: Okay, I will obtain that boon for you.

Numerous others came from the revenue towns, requesting boons. After all were promised something, (Tāmarai called) her maids.

TĀMARAI: Oh, you maids! Secure enough food and other things to last yourselves twenty-one years. Okay, husband. Start out. Let's go.

The two came outside closed and locked the four gates, and went and stood at the Pilliar temple where (she called) out to Vishnu.

TĀMARAI: Vishnu! The one who rescues people in trouble, the saviour of orphans. King of the worlds! The one who rules Paṅṭarīpuram!¹ If it is true that I was born of god's creative force, then you must send black beetles and wasps to watch the palace until we return from the great, golden Benares, oh, Vishnu!

Episode 12 ✨

While Tāmarai was praising Vishnu, black beetles and wasps came to earth from the gods' council chamber and circled Tāmarai's place, guarding it. King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai left the Pilliar temple and set out.

SONG:

*Looking north, looking far to the north,
She is going now, taking her husband with her
Caṅkuvaṭam, Caṅkuvaṭam,²
She is crossing, she is crossing there.*

The two crossed Caṅkuvaṭam and were headed northward when the boar Tāmarai had previously bought and raised, having heard they were going to the great golden Benares, lay down on the path, blocking it like a huge mountain.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! What's this, something sleeping in the middle of the path?

TĀMARAI: Husband! It is the very boar we raised which is lying in the path and blocking it.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Did you not listen when I told you before that we should never raise a boar? Now it is lying across our path.

¹ A place where a woman who was mistreated by her in-laws was rescued by Vishnu.

² This seems to be an imaginary place.

Tāmarai became angry, looked at the boar. "Everyone has been to the palace to ask for boons," she said, "(But) you lie down and block the path." She began kicking the boar with her right foot. All of a sudden, the boar got up and angrily planted its four feet on the earth.

BOAR: Villain, Tāmarai! While going to ask for a boon, you proudly kick me with your right foot? Okay, good. But woman! You will go and do penance. You will give birth to a Poṅṅar, and right after Poṅṅar, you will give birth to Caṅkar. I will go the Veṭṭuvān kingdom of Vīrappūr and, having taken refuge with the chaste woman Vīrataṅkā, I will do penance for twenty-one years at the Vīrappūr Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. (There I will) obtain the boon of seven piglets. The last piglet, the youngest, will be sixty feet high and seventy feet long and will be called Kompaṅ. That will be my boon. Poṅṅar will get the right tusk and Caṅkar the left tusk. With it their guts will be lifted out and your sons will be killed. That will be my boon.

After the boar departed, Tāmarai stood there with a discouraged heart. On seeing all this from the palace, an earless dog came running up to her and said:

DOG: Lady. The boar left so fast. Why are you standing with a discouraged heart?

TĀMARAI: Oh, earless dog! The boar was sleeping in our path, blocking it. I became angry and kicked it with my foot. The boar then got angry and said that, after I had done penance, she would bear a great, tusked boar whose right tusk would be for Poṅṅar and its left for Caṅkar. His tusks would pull their guts out, it said, and it ran off angrily. I thought, "What is the point in going to obtain a boon?" and my heart became discouraged and came to a stop.

DOG: Lady. You must not grieve about that. If a dog is sent with them, it will kill the boar. Go and obtain a boon for a pup of one span¹ to be born in my stomach. Let its teeth be full of poison. Obtain a boon like that for me. On account of it, you will have no need to fear.

TĀMARAI: Okay, earless female dog! We will go and return.

And they set off.

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
They are approaching now, with love,
Leaving the forest, my Lord,
Leaving the Kaṭṭapoḷḷi forest, my God,
Through the dark forest, my Lord,
The two of them are approaching now.*

¹ The size of one open hand.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, you woman of mine!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:
*Thorns of a large-leafed thistle, oh, woman,
 All are stabbing my body,
 Thorns of a large thistle (prick) me,
 (They) rise up to stab one.*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, you woman. Tāmarai! My eyes do not see. How can I walk these uninhabited wastes?

TĀMARAI: Husband. I will hold your hand and lead you slowly. Come without fearing.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:
*I cannot walk, my wife, what shall I do?
 My ankle is really hurting,
 My kneecaps are hurting a lot,
 How shall I cross this dark forest?
 The lord is crying. His body is wilting.*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! There seem to be mountains nearby. What are they?

TĀMARAI: Husband! That is a view of the Himalayas.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! How shall we get across them?

TĀMARAI: Husband! There will be some sort of path to follow.

As they drew close and looked carefully there were no trees, plants or creepers to be seen, just a barren, sloping mountain. "Husband," said Tāmarai. "There is no path for climbing up. What shall we do?"

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. There is no path. We shall return home. Come!

TĀMARAI: Husband! Having come (this far), we must not turn back towards home. I will tie you on my back and crawl up the mountain.

And she tied her husband on her back and began to crawl upwards.

SONG:
*Stretching out her palms,
 The chaste lady climbs upward,
 Extending her thumbs,
 Tāmarai is climbing to the mountaintop.*

Tāmarai grasped, grasped with her hands. As she climbed the height of two palmyra palms, Vishnu, standing on the summit, saw this.

VISHNU: Ah ha! In order to obtain the boon of having children, Tāmarai comes, carrying her husband on her back. We shall observe her cleverness.

With his visible hand, Vishnu tapped Tāmarai's hands. Tāmarai's hand slipped. Doubling over, the two of them fell to the ground. Tāmarai got up and began to lift her husband onto her back (again), and then she saw that he was dead.

TĀMARAI: Oh, oh, husband!

TĀMARAI'S SONG:
*To obtain the boon of a son,
 To obtain it now,
 I have lost my King, oh, Harirāmā
 I lost (him) here,
 To obtain the boon of a child,
 To obtain it now,
 I have lost my husband, oh, Vishnu,
 I have lost (him) here,
 To obtain it now,
 I have lost my monarch,
 I have lost (him) here.*

TĀMARAI: I have come to obtain the boon of a son, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram, (but) I have lost my King, Vishnu! I came to obtain the boon of a child, (but) I have lost my monarch here.

The chaste woman cried, hot with indignation. She laid her husband under a tree. Then she had the idea of bringing water so as to pour a little in her husband's mouth and see if there was any sign of life. (So) she set off to find water in a forest grove. Vishnu, learning of this, made sure that there was no water in any grove (nearby). (Then) in one place, he created a lotus pond and called Yeman¹ to come. Yeman took the disguise of a cuckoo and Vishnu the disguise of a peacock.

Tāmarai, searching for good water and finding none, was returning exhausted when she heard the call of a peacock and a cuckoo. "The peacock and the cuckoo can be found in cool places the elders say," she thought. "Let's go there and see." When she went and looked in the place where the cuckoo was singing, there was a pond with lots of water. Tāmarai became happy and climbed down the first step (towards the water).

¹ A god who brings death. His name is spelled Yama in Sanskrit.

SONG:

*As the chaste woman climbed down one step,
The water receded to the second step,
As Tāmarai climbed down a second step,
The water receded to the fourth step,
As the fine tender vine climbed down to the fourth step,
The water receded to the sixth step,
As the chaste woman climbed down to the sixth step,
The water receded to the eighth step,
As Tāmarai climbed down to the eighth step,
The water receded to the tenth step.*

In this way, as Tāmarai climbed down further and further, the water level dropped until finally the pond was empty.

TĀMARAI: Ah ha, Vishnu! What sin have I committed that all the water should disappear?

At the bottom of the depression, was a hole in which she thought there would be water. As she dug for the dregs with her hand, there was (again) none. (Instead), there was a frog. Seeing this, Tāmarai thought, "Taking this, I shall crush and squeeze it into my husband's mouth." As she caught it in her hand, (the frog cried) out.

FROG: Oh, oh, Tāmarai! Are you catching me?

Tāmarai thought, "It's saying my name!" and she tossed it away and got up.

SONG:

*Before Tāmarai climbed one step,
The water rose to the second step,
Before Tāmarai climbed the second step,
The water rose to the fourth step,
As the chaste lady climbed to the fourth step,
The water rose to the sixth step.*

In this way, Tāmarai came up and up the water came up (too). When Tāmarai had reached the top, she turned, and while looking to the west, (she saw) Vishnu seated at the foot of a tree in the disguise of a wandering ascetic. Seeing Vishnu, Tāmarai approached him and said, "Oh, Vishnu. Is it you? Have you done all these things?" She folded her arms and venerated him. "Vishnu! Why must my husband die so needlessly? Come, get my husband up and return him to life."

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Your husband died when his time was finished. What can I do? Am I Shiva, that I can give your husband life? For my part, I cannot do anything, woman.

TĀMARAI: Vishnu! There is nothing that cannot be done if you desire it. You must get my husband up immediately!

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Okay, take some water and come.

The two of them went and stood under the tree where Kuṅṅuṭaiyā lay. Vishnu took the water Tāmarai had brought and sprinkled it on Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, and (then) took a golden wand and tapped him three times. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā got up, as if from a sleep, sat down, and seeing Vishnu, paid his respects.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Blessings to you! Are you all right?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Lord! With your blessings, I am fine.

VISHNU: Okay, good! Tāmarai, you cannot cross the Himalayas on your own accord! I will tell you a trick. Listen: I will go up (to heaven) and obtain the disguise of a fly for you. (Then) I will lower a string-like rope. You two grasp hold of that rope. I will draw it up and let it down on the other side.

TĀMARAI: Lord! Very good!

Vishnu immediately obtained the disguise of (two) flies for the couple. (Then) he went to the mountaintop, stood, and let down a rope. As flies, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai took hold of the rope. Vishnu immediately pulled it up and let it down on the other side. Getting off, Tāmarai said, "Lord! With your help we have crossed the mountains. (But) there, in front, there seem to be many stones. What is that, Lord?"

VISHNU: Tāmarai! That is a river of stone. Second, a river of thorns. Third, a river of ghee. Fourth, a river of fire. All four rivers must be crossed.

TĀMARAI: Lord! I cannot cross these four rivers on my own accord. To cross these four rivers, you must exercise your mercy.

VISHNU: All right. Good, Tāmarai! I will go first and point the way. You two follow behind me.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good.

SONG:

*Saying it was good, saying it was good now,
They are going with love, going now,
With the blessings of the Lord, with his blessings now,
They are coming, searching for Shiva's abode.*

Vishnu, having brought the two across the four rivers, said, "Tāmarai! Next is the forest of cobras. In that forest, a cobra will block your path. It will say, 'Bring me a boon! Tell the cobra that you will bring it one, then come to the stone for barren, childless women.'" Vishnu then went on ahead. When he had left, and

the two had begun to walk across the cobra forest, a cobra appeared. Wondering who was entering his grove, he spread open his hood.

SONG:

*The cobra hissed, my Lord,
See how it wiggles as it comes, my God,
At that moment, my Lord, it showed its teeth,
See, my God, how arrogant it is.*

The cobra became angry, came close and, looking (carefully), saw two godlike figures.

COBRA: Woman! Who are you? What country are you from?

TĀMARAI: Cobra King! I am from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and my name is Tāmarai Kavunṭācci. The person standing nearby is my husband.

COBRA: Oh ho! If that is so, good! Vishnu told me that you would come.

COBRA'S SONG:

*While obtaining a boon for yourself, woman,
Oh, fine tender vine, obtain a boon for me.*

COBRA: Woman, Tāmarai. When obtaining a boon for yourself, also obtain a boon for me. Woman, Tāmarai! When the time of your hoped-for son arrives, my child will be of help to your children.

TĀMARAI: Cobra King! I will obtain such a boon.

COBRA: Okay, good! Go in good health and return!

Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai took leave of the cobra and set out.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, my Lord,
They are going now with love,
Searching for the holy stone for barren women,
They are going, my Lord, the two of them.*

As the two of them arrived at the stone for the childless, Vishnu was there waiting for them.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Have you arrived safely?

TĀMARAI: Lord! With your blessing, we have arrived.

VISHNU: Okay. Good! The river Ganges is flowing over there. Go bathe in it and come back.

Tāmarai immediately went, bathed, and returned.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. See the flight of Shiva's steps¹ there. Place those stones and thorns in your mouth, circle this place for barren women seven times, and come back.

Tāmarai immediately took the stones and thorns in her mouth, circled the place seven times, and replaced the stones and thorns on the steps as before. Then she got up and stood.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! There are two people closely associated with Tamil,² but for penance you are the only one!³ We will place your husband here, take his life and place it in a golden box. After twenty-one years, on returning, we will restore him to life.

TĀMARAI: Lord. That is good.

Vishnu took his life and placed it in a golden box. Then Vishnu and Tāmarai set off.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, my Lord,
They are going with love, my Lord,
Vishnu walks ahead, my Lord,
Tāmarai follows after, my Lord,
The most excellent one walks ahead, my Lord,
The chaste lady walks behind, my God,
Searching for the gods' council chamber, my Lord,
He is taking Tāmarai (there), my Lord.*

They came close to the gods' council chamber and stood.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! In the gods' council chamber, those people who have committed sins are put in the hell-pit and trampled on. Those who have been righteous are put in heaven. Those with evil deeds in former births⁴ are put in the hell-pit, and while being trampled their life (spirit) cries, "Oh my, oh my." Therefore, without turning around to look anywhere, you must follow after me.⁵

1 Possibly the steps leading to Shiva's abode.

2 Likely the person who formulated Tamil grammar, and Murukan (the most ancient of Tamil divinities).

3 The only one strongly associated with penance as these two are with Tamil.

4 Literally "Karma," or the sum of past deeds.

5 In the Mahābhārata, the eldest of the Paṇḍava brothers, sometimes called Dharma, is similarly taken to heaven by Krishna (a form of Vishnu). At one point, Krishna tells him not to look at what they pass on the way. But Dharma cannot restrain himself, and he sees his enemies enjoying themselves and his own family suffering in hell. Later, Krishna explains the reason for this reversal and tells Dharma that the sight of his relatives suffering is itself a punishment for him, since Dharma had once told a lie. In this story, Tāmarai similarly "suffers" several glimpses of hell as a part of her penance.

"Lord. Good," Tāmarai said, and Vishnu walked ahead while she walked behind. After they had gone a short distance, there was a woman who was in the hell-pit and being trampled on. Hearing that woman's life (spirit) cry, "Oh my, oh my," Tāmarai turned around to look.

TĀMARAI: Lord! What sin has this woman committed? Why is she in the hell-pit and being trampled on, Lord?

VISHNU: Tāmarai! I told you not to turn around and look but she did not listen. (While) on earth, that woman did not pay the washer man, barber or doctor (for their services). By not paying them, she caused an injustice and so she has been put in the hell-pit and is being trampled on. From now on, no matter what sounds you hear, follow behind me without looking around.

Even further, there was a woman tied under a tree with her head down and feet up, and she was being powerfully beaten. The woman's spirit was emitting the sounds, "Oh my, oh my." Tāmarai heard this (and said), "Vishnu! What sin did she commit, to be tied with her head down and feet up and be beaten?"

VISHNU: Tāmarai! On earth:

VISHNU'S SONG:

*She placed the husband on the floor, she did (this),
That woman climbed on the cot and slept,
Placed her husband on the floor, she did (this),
That woman climbed on the cot and slept*

That is why she is given this punishment. Okay. Now follow behind me without turning to look anywhere.

And the two kept going further. There, a man's spirit had been put in the hell-pit and was being trampled by four people. Seeing this, Tāmarai cried out:

TĀMARAI: Lord! What sin did this male son commit?

VISHNU: Tāmarai! He left his wife and began a family with a prostitute or some other. Therefore, he is receiving this punishment. Now follow behind me without looking anywhere.

SONG:

*Searching there for the gods' council chamber,
Vishnu brought her with him,
The God walked ahead,
The lovely parrot followed behind.*

The two arrived at Tāṇṇaci Kōmpai¹ on Shiva's dancing ground in Benares.

¹ A place for ascetics.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! This is the place where Arjuna¹ once did penance. Here is where you must do (your) penance. Look there! In the hollow of that pēpal tree, there is a saffron body cloth, a necklace of prayer beads,² a ritual vessel of copper, a coat of mail,³ and a box of sacred ash. Get all these and come.

TĀMARAI: Lord! I have them all and have returned.

VISHNU: Take off your garments and put on the saffron body cloth.

TĀMARAI: Lord! I have put it on.

VISHNU: Put the bead necklace around your neck. Rub the sacred ash over your whole body.

Having said this, Vishnu planted seven needles on a stone with their points together. On this, he placed seven victory beads,⁴ upon which he placed seven glass beads, upon which he placed seven red flowers, and upon these he placed seven red oleander flowers to make the pillar of penance.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Climb up to this place of penance and sit with one leg folded and one leg hanging down. Close both eyes, extend both arms and meditate on Shiva with complete austerity.

TĀMARAI: Lord! Good!

Episode 13 ✪

As she climbed the pillar of penance, it began to shake.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Climb down! What sin have you committed? The pillar of penance is shaking. Speak up, without omitting (any details).

TĀMARAI: Lord! One day I was sleeping in the palace when my husband, having been out somewhere, came home. At that time, the big toe of my foot tripped him. Except for that, I have not committed any sins.

¹ Hero of the Mahābhārata.

² Prayer beads made of Rudraksha beads from *Elaeocarpus* seeds, used by worshippers of Shiva.

³ This term translates the Tamil words *kavasa kuṇṭalam pañcāṭṭaram*, which refer to the armour worn by Karna, a famous character in the Mahābhārata. This 'mail' made him invincible, but he famously gives it away, when directed to do in a vision he receives from his father, the Sun, just a few days before his death. Judging from this passage, this famous set of armour appears to consist of a breast plate, a magical earring, and a powerful string of phrases (the *pañcāṭṭaram*) that praise Lord Shiva. According to the Mahābhārata, this notable gear-bundle is received by Indra who then passes it on to his son Arjuna, another famous Mahābhārata hero, to help in his defense. This is just one of several references in the story being told here, that make it clear Tāmarai, who is about to perform her penance at the exact spot where Arjuna once did his, is implicitly a new form of that great warrior himself, now appearing in a freshly minted, female guise.

⁴ Sacred prayer beads

"Tāmarai!" said Vishnu. "That, (which you described) was a sin. Go again to the Ganges¹, wash yourself seven times, and return." Tāmarai did this, washing herself seven times, and then returned to Vishnu. "Now climb the pillar of penance and stay there."

Tāmarai climbed up, extended her hands and exercised complete concentration. Vishnu immediately took her life and enclosed it in a golden box. (Then) he braided Tāmarai's hair in four strands "For twenty-one years, endure the winds and rains that beat down upon you," he said. "Let the braids be fixed to the four corners of the ground. Now, I will tell you. Remain like this for twenty-one years. Afterwards, come and I will give you a boon."

And Vishnu returned to the milk sea.

SONG:

*At this good time, this sweet time,
See the good age in progress, in progress,
Day after day, time followed time,
Tāmarai did it, a super penance,
For twenty-one years, (twenty) plus one years,
The chaste lady performed a great penance,
She performed it there.*

Vishnu saw that twenty-one years of penance had been completed. "Ah ha!" he thought. "Now I must quickly go and obtain a boon for Tāmarai." And he set off to the great, golden Benares.

SONG:

*Looking for the Mighty Fortress,
Harirāmā is coming,
Searching for the Supreme Shiva,
Sri Rama is coming there,
Searching for Kailāsa now,
Lord Krishna is coming,
Looking for the gods' council chamber,
Vishnu is coming.*

Vishnu arrived in great, golden Benares, and he noticed the figure of Tāmarai on the pillar of penance. She was dried up and hanging like a finger. Vishnu brought her body down and saw that there were huge termites living in her hair. A parrot of the gods' council chamber had nested in her nose. Baby parrots were playing (there). Vishnu grabbed them, saying, "You must not be in the gods' council chamber. Go to earth." And he flung them away. The two parrots went to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

¹ As elsewhere, this is simply a prestigious way of referring to a local river, implying that this waterway may have a secret underground link to the Ganges itself.

"Ah ha!" said the parrots. "If we stay here, Tāmarai's sons will one day catch us and treat us harshly." And they went to Vīrataṅkā.¹

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Women, baby parrots! What town are you from?

PARROTS: Woman. We are parrots of the gods' council chamber. Tāmarai Kavunṭācci of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has performed penance in the gods' council chamber for twenty-one years. We were raised in her nose! When the twenty-one years were over, Vishnu came to see her. He found us there, grabbed us and flung us down to earth. We came to you, fearful that if we stayed in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, Tāmarai's sons would later mistreat us. (Those) farmers will not come here,² we thought, and so we came to you.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: On this side of Matukkarai forest, in the area of the hills of Nākamalai, Tōkamalai, the four-sided Cūluntamalai, and Pattippaṭarntamalai, in the area of the virtuous Vīramalai, weighty Vīramalai mountain, is the Veḷḷiyāṅkiri tank.³ There is a huge, spreading banyan⁴ tree with a thousand branches and a thousand aerial roots. On the west side of that tree, a thousand country parrots have been raised.

The chaste Vīrataṅkā put the two godlike parrots into the hole in the tree and said, "Live here, the two of you, without getting separated." Fearing that someone might catch these parrots, the chaste Vīrataṅkā placed five thousand cobras in the neighbouring forest as guards. And in the forest beyond that, she placed five thousand tigers as guards. Having taken care of this, she returned.

At this very time, in the gods' council chamber, Vishnu took Tāmarai's body to the bank of the Ganges and moistened it with water. Then he brought it out (of the water) and gave it life. As soon as Tāmarai was given life, she quickly got up.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*She said, "Where is my son, Lord?" (And)
The fine tender vine stretched out (her) two hands.*

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Lady Tāmarai, climb the pillar,
Oh, chaste lady, do a hard penance!*

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Like before, climb the pillar of penance. Pray to Shiva and do a hard penance. I will build a big fire sacrifice in the gods' council chamber and return.

¹ The younger sister of the Veṭṭuvās men who will be important in the story at a later point.

² The Veṭṭuvās are forest dwellers.

³ These are actual place names. See the accompanying map for the location of the areca described.

⁴ The banyan tree, *ala maram* in Tamil, is *Ficus bengalensis*.

Tāmarai climbed the pillar of penance and Vishnu built a sacred fire in the gods' council chamber.

SONG:

*The fire, the fire splinters,
Oh, the smell of the sacred fire, the sacred fire,
See the (splinters) burn Shiva, my Lord.¹*

SHIVA: Oh, goodness, assistants! Run and see! Some villain is burning me as would fire itself. Is someone doing penance at the foot of the pēpal tree? Run and see!

The assistants ran and saw that Tāmarai was performing penance. They ran back to Shiva and said, "Lord. Some woman has erected a pillar of penance and is completely absorbed in meditation. We don't know who it is."

SHIVA: That villain! Who brought her to the gods' council chamber? Oh, assistants! Pull her down and cut her into pieces with an axe! Drop her to the bottom of the three hell-pits! Trample on her!

The assistants did this. They cut up Tāmarai, put her in the hell-pit, trampled on her and returned. Shiva's rage abated.

VISHNU: Oh ho. So, you cut up Tāmarai, put her in the hell-pit and had her trampled?

(Vishnu) took a forked stick, went to the hell-pit, retrieved three bones, and put them in the Ganges to moisten them. Then he placed them on a hillock and gave them life. Tāmarai suddenly got up.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*"Where is (my) son, oh, Lord?" she said,
(And) Tāmarai extended her two hands.*

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Two rebirths have been completed now. There are five more to go. Tāmarai! Climb the pillar of penance again and do a hard penance.

(And) as before Vishnu lit a sacred fire.

SONG:

*The sweet scent of the sacred fire (arose),
And Shiva became shrivelled by the flames.*

SHIVA: Oh, my assistants! Come quickly! Someone is again building a fire. Run and see.

The assistants ran to see and saw the same woman performing penance again. They came to Shiva and said, "Lord. The same woman is performing penance again."

SHIVA: Oh, assistants! Go quickly and cut her with an axe! Wrap her in a heap of straw! Set it aflame and let her burn.

The assistants did this and returned. Shiva's fury abated.

Vishnu came running, saw the burning straw and put the fire out. As he poked around with his forked stick, he found three bones. Taking these, he went to the Ganges, put them in the water, moistened them, touched them with a golden wand, and gave them life. Tāmarai suddenly got up.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*"My Lord, my son,
My son, where is he?
Where is he?"*

Tāmarai stretched out her two hands towards Vishnu.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Three rebirths have been completed. Four more births remain. Climb again to the place of penance, the place of penance. Stay there, oh, great, royal Tāmarai.

Tāmarai climbed the pillar of penance again and while she did penance, Vishnu again built a sacred fire in the gods' council chamber. The fire seized Shiva in the gods' council chamber and he wilted.

SHIVA: Oh, my assistants! Run and see. Someone is lighting a fire again.

Assistants went and found the same woman doing penance. The assistants ran to Shiva (and said), "Lord! The same woman is doing penance."

SHIVA: Oh, assistants! Go again and cut her up. Put her under seven hell-pits, and trample on her.

The assistants did this and returned. Shiva's rage abated.

"Tāmarai has been put in a hell-pit," Vishnu thought. (So) he took a forked stick, went and turned the (contents of the) hell-pit and found three bones. He took these to the Ganges, moistened them, took them out, touched them with a golden wand and gave them life. Tāmarai suddenly got up.

Tāmarai, the chaste lady, stretched out her hands towards Vishnu asking for her son.

VISHNU: Climb the place of penance, lady Tāmarai. Stay there, oh, great, royal chaste woman. Tāmarai! Four rebirths have been completed. Climb up to the place of asceticism once again and do penance.

¹ The heat of a hard penance is thought to rise and burn a god who refuses to grant a boon.

Vishnu built a sacred fire, and it brought a great heat to the gods' council chamber.

SHIVA: Oh, assistants! Run and see. Someone has lit a fire again. Who is this villain?

The assistants ran to see and discovered the same woman doing penance once more. Running back, they said:

SHIVA'S ASSISTANTS: Lord. The same woman is performing penance again.

SHIVA: Oh ho! This is very surprising. What villain is giving her back her life? Don't I know? It is that sneaky fellow, Krishna. It is his work. Oh, assistants! Cut that woman into pieces again and place them in the mouth of an elephant.

The assistants went immediately, pulled Tāmarai down, cut her into little pieces and put them in the mouth of an elephant. Seeing this Vishnu thought, "Ah ha! Things have gone badly. It seems an elephant is going to eat (the pieces)." Without anyone knowing about it, he held the elephant's neck so that it could not swallow. The elephant, now being unable to swallow the meat, spat half of it out. After the assistants had taken the elephant away, Vishnu collected three bones, went to the Ganges, put them in the water and moistened them, took them out, tapped them with a golden wand and gave them life. Tāmarai suddenly got up.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:
*"My Lord, (my) son," she said,
 (And) the chaste lady stretched out her hands.*

VISHNU: Tāmarai! There are two births left still!

SONG:
*Oh, chaste lady, climb the place of penance,
 Stay there, oh, great, royal Tāmarai.*

Again, Tāmarai climbed the place of asceticism and did penance while Vishnu lit a sacred fire. The flames heated the gods' council chamber.

SHIVA: Oh, assistants! Run and see. Someone has lit a sacred fire again.

The assistants ran to see, and again saw the same woman doing penance. Running back, they said, "Lord. The same woman is doing penance. There is no one (else) to be seen."

SHIVA: Oh ho! Is that so? Run and again cut her into pieces, put her on the ground and have the horses trample her until (the whole) becomes nothing but water.

The assistants went immediately, cut up Tāmarai, put her on the ground, had horses trample her and left and gave (the whole) as nothing more than water. Seeing this, Vishnu came running, and while searching he found three bones. He took them out and gave them life. Tāmarai suddenly got up.

Tāmarai stretched out her hands towards Shiva once again and begged him: "Where is (my) son, Lord?"

VISHNU: Tāmarai. There is still one more birth left.

VISHNU'S SONG:
*Climb to the place of penance, lady,
 Climb to the penance place there,
 Stay there, oh, great royal lady, Tāmarai.*

VISHNU: Tāmarai! There is only one rebirth left. Climb up again and perform a complete penance.

Vishnu lit a sacred fire. The flames of the blaze were very hot.

SHIVA: Oh, assistants! Run here! It seems that ancient Kailāsa¹ is being destroyed. My body burns like a fire. This is the work of that sneaky fellow, my brother-in-law, Krishna! Once, long ago, he brought Dharma's younger brother Arjuna² and had him do penance like this and wilted me (with heat). Now that villain is the one to bring her here in this same way. There is no other man who plays with me in this way. Oh, assistants. Go again and pull her down, cut off her head and put in on the Garuda³ pillar that stands in front of Kailāsa. We shall see who comes to give it life.

The assistants immediately cut off Tāmarai's head and set it in front of the Kailāsa council chambers.

VISHNU: A terrible thing has happened. How can Tāmarai's life be restored without her head? Only by going to Pārvati can this business be brought to a close.

So, he took the disguise of a beggar and stood in front of Shiva's dwelling, his body covered with scabs and rotten smells and holding a beggar's bowl in his hands. "Oh, Mother! Give me some alms," he cried.

PĀRVATI: Oh, female companions! A beggar has come, even to Kailāsa! Give him some gift and send him away.

The ladies-in-waiting said: "Goddess, good!" and they brought some gifts and presented them.

¹ Abode of the gods, especially Shiva.

² Famous hero of the Mahābhārata.

³ A special pillar named after Vishnu's vehicle, the Garuda bird. Such pillars stand in front of many temples.

VISHNU: Oh, women! I won't accept what you give. I will accept only what Pārvati herself brings to me.

The ladies-in-waiting immediately went to Pārvati and said, "Goddess! The wandering mendicant refuses to accept what we brought him. You must go and give these gifts to him."

Pārvati took the gifts. When she saw the beggar, she recognized Vishnu.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! Is it you? Why have you come in this disguise? Where have you been for so many days? You haven't been to see me recently, oh, elder brother!

VISHNU: Pārvati. Having spent some days on earth I (once) came to see my brother-in-law. When I arrived, he posted me as a guard for a forest of palm flowers. After I was there for a while, my body became scabby and I began to suffer. Then I set off and went to earth. While going there, I found Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar's wife, Tāmarai. Her heart was saddened after forty-five years with no children. She had built a sixty-foot square tower in front of the Cellāttā temple and was trying to climb it to commit suicide. At that moment, I went and prevented her. I called out "Hey, woman! Are you going to commit suicide?" Tāmarai answered, "Lord. I have been forty-five years without a child. Everywhere in the world people are speaking of me, saying 'barren woman.' I cannot bear their judgement and therefore I have decided on this." I touched her heart saying "Woman. (You) must not die. I will obtain a boon (to bear) children and give it to you." (Then) I brought her to the gods' council chamber and erected a pillar of penance at the foot of a pēpal tree. Tāmarai, after completing twenty-one years of penance has still not obtained the boon. Thinking my brother-in-law would grant her a boon, I brought her here, but Shiva made her die seven times (instead). He did very cruel things to her. Now he has cut off her head and set it on a Garuda pillar in front of Kailāsa. Therefore, Pārvati, you go to your husband and in some way or other, obtain a boon for Tāmarai and give it (to her).

Pārvati responded saying, "Elder brother! That is good." Then she set off. Arriving at Shiva's residence, she paid her respects to her husband.

PĀRVATI: Lord! My elder brother Vishnu has brought a woman named Tāmarai from earth to the gods' council chamber and has promised to obtain for her the boon of (bearing) children. After arriving, she performed penance for twenty-one years, and afterwards you had her killed seven times. You have been unthinkably cruel and have not granted a boon. Lord, have you again cut off her head and set it up in front of Kailāsa? Wasn't that woman born of your own creative power? If one is born (a mere human) in a city (on earth), would it be possible to come to Kailāsa? Unlock your heart! Give that woman a boon immediately, Lord.

SHIVA: Hey, Pārvati! Look at my body. This is your brother's cruelty. He lit a fire and let it burn me. Having done so much, your brother charges me with a fault? All right, Pārvati! On your account, I will let my heart forgive him and I will grant a boon. Go quickly and tell Vishnu to come here.

"Lord. Good," Pārvati said, and she departed and went to Vishnu.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! I told your brother-in-law everything, cooled his anger and got him (to agree) to grant a boon. He has asked for you to come. You go, obtain the necessary boon and give it (to her).

Vishnu went to Shiva and paid his respects.

SHIVA: Oh, brother-in-law! Blessings to you. Vishnu! Look at my body. Having let such a strong fire burn, did you go to your younger sister and charge me with a fault?

VISHNU: So what? Is what you do alone just? Wasn't Tāmarai born of your (own) creative power? Saying she had no children, she brought her case to me. I brought her to the gods' council chamber, and after she had completed twenty-one years of penance, you had her killed seven times. You have been unthinkably cruel. That is why I built such a fire!

SHIVA: Okay. Take her head, restore her life and bring her here.

Vishnu immediately came and took Tāmarai's head, went to the Ganges, put it in water, lifted it out, and tapping it with a golden wand, restored it to life. Tāmarai got up suddenly.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Where Lord, where Lord, is the boon of a son?
(And) Tāmarai extended her two hands.*

VISHNU: Tāmarai, come! We will go to Shiva. You tell him about the boon you want.

He took Tāmarai to the gods' council chamber. When they arrived at the council chamber Tāmarai, looking at Shiva, (sang).

SONG:

*She is paying obeisance there,
She is offering her services,
She is throwing herself at his feet,
She is offering her services,
She circled around and knelt in front of the sun,
She circled around and knelt before the God.*

SHIVA: Oh, lady! There is no death for those who take refuge in me.

SHIVA'S SONG:

You will live long,

You will receive honours in your palace hall,

You will go to (Vishnu's) heaven, you will live like Perumāi (himself).

SHIVA: Lady, Tāmarai! What boon do you want?

TĀMARAI: Lord. I want a boon of two sons for the land and one daughter for the house. Lord! The sons born of my belly¹ must have the strength of twelve elephants.

"Lord! Good," said Cittirapputtirā.² He got the palm leaves for the earth and began looking. "Lord! Of the five Paṇḍava brothers,³ Dharma's younger brother Bhima has the strength of twelve elephants." Shiva said, "Bring the life (spirits) of Bhima and of his younger brother Arjuna," and the lives of the two became trapped in a tiny golden box. "Tāmarai, what additional boon do you want?"

TĀMARAI: Lord. The daughter born to me must have a ball of fire in her breasts.

SHIVA: Tāmarai. What is the ball of fire for?

TĀMARAI: Lord! All the things that will happen on earth, all circumstances, must be known to my daughter.

SHIVA: All right. Good! Cittirapputtirā. Who in the gods' council chamber has a ball of fire?

CITTIRAPPUTTIRĀ: Lord! Of the seven maidens, the youngest has a fire ball.

"All right. Good! Bring her here," Shiva said. The assistants went and brought the virgin goddesses.⁴ The youngest, seeing Shiva, paid him her respects. "Woman, youngest of the virgins! You are to go to the earth for a while, to be born from Tāmarai's belly and to spend some time on earth. After that you will return to the gods' council chamber," he said and, taking her life, he creatively placed all three lives inside Tāmarai's belly. Then he called, "Oh, Cittirapputtirā! Note down that these three will live a hundred and twenty years."

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! How many years of life did you note down?

SHIVA: Vishnu. I said to write down 120 years.

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! The earth goddess will not be able to stand it if they remain on earth so long. Therefore, erase that and note down an age of sixteen, (but) with ninety years of youth.

SHIVA: I have given them that. Tāmarai! What additional boon do you want?

TĀMARAI: Lord! I have two horses. Two colts must be born from their stomachs. These colts must travel with great prowess, at lightning speed.

SHIVA: I have granted it. What additional boon do you want?

TĀMARAI: Lord! There is a black Paṛaiyā woman in my country. She wants the boon of a male child. That child must have the strength of sixteen elephants.¹

SHIVA: Cittirapputtirā! Who has the strength of sixteen elephants? Look (it up)!

CITTIRAPPUTTIRĀ: Lord! Drōṇāccāri's son Asvattāman² has the strength of sixteen elephants.

"Bring it here, that life!" said Shiva. When Drōṇāccāri's son appeared, he said, "Oh, Asvattāman! You will go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows for some time and serve as a First Minister for the farmers. After that, you may return to heaven." Then Shiva took that life and creatively placed it in the stomach of the Paṛaiyā woman on earth. "Tāmarai! What additional boon do you want?"

TĀMARAI: Lord! There is an earless dog in my palace. A pup must be born from its stomach. It must have an enormous amount of venom in its teeth. Like its mother, it must have no ears. I want that boon as a blessing, Lord!

SHIVA: I will give it to you. What additional boon do you want?

TĀMARAI: Lord! Still, all those that are capable of drinking water³ in my home are barren. They must have the blessed boon of a child. Lord!

SHIVA: I will give you some sacred Ganges water. Give a little of this sacred water to whoever wants a child. They will immediately give birth.

TĀMARAI: Lord. Good! The boons I most coveted were only those.

1 The term "belly" is favoured over "womb" in colloquial speech.

2 The account-keeper of human lives.

3 Heroes of the Mahābhārata.

4 These seven goddesses are very important deities in Koṅku religion of Tamil Nadu. The term "Kaṇṇi" can be applied to any young, unmarried woman and can be translated as either "maiden" or "virgin female." The seven are said to be dancers in the court of Indra, who is King of the gods. The term Kaṇṇi is related to the term Kanya in the north.

1 The bard seems to forget the request made by the cow for offspring, which is elsewhere used as a part of this sequence.

2 The son of Drōṇā in the Mahābhārata. His name is spelled Asvatthama in Sanskrit. He was extremely strong and whenever he defeated someone, he took on the strength of his opponent and added it to his own. Asvattāman was also one of the few Paṇḍava enemies to survive the great war. According to the Mahābhārata (1.131.13-14) he whinnied at birth, like a horse. Later in the story told here, this child of a black Paṛaiyā woman becomes known as Cāmpukā. He is shown to have a continued affinity with horses, furthermore, because he is both the heroes' stable keeper and an exceptional character capable of running at the speed of a horse.

3 All the living creatures dependent on her family.

SHIVA: Vishnu! You go to earth daily and bring someone or other and burn me, causing trouble. Therefore, until Tāmarai's children reach the age of sixteen and you bring me their lives, pawn here (with me) your right-spiralled conch and your sacred box.

So, Shiva took Vishnu's right-spiralled conch and sacred box to ensure his good behaviour. "Good, brother-in-law! We will go," Vishnu said, and he and Tāmarai took leave of Shiva and set off. The two arrived at the stone for childless women, and found Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar's body dried by the sun, moistened by the rain and looking like a parched black beetle. Vishnu lifted it into the Ganges and moistened it. Then he set it on a hillock, touched it with a golden wand and restored it to life. After a short while, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar got up and paid Vishnu his respects.

VISHNU: Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Blessings to you!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: What is this, oh, wife? Have you returned after taking this mendicant with you and performing twenty-one years of penance to obtain a child? Where is the child?

TĀMARAI: Husband! I did penance for twenty-one years and Shiva did give me the boon of a child. (But) he has not given (me) a child, yet.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! Take your husband and go to the river of fire. I will be there.

After Vishnu had left, Tāmarai took her husband and set out.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, said to be good,
The two are going with love,
Tāmarai walks ahead, walks ahead,
The lord walks behind, walks behind,
The chaste lady walks in front, walks in front,
The husband follows behind, follows behind.*

COBRA: Woman. Tāmarai! Have you obtained a boon for me?

TĀMARAI: Oh, Nākēntiran!! Having obtained it, I have come. Here, take a little of this sacred water and drink it. You will become pregnant immediately.

She poured out a little sacred water. Nākēntiran drank it and became happy. (Then) the two took leave of the cobra and set out. They reached the river of fire and saw Vishnu.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! You have arrived?

TĀMARAI: Lord. I have arrived.

VISHNU: All right. I will go ahead. Come behind me.

First they crossed the four rivers and then the expanse of the Himalayas.

VISHNU: Tāmarai. Now go to your country and stay well! If you think of me when you need me, I will come.

Then Vishnu left for the milk sea. After Vishnu left, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai turned towards the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and set out.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, said to be good,
The two of them walked the route with love,
The chaste lady walked ahead, walked ahead,
The husband followed behind, followed behind,
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, searching for it,
Tāmarai is approaching, with the lord.*

At midday when the sun was as its zenith, they arrived at the Pilliar temple in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. In a short while, the news spread throughout the town that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai had obtained a boon and returned. After a time, an enormous crowd gathered at the Pilliar temple. Everyone paid Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai their respects.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Blessings to all of you!

Then those people who were childless and all the living creatures of the palace came to Tāmarai.

CHILDLESS LOCALS: Lady! Have you obtained a boon for us?

TĀMARAI: I have obtained a boon for all of you! Here, all of you take a little of this sacred water and drink it.

Everyone took a little sacred water, drank it, and became happy. Then Tāmarai, thinking of the gods' council chamber, sent away the black beetles and wasps which had guarded the palace. Then, calling the ladies-in-waiting she said, "Clean the palace immediately and decorate it." In a short while, they had decorated it. Then they came to Tāmarai. "Lady," said the ladies-in-waiting, "We have cleaned the palace." And the two of them were happy.

SONG:

*Poṅṅayyā ruled with justice, sweet rule,
He ruled the country authoritatively, he ruled there,
He ruled with a golden signet ring on his finger, sweet rule,
He ruled the country alone, he ruled there,
Poṅṅayyā's good age,
It misted there. Dew fell*

¹ Tāmarai addresses this cobra as male, but logically it must be female, since it is asking for the gift of pregnancy.

*Kaṭuku sampa paddy flourished, paddy flourished there,
The mist covered it well, it covered the land there,
Miḷaku sampa paddy flourished, paddy flourished there,
It rained three times a month in that land,
Hailstones fell (there) once a year,
See the surplus paddy sprout on the threshing floor.*

Episode 14 ✪

Kuṅṇuṭaiyā unfailingly performed a pūjā for Cellāttā three times a day. Now Tāmarai was pregnant and was in the seventh month. While this was the situation in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, in the Land of Prosperity the thousand clansmen gathered at (their) Pilliar temple. One man in the crowd spoke.

CLANSMAN: Oh, my elder brothers! Tāmarai, of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, is now seven months pregnant. Therefore, at the time (of birth) we must call our midwife, Kuppi, and arrange a trick.

Then one man left, got Kuppi, and brought her there.

CLANSMEN: Kuppi, elder sister! Tāmarai, the wife in the big house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, is seven months pregnant. In three more months, they will come to you and take you (to the palace). You go, and if a male child is born to her, cut it up and stuff the pieces in a bandicoot hole. If a female child is born in a conch, give it milk and name it Taṅkā.¹ If you do this, and drive them from their country and kingdom, we will divide the seven and a half crore of wealth equally with you.

The midwife Kuppi said, "Okay," and the greedy one made the agreement. The midwife's body was misshapen by eighteen bends,² just like her vile character. Vishnu, seeing the group of clansmen talking, from (his vantage point on) the milk sea, thought, "The boon I have given is about to be married. The boon I gave is going to be affected by a faulty penance. I must go and take care of it." He immediately mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord, leaving there,
Coming to the fertile Land Where the Kāveri Flows, oh, God,
Where gold springs from the earth, my Lord,
To the land renounced for its wealth, oh, God,*

¹ Taṅkā means "golden one."

² Kuppi is a hunchback. There is a possible parallel here with Kūṇi (Manthara in Sanskrit), a hunchback female figure in the *Rāmāyana*. Kūṇi was the nurse-cum-slave who advised Dasaratha's wife Kaikeyī to arrange Rama's banishment to the forest. This was so that Kaikeyī's own son, Bharata, could take the throne.

*To the one who divides the earth, the good earth,
To the Cellāttā temple of Matukkarai.*

As soon as Vishnu arrived at the Cellāttā temple, Cellāttā saw him and paid her respects.

VISHNU: Oh, Cellāttā! Blessings to you.

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother! What brings you here looking for me?

VISHNU: I took Lady Tāmarai to the gods' council chamber and obtained for her the boon of two sons for the land and one daughter for the house. You know this, don't you?

CELLĀTTĀ: Yes. I know.

VISHNU: Tāmarai is now in her seventh month. However, the clansmen of the land of Prosperity have made an agreement with the midwife Kuppi that if a male child is born to Tāmarai, she will cut him up and stuff him in a bandicoot hole. If a female child is born, she will put her in a conch, pour milk in the shell and give it the name Taṅkā. Therefore, in the next three months (you must) build an underground passage between the palace and your residence. I will come here on the day the child is born. As soon as I arrive, you (should) go to the mouth of the passage and wait. When I call, (you are to) come inside the palace. At that time, I will tell you what you must do afterwards. This is what I want you to do.

CELLĀTTĀ: Lord. Good!

VISHNU: Cellāttā! I will go.

Vishnu took leave and set out for the milk sea.

SONG:

*Day after day, time followed time,
See the good age in progress,
Threshing was done by elephants (there),
Oh, lovely Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Three months passed there,
See, they have passed.*

Tāmarai had completed her tenth month of pregnancy,¹ the time of birth neared, and the labour pain began.

TĀMARAI: Oh, ladies-in-waiting!

¹ In Tamil, months are numbered from their start rather than with their completion, so that a pregnancy is said to last ten months rather than nine, as in English.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Oh, ladies-in-waiting!**My stomach is in pain,**My intestines are causing me nausea,**It seems my life is leaving me,**Oh, ladies. Bring my husband here quickly."*

"Lady, good!" said the ladies-in-waiting, and they went to King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā.

"Lord. The lady's stomach pains have started. She has asked us to bring you."

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā got up immediately and ran to where Tāmarai was. "Oh, woman, why do you cry?"

TĀMARAI: Husband. My stomach is hurting. Go quickly to the Land of Prosperity and bring the midwife Kuppi here.

The king set out immediately.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, oh, Lord,**Going to the Land of Prosperity, my God,**Seeing hills and climbing them, oh, Lord,**Seeing valleys and crossing them, my God,**In the burning sun, oh, Lord,**Ignoring the intense heat, my God.*

When then sun was at its zenith, at midday, while King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā was on his way to the Land of Prosperity, the Kavunṭar clansmen were meeting at the Pilliar temple. As Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar neared the Pilliar temple, the clansmen called, "Elder brother! Come. Sit down. Is your body tired?"

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Man of the big house! Of course, my body is tired. I have come to fetch your elder sister, Kuppi.

CLANSMAN: We thought as much, seeing you come at this time of day, and in such a hurry. You stay here. I will go and get her.

The son of the Kavunṭar of the big house, Paḷanicāmi, went and brought the midwife Kuppi. When Kuppi arrived and saw Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, she asked, "Younger brother of the big house, is Tāmarai all right?"

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Elder sister! She is not all right. She told me to fetch you quickly. Let's get going.

KUPPI: I am coming, younger brother!

As they set out, Paḷanicāmi Kavunṭar called. "Elder sister! Do you remember what we told you? Look after Tāmarai well. You must look after her with great care until the child is born," he said and he winked his eyes as he spoke.

KUPPI: Younger brothers. I shall not forget. I am thinking about it constantly.

CLANSMEN: Good. Go and return.

King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā set out, taking Kuppi with him.

SONG:

*Bringing Kuppi with him, my Lord,**The gentle king is coming, my Lord,**Leaving the Land of Prosperity, my Lord,**Approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord.*

Tāmarai, not being able to bear the pain, was crying. (Kuṅṅuṭaiyā) brought Kuppi and approached the palace, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Vishnu, seeing Kuppi arrive at the palace, immediately mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord,**Coming to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my God,**The good Lord, great Perumā**Harirāmā is coming, my Lord.*

Vishnu arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and came to the Cellāttā temple. Cellāttā paid him her respects.

VISHNU: Cellāttā! Blessings to you. Come immediately to the tunnel beneath the palace and wait here, prepared. When I call, come in, and take away the children (which) I will bring out.

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother, good!

VISHNU: I will go first.

Arriving at the palace, he took the disguise of a fly and alighted in the room where Tāmarai was. Kuppi arrived at the house at the same time.

KUPPI: Oh, ladies-in-waiting! Bring a rope!¹

The ladies went and brought a rope, which Kuppi took and she sent everyone out (of the room), bolting the door. Then she tied one end of the rope to the rafters and left it hang. Then (she said), "Tāmarai! Squat down and hold onto this rope." After Tāmarai had squatted down and taken hold of the rope, Kuppi took a cloth and tied it over Tāmarai's eyes.

TĀMARAI: Oh, father's sister!² Why have you covered my eyes?

1 Women in the Koṅku region traditionally gave birth while squatting and tugging on a rope tied to a rafter.

2 Note that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā used the term "elder sister" for this woman, but his wife used the term "father's sister" for her. This is significant as it indicates that the wife here does not assimilate to her husband's kin terminology. She continues to use "cross" rather than "parallel" terms for her husband's lineal kinsmen after her marriage. This is a common non-Brahmin custom.

KUPPI: Tāmarai! This is your first birth. You must not become frightened as the child is born.

Kuppi went to the next room, got a knife, and sharpened it carefully on a stone. Vishnu, seeing his chance, cut open the right side of Tāmarai's belly.

SONG:

*Stepping out suddenly, my Lord,
By the grace of Vishnu, my Lord!*

Exiting via the cut in the right side of the belly, the agreeable, patient Poṅṅampalam jumped out, and holding a knife in his hand, he stood facing south. Then Vishnu cut open the left side of Tāmarai's belly.

SONG:

*Jumping forth, my Lord,
The strong Caṅkar, my Lord.*

With the strength of twelve elephants, the younger one, Caṅkar, looked around, and holding Yeman's righteous spear in his hand, he stood facing south. As this was happening, Caṅkar saw the midwife Kuppi seated facing north, sharpening a knife. "Who is that?" thought Caṅkar. "Who is there sharpening a knife?" The boy ran and kicked her. Kuppi's intestines cramped in pain and she fell against a wall. Caṅkar kicked and kicked (again). The twelve beings in Kuppi's body all became straightened.

VISHNU: Cellāttā! Run here! Take the two children with you, and without anyone knowing about it, you must raise them for five years.

"Oh, brother!" said Cellāttā. "Good." She took the two children through the underground tunnel to her home. A short while later, a female child was born to Tāmarai. Kuppi unbound Tāmarai's eyes.

KUPPI: Tāmarai! You did twenty-one years of penance, (and) the child boon you obtained has been wasted. A little while ago, two evil spirits emerged from your belly. They tore up the umbilical cord and ran away. Now a female child has been born.

TĀMARAI: Ah ha, Vishnu! Was the boon I obtained unproductive?

SONG:

*The creator Brahma, the creator there,
The corrupted God, there, the God,
The one who writes one's destiny there,
The one who writes,
I have been subjected to this fate, there,
I have been (subjected to this),
The one who sleeps there, the one who sleeps there,
On the pēpal leaf, the one who sleeps there,*

*On the pēpal leaf, on the pēpal leaf,
Harirāmā, Harirāmā, what shall I do? What shall I do now?*

TĀMARAI: Vishnu! You were with me. Did you obtain such a boon to give to me? The good woman is crying, the flower parrot is pining.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā heard the sound of Tāmarai's crying and came running.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Kuppi, elder sister! Why is Tāmarai crying? Has the child been born yet?

KUPPI: Younger brother! You performed penance for twenty-one years. Shiva shut two evil spirits up in Tāmarai's belly. A little while ago, they tore open her stomach and ran off. Now a female child has been born.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Tāmarai! Don't cry. This is what has been allocated to us by elder sister Kuppi! You said two evil spirits escaped from the belly. Did you see them?

TĀMARAI: Husband. She tied a cloth over my eyes! Therefore, I did not see a thing.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Never mind that. Don't cry. There is a female child. We will raise her and marry her and establish her in our country.

TĀMARAI: Yes, husband! Good!

SONG:

*It was said to be good,
See how things happened with love.*

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Tāmarai! Friday is an auspicious day. Shall we perform a Puṅṅiyārccaṅai ceremony?¹

TĀMARAI: Lord, good! We shall do it.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, light-footed servant! Go to Aṅiyappūr and tell the Brahmins to come and perform a pūjā on Friday, the fifteenth day.

SERVANT: Lord! Good.

SONG:

*The light-footed servant, a servant,
Shining like silver, shining,
Running with big steps, big steps,
A servant is coming at great speed.*

¹ A ritual purification. The rite is usually performed at the naming ceremony of a newborn child, as well as on other important occasions.

The servant arrived in Aṇiyappūr, and going to the house of a Brahmin, he called, "Lord! In the home of the Kavunṭar of the big house of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, a Puṇṇiyārccaṇai ceremony will be performed on Friday. They have said you are to attend."

BRAHMIN: We shall come then!

SERVANT: All right, good, Lord! I will leave.

SONG:

*Leaving Aṇiyappūr, leaving it,
He is coming to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, coming,
When seen, the man walks like a swan, like a swan,
When not seen, he approaches with the speed of a horse.*

Early on Friday, the fifteenth day, at five o'clock in the morning, the ladies-in-waiting got up, decorated the palace, and sprinkled some drops of diluted cow dung around.¹ The Brahmins arrived. Before the moon set in search of Indra and before the sun rose in search of the moon, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā went to the Benares riverbank to bathe. Then, calling Cellāttā, he finished the pūjā for god, the family deity, and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā and returned home. The Brahmins paid Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai their respects.

BRAHMINS: Tāmarai. Is the child in good health?

TĀMARAI: Lord. She is fine.

BRAHMINS: Shall we begin the Puṇṇiyārccaṇai ceremony?'

TĀMARAI: Lord. Begin it. Oh, Kuppi. Give the Brahmins the materials they need.

The Brahmins took the necessary materials, tied strings of mango leaves to the house, recited sacred chants and performed a Puṇṇiyārccaṇai ceremony. Then the Brahmins were given cloths and other gifts and set off.

SONG:

*It rained three times a month, it rained there,
Once a year hailstones fell,
The threshing was done with elephants,
Oh, beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows, oh, fertile land,
So the monarch ruled thus,
In the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

TĀMARAI: Husband! Give a sari to father's sister, the midwife, and send her home.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! I shall send her off.

¹ Done to purify the house.

He called a servant and told her to bring a sari and put it on a plate with betel leaf, areca nut and twenty rupees. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā gave these to the midwife Kuppi, who accepted them, took her leave of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai, and set off towards home.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
She is approaching the Land of Prosperity,
Seeing hills, Kuppi, the elder sister, climbed them,
Seeing valleys, she crossed them and came.*

When the sun was at its height, at midday, as Kuppi was returning to the Land of Prosperity, the clansmen were seated at the Pilliar temple.

FIRST CLANSMAN: My elder brothers! It seems as if someone is approaching from the north.

SECOND CLANSMAN: It is our own elder sister, Kuppi, who is coming, it seems. But did not Kuppi have eighteen bends (in her body)? Now she approaches well straightened!

They all chalked out a plan, and just as this was done, she neared.

CLANSMEN: Oh ho! Elder sister Kuppi has come. Elder sister hasn't a single bend. How did she get straightened?

CLANSMAN: Elder sister! Was all the work accomplished? Did you carry out all of our instructions?

KUPPI: Men. Just as you said, two male children were born! I cut them up and stuffed them in a bandicoot's hole. A third child, a female, was born. I named it Taṅkā! and have come back.

CLANSMEN: Oh, the villain! We told you in jest, to teach you (about) your own character, and you have (actually) cut up the two children and stuffed them in a bandicoot hole? Oh, twisted woman!

KUPPI: Men. You yourselves told me to do it. Now you talk like this!

CLANSMEN: Oh, twisted one! You say we told you to cut up the children. Get that bush knife! We shall finish her with one blow.

KUPPI: Men, younger brothers. You need not cut me up. You need not give me what you said you would before. If you let me live it is enough. I shall go.

¹ This name means "younger sister" and is odd for two reasons. It is not normally a girl's formal name and it also implies that she has elder siblings, which in this case is supposed to be a secret that only the midwife knows.

CLANSMEN: Run off! You must not stand before us.

The midwife Kuppi speedily went home. Meanwhile, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows:

SONG: Taṅkā|
*Poṅṅayyā¹ ruled with justice, sweet rule,
 He ruled the country with authority, he ruled there,
 He ruled with a golden signet ring on his finger, sweet rule,
 He ruled the country alone, he ruled there.*

It rained regularly in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and the Kaṭuku sampa paddy flourished. Mist covered the land and the miḷaku sampa paddy flourished.

Episode 15 ✨

TĀMARAI: Husband, it's Friday. Let us take the child to the Pilliar temple. From there, we can go to Cellāttā's temple, introduce her (to the goddess) and return.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, oh, woman! We shall go and return.

The two of them bathed, took the child, went to the Pilliar temple, and paid their respects. Then they went to Cellāttā's temple, called upon her and performed a pūjā. Then they placed the child at Cellāttā's feet and paid their respects. As they took the child and started to leave, (Tāmarai spoke).

TĀMARAI: Husband. Let us visit the enormous field and see the black cows and the calves on the way.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Yes, oh, woman!

The two of them visited the enormous field. As they went, they saw two calves of the black cows frolicking (there).

TĀMARAI: Husband! The boon I got for myself was unproductive. (Yet) the boon I got for the black cows has turned out very well. Oh, husband! Let's go and see the colts of the blue (horse), at Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam.

The two of them set out and arrived at Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam. There, they saw the two colts of the blue (horses) frolicking and running like flashes of lightning. Seeing this, Tāmarai (said), "Husband! The boon I obtained for myself was unproductive, (yet) the boon I obtained for them has turned out very well."

¹ This epithet means "the Golden One." Here it is used to describe Kunṇuṭaiyā but later it will become a frequently used epithet for his son, Poṅṅar. The bard sings this song long before the child is actually old enough to rule the kingdom.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Husband!
 For that to happen, for that to happen,
 How many sins I committed, how many sins there,
 For all that to happen I (must have) made many mistakes there,
 many mistakes,
 The good woman, the good woman is crying, is crying there,
 The flower parrot, the flower parrot is pining, is pining there.*

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman. Let us be without a male child. We can be happy with the birth of male offspring to the horses and cows! Come! Let's go and see the son of the black Paṛaiyā woman on our way.

Saying this, the two set off and arrived at the Paṛaiyā's street. Once there, they called the Paṛaiyā woman, telling her to bring her son. The Paṛaiyā woman immediately picked up the child.

TĀMARAI: Husband. The boon I obtained for this Paṛaiyā woman was not unproductive. The child seems to be very strong. As soon as he becomes a man, we shall make him the palace guard.

The two of them, talking, returned to the palace. They ate, chewed betel and areca nut, and rested.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman. Tāmarai. We must make the child a hanging cradle, mustn't we?

TĀMARAI: Yes, husband! We must call the artisans.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, light-footed servant! Go quickly to the Land of Prosperity, get the artisans and bring them here.

SERVANT: Lord. Good!

SONG:
*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it,
 Going to the Land of Prosperity, going there,
 When seen, the man walks like a swan, like a swan,
 When unseen, he travels with the speed of a horse.*

SERVANT: Men. Oh, artisans! King Kunṇuṭaiyā of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has ordered me to fetch you.

ARTISANS: Whatever it is, we are coming.

And they set off. Arriving in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they found King Kunṇuṭaiyā. The artisans paid him their respects.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Men. Oh, artisans! Blessings to you! Artisans. You must make a hanging cradle for the child. This is the reason you were sent for.

ARTISANS: Lord. Good!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, servant! Come here. Measure out a vaḷḷam of pearls and give them to the artisans.

The servant came running, immediately. She brought a vaḷḷam of pearls and gave them to the artisans. The artisans accepted the pearls, set up a workshop and began to work.

SONG:

*Softening the body of metal, melting it
In the artisans' workshop, in the workshop,
Softening the gold, melting it,
In the blacksmith's workshop, in the workshop.*

The artisans softened the gold, beat it, formed it and finished the making of a hanging cradle. Then, seeing the king, they said, "Lord. We have made the hanging cradle."

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Hang it from a chain on a cross-beam in the earthen courtyard.

The artisans immediately did this.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, servant! Measure out a vaḷḷam of pearls and give it to the artisans.

The artisans accepted the pearls, took leave of King Kunṇuṭaiyā and returned to the Land of Prosperity. After the artisans had left, Tāmarai took the child, put it in the cradle and began to swing it.

SONG:

*The swing of the chaste girl is rocking,
It moves for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture of a goddess,
The silver chariot is swaying for the chaste girl,
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess),
The swing is talking to the chaste girl,
See how she smiles, the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess),
Oh, chaste girl in a fine swing,
Pārvatī¹ is sleeping deeply.*

While these things happened in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, in the Land of Prosperity the Kavunṭar clansmen had all gathered at the Pilliar temple.

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Men. Have the heads of the thousand households arrived?

KAVUṆṬARS: Oh, elder brother of the big house! We are all here.

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Kunṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai, of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, went to the gods' council chamber and did penance for twenty-one years. They obtained the boon of bearing children and returned. Now a female child has been born. Elder sister Kuppi deceitfully murdered the male children, as she was told. Now, as soon as that female child grows up, she will be married, the son-in-law will be brought and established there, and all the land and the wealth will be passed to him. Will we existing clansmen, the thousand of us, let the country pass (into the hands of) an in-law? We must go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows now and seize the land, driving them off it and out of the country.

They all came to an agreement and, turning towards the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land of Prosperity, my Lord,
Approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
When seen, the men walk like swans, like swans, my God,
When unseen, they move with the speed of horses, my Lord.*

They all arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and sat down at the Pilliar temple (there).

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Men. We must not all go to the palace. Let fifteen men go. Having gone, don't beat Kunṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar excessively. Kick Tāmarai well. Then leave both of them outside.

Fifteen men set out. As the clansmen set off for the palace, Tāmarai had put the child in the cradle and was swinging it. The clansmen came near.

SONG:

*He grabbed her by the hair, the villain,
He struck her across her cheek four times,
He seized the hair at the nape of her neck, the clansmen,
He struck Tāmarai four times,
The chaste lady couldn't bear the blows (and)
Tāmarai jumped the height of a man.*

CLANSMEN: Villain! Liar! Where is your husband?'

TĀMARAI: Oh, oh, Lord! If you beat me, I will bear it. Don't do anything to my husband. We will do whatever you say.

CLANSMEN: Bring your husband quickly. Run, leave the country, leave the land! If you stay here, we will beat you both.

At that moment, Kunṇuṭaiyā appeared. The clansmen seized him and dragged him to the Pilliar temple.

¹ Another name of Tānkā], the brothers' younger sister.

CLANSMEN: Villain! Take your husband and run away.

"Lord! We will run away right now. Don't do anything to us," Tāmarai said and, looking at her husband, (added), "Hold the child." She gave her to him, approached the palace and prayed to Vishnu.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Seer of Bāla mountain, supreme penitent!
Poor pilgrim, my Perumā, my Vishnu,
The thousand clansmen have beaten us,
And are sending us out of the country
After we leave, they will take all our wealth away,
They will knock down the palace,
When we have left the country,
If we escape, manage for a while, and return,
We must have our palace,
Therefore, you must protect the palace, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!*

Tāmarai prayed to Vishnu, who heard and immediately sent beetles and wasps to guard the palace. Tāmarai turned around, went back to the Pilliar temple, took the child from her husband, and the two of them set out.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Tāmarai! When our life is over, if we are in our country, at least the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages will take us and bury us! But on the contrary, this has befallen us!

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*We made a mistake in that,
Woman, we made a mistake,
How many sins we have committed!
We have sinned,
It was written, written by God,
It was written there,
We have come to this state,
We have come to this.*

TĀMARAI: Husband! What will be, will be. We cannot stop in midroute, as you always say! What can we do about it? Come. We shall go to Cellāttā's temple.

The two arrived at the Cellāttā temple. Tāmarai handed the child to her husband, tightened her sari around her breasts, let out her hair, and turned to Cellāttā.

¹ Burial instead of cremation is a common practice in the area where this epic is told, especially among the poor.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Cellāttā, are you in the temple, woman, are you?
Have you left your residence, villain, have you left?
Cellāttā, are you in the palace, woman, are you?
Have you left the palace, villain, Cellāttā, have you left?*

SONG:

*Moving around, changing place, the chaste woman,
The fine tender vine, is beating,
Striking her breasts, the chaste woman circles the shrine,
The fine tender vine, the fair-complexioned woman,
Tāmarai circles the temple nearing her breasts,
That chaste, fair-complexioned woman, slender as a branch.*

TĀMARAI: Cellāttā. I went to the gods' council chamber, did penance for twenty-one years, obtained a boon, returned and gave birth to a daughter but not to sons. Now the clansmen have come, fraudulently seized all our wealth and land, beaten us and sent us out of the country. Oh, Cellāttā! Where can we go to live? How we have worshipped you, yet we have lost our power. Where shall we go? From now, only the clansmen will perform pūjā for you. Eat well and be contented!

Taking the child, the two set off and reached Aṇiyappūr. Tāmarai had Kunṇuṭaiyā sit down at the Pilliar temple and handed him the child. "I shall go and get some milk and come," she said, and she went and stood in the street.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*Oh, women of the house nearby,
If there is milk, (please) pour out some,
A babe cries of hunger, if there is milk, pour some out, oh, woman,
From the capital of this country
I have come, suffering,
If there is milk, (please) pour out some, oh, woman,
A babe cries of hunger, if there is milk, pour some out, oh, woman,
There was gold, there was praise, oh, woman,
I was a lady with land, there was land, (that) I have left,
What can I do for such great suffering?
If there is milk, (please) pour some out, oh, woman,
A babe cries of hunger, if there is milk, pour some out, oh, woman.*

Tāmarai stood in the street, making noise. The woman of the house came out and, seeing Tāmarai, said, "There is no milk here," and sent her away.

TĀMARAI: Oh ho! Oh, Vishnu, creator of this world! Despite all the wealth we had, the clansmen have taken everything away. I do not even have cash to buy milk for the child now! My condition has come to this? Oh, Vishnu!

And Tāmarai went and stood in front of the big house of the Kavunṭars.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*If there is milk, (please) pour some out, woman,
A babe is crying of hunger, if there is milk pour out some, woman,
I have not a single coin in hand, there is no one to give me a loan,
I have come, suffering,
If there is milk, (please) pour some out, woman,
A babe is crying of hunger,
Oh, Mother, if you have milk, pour out some, woman.*

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Woman. Someone outside is asking for milk. Go and see who it is.

The wife of the Kavunṭar of the big house went outside to see and returned.

KAVUṆṬAR'S WIFE: Husband. She looks like someone from an important family. I don't know who she is. You come and see!

The Kavunṭar came out and saw that it was Tāmarai.

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Lady! What hardship has befallen you? Why have you come in this fashion?

TĀMARAI: Oh, Kavunṭar! Today a thousand clansmen from the Land of Prosperity came and beat us. They deceitfully took away our wealth, told us not to remain in the country, and sent us off. With that, we have come here. After getting milk and giving it (to the child), we plan to go to Vīrappūr.

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Lady! Where is the great ruler now?

TĀMARAI: Oh, Kavunṭar! I have left the child with him at the Pilliar temple.

Hearing this, the elder Kavunṭar called all the other Kavunṭars of the town and told them the news. All of them came to the Pilliar temple and gave Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar several crores of gifts, plus several crores of jewels.

KAVUṆṬARS: Oh, my, great ruler! Your condition has come to this? You must not go elsewhere. Stay here with us!

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Men. Oh, Kavunṭars! It makes me happy to hear you speak like this. But if we stay here, the clansmen will start fighting you. Therefore, we shall go to Vīrappūr. Take us as far as Vīrappūr. If you give us this help, it will be enough.

KAVUṆṬARS: All right. As you wish.

The Kavunṭars took Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai, turned towards Vīrappūr, and set out.

SONG:

*Leaving Aṇiyappūr, my Lord,
Searching for Vīrappūr, they are going, my God
The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord,
The mountain that is hollowed out on four sides, my God,
(The place) where there are mountains all around
Vīramalai, the spiral-like mountain, my God,
Searching for Vīramalai mountain, my Lord
The Kavunṭars are taking the two of them (there)*

They all came as far as Vīrappūr. Then the Kavunṭars took their leave. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai entered Vīrappūr. After they left, Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar set the child down and sat at the Pilliar temple. A great many Veṭṭuvās lived there. The king himself was a Veṭṭuvā. The king's younger sister was the chaste, unmarried Vīrataṅkā.

Two ladies-in-waiting approached carrying water vessels.

SONG:

*The chaste ladies have taken the water vessels,
The ladies-in-waiting have come to fetch water,
They walk like swans, the ladies-in-waiting,
They swing their arms beautifully, the ladies-in-waiting.*

As the two maids approached the Pilliar temple, they saw Tāmarai and Kuṇṇuṭaiyā who had set the child down and were sitting (there). Not knowing who they were, they came closer. As they looked at the child's face, it shone with as much beauty as the sun itself. Seeing this, one maid looking at the other and said:

LADY-IN-WAITING: Elder sister. Have you seen this child? What beauty and what composure!

(Then) she looked at Tāmarai. "Woman! What town are you from? What country are you from?"

TĀMARAI: Oh, girl. We are from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

LADY-IN-WAITING: All right, good.

The maids lifted their water and went to the chaste Vīrataṅkā, their princess, at the palace.

LADY-IN-WAITING: Oh, princess, a man and wife from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows have come and are sitting at the Pilliar temple with their baby daughter. Thinking we would fetch some water, we went there and saw them. The child is very beautiful, like the sun itself.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: All right, good. Go and bring the two of them to me.

The maids set out, and going to Tāmarai, they said, "Woman! Our princess has said to fetch you. Come."

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai immediately picked up the child and went with the maids to the palace. As soon as the chaste Vīrataṅkā saw the child, she began to admire it.

"Elder sister!" Vīrataṅkā said. She then thought in her heart: "God has made this child so beautiful." Looking at Tāmarai, she asked: "Woman! What country are you from?"

TĀMARAI: Oh, girl! We are from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Woman. What is your caste?

TĀMARAI: Girl. We are Kavunṭars.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: All right. Good. Do you have any relatives here?

TĀMARAI: Girl. We do not have a single relative here. In our country there is no rain. The land has dried, a famine has begun and one cannot live (there). Therefore, hearing that a paddy was being husked here, we decided to come and stay here awhile until times change and we can return.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: All right, woman. Good! Oh, maid servants! Go quickly to my elder brother's palace and tell him that guests have arrived. Tell the maids to start cooking and bring the child some milk!

LADIES-IN-WAITING: All right, good!

The ladies-in-waiting went to the palace of the Veṭṭuvā. After telling the maids to start the cooking, they went to the king.

LADY-IN-WAITING: Oh, King! A man and a wife have come from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, bringing one child with them. The chaste princess told us to come and tell you.

The maids then returned to Vīrataṅkā's palace. After a while, the king called the maids and asked, "Is the meal ready?"

MAIDS: Oh, King! It is ready.

KING: Good. Go quickly and fetch the guests.

The maids immediately left and, seeing Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai, they said, "The king has said to fetch you for the meal." Then they returned to the palace.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Can we eat in the house of Veṭṭuvā?

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! We must not eat in the home of a Veṭṭuvā!

TĀMARAI: Husband! What shall we do now? If we refuse to eat, they will be angry. Therefore, let us say that we have eaten and then leave. Let's go.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai arrived at the king's palace. (When) they arrived, the king took the child on his lap for a while. Then, looking at Tāmarai, he said, "Go and eat."

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, King! We have just now eaten some cold rice (that we brought). We are not hungry. Therefore, if you give us a little place to sleep, it will be enough!

KING: Oh, Kavunṭar! You speak like this, thinking that you must not eat in our house.

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, King! You must not think that. We are not hungry. That is all.

KING: All right. Set out! There is no room in the palace. Oh, servant. Take these two to the horse stable and return.

"Lord. Good!" he said, took the two to the horse stable and returned.

Tāmarai cleaned the place well and the two set the child down, and (they) themselves lay down (too). Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, suffering and not able to sleep said, "Oh, woman. We have fallen into such a state!"

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ'S SONG:

*On a cotton mattress,
On a mattress there,
On the bed, on the good bed,
I used to say that it sings, oh, woman!
Oh, the red bed,
We used to be together,
Be together, there, oh, woman!*

TĀMARAI: Husband, don't be sad. We must experience any hardships that time brings. We must experience them.

Evening came, and before dawn, before the cocks crowed, all of the people of the town arose and came onto the streets, chatting (on their way) to husk paddy at the house of the merchant.¹ Hearing the noise, Tāmarai said, "Husband! The people are going to husk rice. Watch the child. I shall go, husk rice, and return."

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Up until now, you have never even held a pestle in your hands. Therefore, can you really go and husk paddy?

¹ Ceṭṭiyār, a caste name.

TĀMARAI: Husband! One way or another, it must be done. We must maintain ourselves, mustn't we?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: As you wish, go and come back.

Tāmarai set off for the merchant's house where she found one thousand women husking paddy. Two women worked on each muttai¹ of paddy. When it was husked, each woman would receive two paṭi of rice, plus eight annas in cash.² The owner of the paddy, seeing Tāmarai standing there, came over.

MERCHANT: Woman. Who are you? What town are you from?

TĀMARAI: Oh, merchant! I am from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

MERCHANT: Woman. Why have you come to me?

TĀMARAI: Oh, merchant. In my country, there is no rain and food is difficult (to obtain). Therefore, thinking we would maintain ourselves husking rice, we came here. My husband is over there somewhere. Give me some paddy and I will husk it.

"Woman! Can you husk a muttai of paddy from this field?" asked the merchant. Turning to the other women, he said, "Will you agree to let this woman join in the husking?"

WOMEN: Oh, merchant! We will not husk (with her). If that woman pounds all day, she will not be able to husk even four vaḷḷam.

MERCHANT: Woman, they say that none of them will husk rice with you. What can be done?

TĀMARAI: Oh, merchant! No one need join in with me. Give me one muttai of paddy alone and give me one pestle.

The merchant called an assistant and said, "Give this woman a muttai of paddy." He immediately brought a muttai of rice and set it in front of Tāmarai. She tied her sari tightly and stood facing north. Thinking of the gods' council chamber, (she prayed).

TĀMARAI: Oh, Vishnu! Ruler of the earth! Lord of Paṅṭarīpuram! As I lift the pestle in my hand and move it twice, let the paddy chaff and rice grain separate, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram.

1 One muttai equals slightly less than two bushels.

2 One paṭi equals about two and a half cups. Eight annas equals one half rupee.

SONG:

*Save me, Harirāmā,
You who removed the curse of Akāḷikāi,
You who severed the ten crowned heads of Rāvana of
Southern Sri Lanka, there,
You who uprooted the giants, Harirāmā, come Lord! Now!*

As Tāmarai prayed to Vishnu and husked paddy, the chaff and the grain separated. The merchant watched this happen and marvelled.

MERCHANT: Oh, Kāḷi!! Elder sister Nācci! Elder sister Cella! You said you would not join with that woman to husk rice. Look, now! In half a second's time the chaff and grain have been separated.

As the merchant said this, all the people there looked and marvelled. The merchant immediately called the accountant and told him to give Tāmarai rice and money. The accountant gave her two paṭi of rice and eight annas in cash. Tāmarai accepted these and returned to the stable.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Did the child cry after I left?

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! The child did not cry. You have returned so quickly! Did not you husk any paddy?

TĀMARAI: Husband! I husked the rice. I have brought two paṭi of rice and eight annas.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: If it is so, did you husk a whole muttai of paddy? Where (are your hands)? Let me see them!

Kunṇuṭaiyā looked at Tāmarai's hands and (he saw) the redness and the blisters. Kunṇuṭaiyā's heart became sad. "Oh, woman!" he cried, "We have fallen into such a state that you are husking paddy! Oh, Lord Brahma."

TĀMARAI: Husband! What will happen, will happen. Don't be sad. What can be done? Don't cry.

SONG:

*It rained three times a month,
In Vīrappūr hailstones fell once a year
It was said to be good, to be good there,
See how things happened with love, happened with sweet love,
Five good years Vīrappūr,
So time passed in Vīrappūr.*

Five years had passed since Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai came to Vīrappūr. Since their arrival, it rained three times a month and hailstones fell once a year.

1 Here Kāḷi is the name of a woman worker and not the goddess.

Vīrappūr prospered. At this time, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the two male children whom Cellāttā had taken now reached five years of age. Cellāttā put the two of them on a swing.

SONG:

*Rāri, rāri, rārārō,
You are my eyes,¹ rāri, rāri, rārārō,
You were born on account of a boon,
You are dark-complexioned farmers, my lords,
You were born as a result of penance,
You are courageous farmers, Lords,
Tāmarai gave birth to you,
You are lords, courageous ones, sleep,
Kuṇṇuṭaiyā gave birth to you,
You are Lords, elephant-like ones, sleep,
You will destroy the clansmen,
You, me Lords, you have come for revenge,
You will destroy Kompaṇ,²
Go to sleep, my Lord, you who have come to murder,
You will spear the boar, my Lord,
You will divide it into seven pieces,
You will spear Kompaṇ,
You will divide him into seven pieces.*

As Cellāttā stood like this and rocked the swing, Caṅkar, who had the strength of twelve elephants, jumped out.

CAṅKAR: Mother! Mother! Why do you sing such a song while rocking the swing? Where is our mother?

CELLĀTTĀ: Tāmarai gave birth to you, courageous ones. Sleep. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā gave birth to you, elephant-like ones. Sleep.

CAṅKAR: You sing like this and rock the swing? Where are my mother and father? What is (the name of) our country? What is (the name of) our town? What is the reason why you had to raise us? Speak out quickly!

CELLĀTTĀ: Men. Oh, apples of my eye! I am your mother! You are my children!

CAṅKAR: Mother! You are lying. Tell (us) where our mother and father are now. If not, shall I cut you with my knife.

Caṅkar, becoming angry, raised (his) knife.

1 As precious as my eyes.

2 The wild boar who appears later in the story.

CELLĀTTĀ: If I don't tell the truth now, he will kill me. Men, children! Your mother's name is Tāmarai Kavunṭacci. Your father's name is Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. The two of them were ruling the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. During this time, they had no children, so your mother went to a place of penance in Benares¹ and did penance for twenty-one years. She obtained two sons for the land and one daughter for the house, as a boon from Shiva. At the time of your birth, the clansmen of the Land of Prosperity told the midwife that, if a male child was born, she was to cut it up and stuff it in a bandicoot's hole. If a female child was born, she was to feed it milk in a conch and name it Taṅkā. Seeing this, Vishnu ripped you out (of the womb), looked after you, gave you to me and told me to raise you for five years. Afterwards, a female child was born to your mother. Three months after this child was born, your mother and father, left the land and left the country, thinking that they had no male offspring. It has been five years since they left. I don't know where they went. You are now five years old.

CAṅKAR: Mother! Are the clansmen still alive?

CELLĀTTĀ: Lord. There are one thousand clansmen families.

CAṅKAR: Good. If I see them later, I shall kill them. Now, take us to our mother and father.

Episode 16 ✪

Cellāttā picked up the children and set off.

SONG:

*Matukkarai Cellāttā, who divides the earth
And defines the boundaries of countries,
Placing the children on her shoulders, my Lord,
Cellāttā walked a long the path, oh, God,
Cellāttā carried the children on her shoulders, my Lord
As Īswari,² and walked along the path, oh, God,
Searching for Aṇiyappūr, my Lord,
Cellāttā is approaching, oh, God.*

When Cellāttā arrived in Aṇiyappūr, she went to the Pilliar temple, put the children down and sat (there). Learning that Cellāttā had come, all the Kavunṭars of the town came to the Pilliar temple and paid their respects. Seeing the children nearby, (they asked), "Lady! Whose children are these?"

CELLĀTTĀ: Men. Oh, Kavunṭars! These children are the sons of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. From now on, they shall be your kings.

1 Kāci Poṅṅampalam, meaning "Golden Benares."

2 Īswari is Shiva's wife. Cellāttā is thought to be one aspect or form of this great goddess.

KAVUṆṬARS: Lady! King Kuṇṇuṭaiyā said he had no male children. How did these appear?

CELLĀTTĀ: Men. Kavunṭars! The clansmen were treacherous and thought they had killed these children. Vishnu came, looked after the children, and told me to raise them without anyone knowing of it for five years. Now the five years are up. Now they must be given to their mother. Therefore, do you know where Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar and Tāmarai have gone, oh, Kavunṭars?

KAVUṆṬARS: Lady! The clansmen told them to leave the country. They came here and asked us to take them to Vīrappūr and leave them there. We took them (there) and returned. Five years have passed since that. We don't know where they are now.

CELLĀTTĀ: Good, oh, Kavunṭars! I shall go to Vīrappūr, look, and return.

Lifting the children, she set out.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Searching for Vīrappūr, my Lord,
The Nākamalai mountains and the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord,
The mountain that is hollowed out on four sides, my Lord,
Searching for Vīrappūr, my Lord,
Cellāttā is coming, my Lord.*

Cellāttā arrived in Vīrappūr and sat down at the Pilliar temple.

CELLĀTTĀ: Dear children! I shall go and look for your mother and father, then come back to you. Until then, you two must not leave this spot to go anywhere.

(Then) she drew seven lines and said, "You must not cross these, nor follow," (Then) she left the children and set out. Cellāttā arrived at the town and stood in one of the streets.

SONG:

*Oh, woman of the house nearby,
My elder sister, did you see her come?
Five years have passed
(Since) the lovely parrot came here
Oh, woman of the house nearby,
My elder sister, did you see her come?*

Cellāttā stood in the street, asking about Tāmarai. The women of the street answered, "Woman. None of us have seen her. Go ask in that street." Cellāttā went from that house to the next street and stood, asking,

SONG:

*Oh, woman of the house nearby,
My elder sister, did you see her come,
Bringing a man (with her)?
Oh, woman of the house nearby,
My elder sister, did you see her come?*

Hearing this, the women of that street said, "Woman! Five years ago, two people came carrying one child. They were about sixty years old. Are you asking about them?"

CELLĀTTĀ: Yes, woman! (I am asking) about them. Tell me where they are.

WOMEN: All right. Come! We will show you.

Taking Cellāttā, they showed her Tāmarai's place in the horse stable. "Here is where they are," they said, and then they left.

As Cellāttā approached the horse stable, her shadow appeared at the door as if the sun were in the east at dawn. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā saw it from inside and addressed Tāmarai.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! No one has visited us since we came to this house. Who is this standing to the east? I see a shadow. Go out and see.

Tāmarai came out, and as she looked, she saw Cellāttā standing (there).

TĀMARAI: Oh, husband, Cellāttā has come to meet us! When the clansmen sent us far away out of the country, I beat my breasts and cried. At that time, she closed her eyes and would not meet us. Now she has come to see if we are still alive, or if we have died. The villain!

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Oh, woman! Why do you start an argument with Cellāttā? What can she do about our misdeeds? Cellāttā! The clansmen have taken your land, your thousand fields, our palace, and our wealth! They beat us and banished us from the country. The villains!

CELLĀTTĀ: Man. Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! Don't cry. If it is destined that you have to pay for it, then you have to pay. As Vishnu ordered, I raised your children for five years on elephant's milk and tiger's milk. Now your children have come. Receive them!

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ: Lady! We have only one child, and it is with us. How can any other children exist?

CELLĀTTĀ: Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar! When your wife was pregnant, the clansmen of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows decided to deceive you. They called the midwife Kuppi and told her that, if a male child were born, to cut it up and stuff it in a bandicoot hole. If a female child were born, she was to feed

it milk in a conch and name it Taṅkā. They told her they would give her half the land and half the wealth if she did this. The deceitful Kuppi agreed to this. Vishnu saw this and came to me. Telling me this news, he told me to prepare a tunnel connecting your residence and the palace, within three months. (He said), "I will come on the day of the labour. You come to the mouth of the tunnel and wait. I will take the child as it is born and hand it to you." You went to the Land of Prosperity and brought the midwife Kuppi. As she came, she thought of preparing the way for her deceit. (So) she ordered that none of the maids of the house be present. Kuppi shut the door, and covered Tāmarai's eyes. Then she went into the kitchen and began sharpening a knife. Vishnu, seeing his chance, cut Tāmarai open on two sides of her stomach, and brought out the two children. He took them and handed them to me. Ask Vishnu about the rest. Now the children have come. Receive them. The children are at the Pilliar temple.

KUNṆUṬAIYĀ: Okay. Oh, woman! We shall go and see.

The two set off with Cellāttā. When they arrived at the Pilliar temple and saw the children, they seemed to shine with the beauty of the sun itself.

"Husband!" Tāmarai said. "I am in doubt. I shall call Vishnu and ask him. (Then we) shall know." She stood facing north (and called), "Vishnu, creator of the world! You must come here immediately." While she thought of Vishnu, he saw (her). He immediately mounted his Garuda vehicle, turned towards Vīrappūr and set out.

SONG:

*He saddled the Garuda, oh, Lord,
Searching for Vīrappūr, oh, Lord, he comes,
Searching for the earth, my God,
Vishnu is flying, oh, Lord.*

Vishnu arrived in Vīrappūr and dismounted at the Pilliar temple. Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai paid their respects.

VISHNU: There is no death for those people who take refuge in me. Tāmarai! What have you called me here for?

TĀMARAI: Lord! Cellāttā says these two children are mine. I am in doubt, Lord!

VISHNU: All right. So that is it? You go to the well, bathe and return.

Tāmarai immediately went to the well, bathed and came back.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! How do you want me to prove to you that these are your children?

TĀMARAI: Lord! In front of this crowd, milk must spring from my breast and fall into the children's mouths.

VISHNU: All right! I shall arrange that.

He threw some sacred ash and created seven (cloth) curtains. Tāmarai stood beyond them. Then Vishnu threw some more sacred ash, and milk sprang from Tāmarai's breasts and fell by itself into the children's mouths. Seeing this, all the people in the crowd there gave (them) their blessings. Tāmarai came running, swept up the children, and kissed their precious faces. Picking them up together, she kissed them abundantly.

VISHNU: Tāmarai! You take the children now and go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. I will come after three months and name the children.

Then Vishnu returned to the milk sea.

TĀMARAI: Husband! Get started, Let's go.

And the two of them picked up the children and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving Vīrappūr, leaving it,
Approaching the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, approaching,
Putting the children on their shoulders, on their shoulders,
They are going, the two of them, the two of them,
Nākamalai mountain, Tōkamalai mountain, Tōkamalai mountain,
The mountain hollowed on four sides, hollowed on four sides.*

They arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, went to the Cellāttā temple and paid respects to the goddess. Then (they went) to the Pilliar temple, (where they) stood. Tāmarai thought of the gods' council chamber. She released the palace guardians, and sent the beetles and wasps back (to the palace) immediately. The maids came immediately and cleaned the palace. Kunṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai paid their respects to Pilliar, and went to the palace with the children. When they arrived at the palace, Poṅṅar and Caṅkar both circled around it, looking. Then food was cooked and everyone ate.

CHILDREN: Mother! Are there any (animals) around (here) for riding?

TĀMARAI: Oh, apples of my eye! In the enormous field there, the calves of some black cows are playing. At Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam, there are the colts of the horse, Nīlā¹ who play with their mother.

CHILDREN: Is there a servant to look after us?

TĀMARAI: Children, there is a servant who is for you alone. He is Cāmpukaṅ, (son of) the black Paṛaiyā woman.

¹ The term Nīlā technically means "blue," but here it is used as a proper name referring to the horse's very dark colour, close to black.

YOUNGER CHILD: Elder brother! Come. We will go with Cāmpukaṅ, look at the black cows and blue horses, and then return.

The two children went out onto the street, calling for the servant. Cāmpukaṅ came running.

SONG:
*He prostrated before the princes,
 He, himself, supplicated
 He worshipped their feet,
 He rendered his services.*

CHILDREN: Hey, Cāmpukaṅ! Come. We three shall go and look at the black cows and blue horses.

CĀMPUKAṅ: All right. Good. We shall go.

When they arrived at the enormous field, they saw the calves of the black cows playing. Seeing this, all three of them became happy. Leaving that place, they went to Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam and saw the colts of the horse Nīlā. As they watched, one colt said, "Someone has come to catch us!" From fright, the colts began to run.

CHILDREN: Hey, Cāmpukaṅ! The horses are running. Wherever they go, we must catch them without fail and train them.

Saying this, the three of them began to run after the colts.

SONG:
*They fly right across the sky, my Lord,
 Having crossed the forest of Matukkarai, my Lord,
 The horses vanish, my Lord
 With the horses, behind them, my God,
 Three persons fly at great speed
 The Nākamalai mountains, Tōkamalai mountains, my God
 The mountain hollowed on four sides, my Lord,
 Mountains spread in a row,
 The renowned Vīramalai mountains, my God.*

The horses kept out of their reach and headed fast for the central mountain of the Vīramalai range. This angered Cāmpukaṅ, who jumped forward and seized the manes of the two (horses) and stopped them right there in the middle of the mountains. As he did this, the children arrived to join him.

CHILD: Hey, Cāmpukaṅ! I want to get on the horse and ride. For that I need a bridle. What can I do?

CĀMPUKAṅ: Lord! Hold the horses. I will return.

He went into the jungle, seized two large cobras, and skinned them. (Then) he caught two vipers and skinned them. Fashioning them as bridles and stirrups, he put them on the horses.

SONG:
*The cobra is the bridle there,
 The cobra is the stirrup,
 The viper is the bridle,
 The snake is the stirrup.¹*

CĀMPUKAṅ: Lords! Climb in the ship-like saddles of the fire-coloured horse and the blue horse and return to the palace. I shall come after you.

The two children mounted the horses and set off.

SONG:
*Spurring with the right foot,
 The horse gallops as if he will reach (Vishnu's) heaven,
 Spurring with the left foot,
 See the horse gallop as if he will reach the world of Yeman,
 Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
 Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord,
 Making this its destination, see it fly like a cloud,
 (In) the renowned Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord.*

The Land Where the Kāveri Flows shook from the speed of the approaching horses. Tāmarai, feeling the earth rock, came out of the palace and saw the children approaching rapidly on horseback.

TĀMARAI: Ah ha, Vishnu! The boon I obtained is working well.

Thinking this, she became happy. By this point, the horses were close by. Then Cāmpukaṅ arrived before they could dismount and leave the horses.

CHILD: Hey, Cāmpukaṅ! Take the horses and tie them in the stables.

(Then) they went into the palace, ate, and were happy.

¹ Snakes and horses have a strong affinity in Indian mythology. The fact that Cāmpukā makes bridles and stirrups out of snakes' skins for these two magical horses, essentially taming them via these self-made serpent-skin straps, is no accident. See Wendy Doniger, 2011, *Winged Stallions & Wicked Mares: Horses in Indian Mythology and History*, Charlottesville and London, University of Virginia Press for multiple examples of this theme as well as for a more general discussion of the significance of storied horses in South Asian tradition.

SONG:

*He ruled with justice, sweet rule,
He ruled the country with authority. He ruled there,
Poṅṅayyā with the golden signet ring on his finger
These times, sweet times,
He ruled the country alone. He ruled there.*

Tāmarai, the fine tender vine, the all-knowing goddess, thought, "Three months have passed, as Vishnu (has) said. (Now) I must call him here." When she thought of Vishnu, he immediately set off and came to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, dismounting at the palace. Everyone paid Vishnu their respects.

VISHNU: Blessings to everyone! Tāmarai, what have you called me for?

TĀMARAI: Vishnu. You said that after three months, you would give names to the children. Therefore, find an auspicious day and name them.

VISHNU: Friday is an auspicious day. Therefore, invite the thousand revenue villages. Before I get here, have everyone gather at Cellāttā's temple. When all the ceremonies are complete, I will come and pronounce the names.

Then Vishnu left for the milk sea. When Vishnu had left, King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā called,

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Cāmpukaṅ! Go to the thousand revenue villages surrounding the Cellāttā temple! Say that each house, without fail, must bring some milk for Cellāttā.

CĀMPUKAṆ: Lord. Good!

(Then) he took a men's loincloth measuring twenty-four mulams² and wrapped it (on himself) in the prescribed way. He took his walking stick with three knots on it, put it on his shoulder and set out. His was no (ordinary) hand staff. It was made of two felled palmyra palm trees that had their tips cut off and had been bound together with three strips of iron. Cāmpukaṅ left the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and set off in the direction of Aṅiyappūr.

SONG:

*With big running steps, my Lord,
Cāmpukaṅ is coming with great speed,
Traversing quickly,
The boorish one travels a league.*

Cāmpukaṅ arrived in Aṅiyappūr, and as he walked down the street, the townspeople saw him and thought, "What a huge man!" They were all afraid and began to shake. Cāmpukaṅ stood in the middle of the street and said,

"Lord, I am the First Minister of the King of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Seeing me, no one should be afraid. My name is Cāmpukaṅ."

PEOPLE: Cāmpukaṅ! What is the news?

CĀMPUKAṆ: Lord. Tomorrow on Friday, the king will name his children at the Cellāttā temple. Therefore, on Friday, all of you are to come and bring milk for Cellāttā.

Cāmpukaṅ went to all the revenue villages, making his announcement. Then he returned to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He stood in the doorway of the jewelled hall and said to Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, "Lord! I told the thousand revenue villages to come on Friday morning, and have returned (here)."

KUṅṅUṬAIYĀ: Good.

On Friday at five a.m., Tāmarai got up, called the maids and told them to clean the palace. She (also) ordered the palanquin brought. Kuṅṅuṭaiyā, Tāmarai and the children got into the palanquin, and bringing the necessary things with them, they set off.

SONG:

*Singing thus, thus,
They come bringing the offerings,
Singing thus, thus,
Bringing these, they come in the palanquin.*

When they reached the Cellāttā temple, they got down from the palanquin, and they all went to the riverbank to bathe. Before they finished and came back, the Kavunṭars of the thousand revenue villages arrived and gathered (there). Then King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā called Cāmpukaṅ, performed the ceremonial offering with milk, and completed the god's pūjā for the family deity. The people in the crowd paid Vishnu their respects.

VISHNU: Blessings to all! Cellāttā, sit down facing the east. Tāmarai, take the first child and hand it to Cellāttā.

Cellāttā received the child, held it on her lap, and said to Vishnu:

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother! What shall we name this child?

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Covered in gold, covered in gold, infused with milk,
Cellāttā, call him Poṅṅar.¹*

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother. I have given him (that name).

VISHNU: Take the second child and hold it in your lap.

¹ The naming ceremony is traditionally performed at the family's clan temple.

² This is about twelve yards, much longer than the average male cloth.

¹ The golden one.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Covered by a conch, infused with milk,
Īswari, call him Caṅkar.¹*

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother! I have given him (that name).

VISHNU: Take the third, the female child, and hold her in your lap.

VISHNU'S SONG:

*Covered by a conch, infused with milk,
Cellāttā, call her Tanika!²*

CELLĀTTĀ: Elder brother! I have given her (that name).

VISHNU: Good.

After the naming of the children was finished, everyone received some of the blessed food.³ The Kavunṭars of the revenue villages took leave of Vishnu, Cellāttā, and King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and returned home.

VISHNU: Tāmarai, take the children, go to the palace, and raise them well.

Then Vishnu took leave of everyone and returned to the milk sea. King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai took the children, and went to the palace.

After some time, as soon as the children had come of age, King Kuṅṅuṭaiyā gave over the responsibility for the country to his sons. Upon coming of age, Poṅṅar was renamed Periyaṅṅacāmi⁴ and Caṅkar became Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi.⁵ Periyaṅṅacāmi and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi began ruling the land.

SONG:

*Masters of the land, they ruled,
They ruled there
It rained three times a month for Poṅṅayyā,
It rained there
In that land, hailstones fell once a year,
A shower of hailstones
The king of the farmers held the curved plough,
The king of the agriculturists held the ploughshare
See the faggot bundles, see the ripe paddy.*

In this way, Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar's sons, Periyaṅṅacāmi and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, ruled the country. One day, when the two were playing dice, Vishnu joined

1 The conch-like one.

2 The one made of gold, or the younger sister.

3 Piracatam, or food left over from the ceremonial offerings.

4 Big elder brother.

5 Little elder brother.

them and all three played together. Seeing her sons ruling the country, Tāmarai was infused with a sweet feeling. Her heart was full, and she was happy.

SONG:

*It was an age of sweetness,
See the monarchs' rule, his good rule,
It was said to be good, it was called sweet,
Things were done with love,
At this time, this sweet time.*

TĀMARAI: Dear children! We have become old. Before we go to heaven (to the gods' council chamber) we are thinking of completing your marriage. I have called you to ask you about this.

CHILDREN: Mother! We don't want to be married now!

Having said this, they returned to playing dice.

TĀMARAI'S SONG:

*I have never seen from a distance
The garlanded necks, the garlanded necks there, oh, Mother!¹
I have never seen from a distance
The garlanded shoulders of the Lords
Alas. I have not seen, I have not seen (it),
For this to happen, for this
I must have committed sins then, I must have committed sins then
For all this to happen in this country,
I must have made many mistakes there, made many mistakes.*

TĀMARAI: Oh my, Vishnu! If we don't marry our sons before we die, several crores of people in this world will speak about us, several crores will criticize us.

Tāmarai was grieving. She was sad and would not eat or sleep.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, to be good there,
See how things were done with love,
See how sweet they were,
At this good time, this sweet time
See the good age in progress, the good age.*

1 Referring to the flower garlands used in the wedding ceremony.

Episode 17 ✨

One day, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Periyaṅṅacāmi finished their dice game and finished eating:

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Kuppi! Have Mother and Father finished eating?

KUPPI: Oh, King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! (Your) father has just finished now and went to rest on the cotton mattress. Your mother has not eaten well for ten days.

Hearing this, the two of them went to the courtyard where people assemble.

BROTHERS: Mother. Kuppi says you have not eaten well for ten days. What is making you worry?

TĀMARAI: Lord! As I am not feeling well, I cannot eat rice.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother! You are lying. Aren't you grieving because we said we did not want to marry? Oh, Mother! You must not be sad on this account. We will marry, in accordance with your wish. But where is the bride?

TĀMARAI: Lord. There are two brides in the house of your mother's brother, in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother. How many mother's brothers do we have?

TĀMARAI: Lord. I have two elder brothers, Marikkoḷūntā Kavunṅar and Civakkoḷūntā Kavunṅar, in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi. They are both your mother's brothers. I spoke about their daughters.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother! Is there any enmity (between you and) these mother's brothers?

TĀMARAI: Lord. There is some enmity between us and these mother's brothers.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother. So it is like that! I shall go now to that country and kill them.

TĀMARAI: Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! Don't be impatient. Let them pay for their own actions. Do not go to their palace. When I married your father, Vishnu came and performed (the wedding) at the Pilliar temple in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi. In the same way, I shall place you two in that Pilliar temple for your wedding. I have made stone images of the brides and kept them at the Pilliar temple (there).

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother. Good! Start the wedding preparations. But one thing. At the time of linking hands with the bride I will not give my (little) finger.¹ It will reduce my virility. Therefore, have finger (extensions) of gold and silver

¹ It is customary for the bride and groom to link the little fingers of their two right hands at one point in the wedding ceremony.

made and kept ready for me. I don't want any of the (preliminary rituals). At the time of the mukurttam,¹ I will come, (but) I will not look at her face (while I) garland her. You must have a curtain held between us. Furthermore, after the wedding I will not look at her face. I shall imprison both of them in a (palace) jail. If she comes to me, I will kill her. If my elder brother desires it, perform all the necessary agriculturalist rituals for his wedding. This is my decision.

TĀMARAI: Lord. That is good.

Tāmarai then went to King Kuṅṅuṅaiyā. They agreed to arrange the wedding. After deciding on a date together, they called the artisans and told them to make the gold wedding necklaces and silver finger (extensions). Then they sent invitations to all the kings and invited the Kavunṅars of the revenue villages. On the day they had specified, they decorated the palanquins and everyone set out. King Kuṅṅuṅaiyā, Tāmarai, and Periyaṅṅacāmi rode in the palanquin. All the local residents also set out. The maid and servants lifted the palanquin, placed it on their shoulders and set out for the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi.

SONG:

*Singing thus, the palanquin
Was gently lifted by them
Singing thus, thus,
They lifted the palanquin
The kings of the fifty-six countries
Are coming with love,
The Kavunṅars of the revenue villages
Are coming with sweetness
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi,
Everyone is coming.*

They all arrived in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi and disembarked at the Pilliar temple. Tāmarai bowed to the north and, folding one leg, thought of the gods' council chamber and of the gods Vishnu and Varuna.

TĀMARAI: Oh, one who rescues those in trouble! Orphan-saver! Vishnu! If it is true that I was born of the god's creative power, then you must immediately create, by your grace, a place for the fire sacrifice and all other necessities, oh, Lord of Conjeevuram!

Vishnu saw this. He threw some sacred ash, and with his (powers of) illusion, he created a place for the fire sacrifice and all the other necessities. Then

¹ The main rite during which the bride and groom are officially united.

Tāmarai went to the statues of the brides and sent the beetles and wasps¹ to the gods' council chamber.

TĀMARAI: He who carries a conch, a discus, and who lives in Vaikunta. Parantāmā. He who lives in Paṅṭarīpuram,² ruler of earth. You must change these two stone statues into women, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!

The statues were changed from stone to (live) females, with Vishnu's grace. Tāmarai called the girls, gave them new clothes and jewels and decorated them. She called two more girls (to ask them) to serve as maids, and began the rituals for Periyaṅṅacāmi. The musical instruments were played. The necessary agriculturalist rituals were all performed.³

While this was being done and before the cocks crowed, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi got up, bathed, decorated himself, came outside and stood.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā!

Cāmpukā came running and paid his respects.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Oh, King! What is the news?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey! We two must go to the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi. Saddle Nīlā and decorate her. I will go, dress up, and return.

He went inside, finished the god's pūjā, ate, and went to the gold workshop.

SONG:

*Wrapping calico around the head,
Trying a turban with a nosegay, my Lord,
Putting on, putting on various things,
Adorning himself with sweet things, my Lord,
Collecting, collecting, various things,
Things for adorning one's front, my Lord.
Glittering silks,
He covers himself like a supreme god, my Lord,
The decorations glitter,
He covers himself with (fine) things, my Lord.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi prepared a bundle of foods and fruits. After decorating his spears and other weapons, he went to the gold workshop, took the sword and placed it in his scabbard.

¹ These insects had been guarding the statues, according to her earlier command.

² Paṅṭarīpuram got its name from a chaste girl, Pantaribai, who lived there and worshipped Vishnu.

³ These Kongu rituals are illustrated in the graphic novel and more fully described in the animated version of the story.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Kuppi! Come here. Look after the palace. I shall be back soon. Look after the palace carefully, I am going to the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi and will be back soon. Hey, Cāmpukā! You must follow after me quickly.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Good!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi mounted the blue horse and took the reins in his hand.

SONG:

*He mounted Nīlā, my Lord,
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord,
With Nīlā he crossed (the land),
He snapped the stinging whip, my Lord,
Spurring with the right foot, my Lord,
The horse gallops as if it will reach (Vishnu's) heaven,
Spurring with the left foot, my Lord,
See the horse gallop as if he will reach the world above,
Searching for the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi,
My Lord, Caṅkar himself is coming.*

The heavens shook with the speed of Nīlā and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's approach. Knowing that Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi was on his way, everyone in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi was standing ready. Ciṅṅacāmi arrived in the Country Called Vāḷavaṅḍi and dismounted from his horse. Cāmpukā came from behind and joined him.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Take Nīlā and tie her up.

At the place of the fire sacrifice, he called, "Mother! Is everything ready?"

TĀMARAI: Everything is ready! We were just waiting for you. Come! We'll go to the canopied ceremonial dais.

Tāmarai took the lord, circled the canopied area with him and seated him inside on the dais, facing east. The Brahmins recited sacred verses and fed the sacred fire. Then a curtain was held in front of both Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Periyaṅṅacāmi, and the brides were made to stand behind this. The Brahmins took the wedding necklaces and placed them in the hands of the two (grooms). The two men took the necklaces and staring at the ground, without looking up, tied the necklaces on the brides' necks. Then they were given silver finger (extensions) and they put them on. (Then) they joined (these) with the (little fingers of the) brides' hands, and circled the canopied area. (They) removed their hands (afterwards). After the mukurttam (rituals) were finished, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi went to Tāmarai.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Mother! If there are any more required ceremonies, have my elder brother do them and bring him back. I will set off. Hey, Cāmpukā! Being the blue horse.

SONG:

*Leaving the Country Called Vāḷavaṇḍi,
See Nīlā coming, my Lord,
Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Searching for it,
He is coming on Nīlā, my Lord.*

The lord arrived at the palace and before he could dismount, Cāmpukā arrived as well.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! After tying up Nīlā, go and stand at the Pilliar temple. When the brides and the groom come, take the two brides and put them in the palace of prosperity. You (should) return (here) after giving them food, water and all conveniences, and arranging it so that they may not come out.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. Good!

And Cāmpukā went to the Pilliar temple. After a short while the brides, the groom and everyone else arrived.

Cāmpukā took the two brides, and as CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi had said, he put them in the palace of prosperity, gave them all that was required and left them (there). Then everyone went to the palace. The kings and the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages ate and chewed betel and areca nut. (Then) they took leave of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai and returned to their homes. CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi and PeriyaṆṇacāmi went to play dice.

SONG:

*PeriyaṆṇaṇ ruled with justice, sweet rule,
He ruled the country with authority, he ruled there
Poṇṇayyā with the golden (signet ring on his) finger,
He ruled there.*

It rained regularly, and the black pepper paddy grew. The rains covered the land, and the chili pepper grew.

While things were like this, the time of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai drew to a close. The two of them called CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi and PeriyaṆṇacāmi.

KUṆṆUṬAIYĀ AND TĀMARAI: Dear Lords! The end of our time is drawing near. We must go to the gods' council chamber. Therefore, we want to tell you one thing! Never do anything to harm the King of the Chola Country. That is to say, he was the one who established your grandfather Kōḷattā Kavunṭar in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He (also) established the clansmen in the Land of Prosperity and had the boundaries measured and marked. Therefore, do nothing to harm him. Furthermore, no matter how much harm the clansmen have done us, they must account for their actions themselves. Don't you do anything to them. And furthermore, always be sure to perform three pūjās for

Cellāttā each day. The land of this country all belongs to Cellāttā. Therefore, you must perform these pūjās without fail. Also, the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages have given us a great deal of help. Whatever mistake they might make, be patient of heart and continue to rule without demanding compensatory justice.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Mother. Good!

TĀMARAI: And furthermore, your sister Taṅkā. You, yourselves, must look after her. Whatever she might do, be patient of heart. Do whatever she asks immediately, and don't get angry with her. You must do these things. She will see beforehand, in her dreams, what good and what evil will befall you in the future. She was born with this special quality as her boon. You will be both mother and father to her after we die. Furthermore, when you find a good place for her, see to her marriage.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, Mother. Good! We shall do these things.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, said to be sweet,
See how things were done with love,
At this time, this sweet time,
See the good age in progress in this land.*

A few days after this, Yeman arrived. He milked the life out of King Kuṇṇuṭaiyā and Tāmarai and took them to the world of the gods. The kings of the fifty-six countries and the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages came to know that King Kuṇṇuṭaiyā's and Tāmarai's time had finished and that they had gone to the gods' council chamber. Everyone came, saw PeriyaṆṇacāmi and CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi and Taṅkā, and made inquiries. Then the Karumāti ritual was performed.¹ A thousand crows were fed cooked rice.² All the required observances were completed. The kings and the Kavunṭars of the revenue villages took leave and returned home. Afterwards, PeriyaṆṇacāmi and CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi ruled the country without swerving from what was just.

SONG:

*He ruled with justice, sweet rule,
He ruled the country with authority, he ruled there,
He ruled with a golden signet ring, sweet rule,
The brothers reigned as the single authority, reigned there,
It was a good time, it rained, sweet rain.
Kaṭuku sampa paddy flourished in the Land Where the Kāveri
Flows, paddy flourished there*

¹ Ceremony performed on the sixteenth day after death (in the case of Kavunṭar communities), in order to complete the soul's passage to the other world.

² Part of the same ceremony.

*The good rain covered (the land), sweet rain,
Miḷaku sampa paddy flourished in the Land Where the Kāveri
Flows, paddy flourished there.*

There, in the land of fulfillment, the land of cows, in the beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows, in the place where the town of Cilukkāmpuliyūr is found, in the place where gold springs from the earth, in that famous land of constantly increasing wealth, is the place where elephants are used to thresh the paddy. (In) that beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows, it rains three times a month and once a year hailstones fall. See the faggot bundles and black-tipped paddy flourish (there).

Periyaṅṅacāmi and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi performed pūjā for Cellāttā three times a day. The good younger sister, beautiful heir, born with the elder brothers, the good peacock sister of Poṅṅar, was sleeping deeply in the hanging cradle.

SONG:

*The swing of the chaste girl is rocking,
Swinging for Pārvati who sways like a golden garland as she walks
See the silver chariot moving for the chaste girl,
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess)
The swing is swinging for the chaste girl,
The golden sculptured Pārvati who walks as if she floated (on air)
The chaste girl in the swing,
Pārvati is sleeping deeply.*

At that time, the two brothers had gone to play dice. Vishnu had come and joined them and while playing, without Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi knowing, Vishnu fettered his chest, his hands, his shoulders and his thighs. In this way he placed twelve fetters on him while he played dice. The reason for putting these fetters on (him) while playing was that Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi had the strength of twelve elephants. When he became angry, he would get up suddenly and strike about. So daily, when they were playing dice, Vishnu would lock (him), in fetters. When the gaming was finished, he would unlock the fetters. But Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi never knew when the fetters were locked and when they were unlocked. That day, when the gaming was over, Vishnu set off. Then Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Periyaṅṅacāmi got up and went to eat.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Kuppi! Is Pārvati still sleeping?

KUPPI: Yes, Lord! She is still sleeping.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Good! When she awakes from sleep, bathe her and feed her.
Then put her in the hanging cradle, rock it and look after her carefully.

The two lords then went to the hot water room and bathed. Then they performed the pūjā, ate, and went to sit and chew betel leaf and areca nut in the courtyard where people assemble.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Say, elder brother! The villains, those thousand clansmen of the Land of Prosperity, banished our mother and father from their town, from their country, for five years. Therefore, elder brother, we must go once and see how big these clansmen are, and how great their strength is.

Periyaṅṅacāmi: Ciṅṅayyā! Not that, man! Before our mother and father died, did not they tell us never to trouble the Chola King and never to trouble the clansmen? Have you forgotten that?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Elder brother! It is true that Mother and Father said that, but if we don't draw a line on insolence, the oppressive acts of the clansmen against our mother and father (will endure). We must not lose the chance to trample on the feet that trampled on us. If a cow, which we reared, tries to kill us should we not kill it? If you are afraid, then you need not come. You take care of Pārvati. Cāmpukā and I will go and return.

Cāmpukā heard him, came running and paid his respects to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi.

"Oh, King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! You have said something, in anger, to King Periya. What is the reason?" he asked.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! Have you heard what elder brother said? The clansmen of the Land of Prosperity repeatedly oppressed our mother and father. I said let's go once and have a look at their splendour. Do you know what he answered to that? Because our mother and father said, when they were dying, not to start a fight with the clansmen, he said, (I was) refusing to listen to them. What do you say, Cāmpukā? Will we pass up our chance to trample, shall we ignore the feet that trampled us? It is better to die than to pass up this chance. This is what I was making a noise about with him. Okay. You speak with my elder about this.

Cāmpukā: Oh, King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! Don't start a fight with King Periya. If he doesn't want to come, let him remain in the palace. We two shall go and return, oh, King!

Hearing all this, Periyaṅṅacāmi turned to Cāmpukā and asked, "Cāmpukā! You are going to go, too?"

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Yes, elder brother! Cāmpukā and I will go and return. You remain in the palace.

Periyaṅṅacāmi: Lord. If you go, for what reason would I remain in the palace? I will also come!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Cāmpukā! Did you hear that? Elder brother now says, "I will come too."

Cāmpukā: Lord. Good! Let him do as he pleases. You must not tell him (that he is not wanted).

The two lords got up, and went to the room where one dresses for battle.

SONG:

*Wrapping calico around the head,
Trying a turban, my Lord, with a nosegay,
Putting on, putting on various things,
Adorning himself with sweet things,
Collecting, collecting various things,
Things, my Lord, for adorning one's front,
The two lords' adornments glittered,
(Their bodies) were covered with things,
The silks glittered. See how they resemble God,
The two of them went to the gold workshop,
Took swords and stuck them in their scabbards,
(Then) they came and stood outside.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI AND PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Kuppi! When Pārvati awakes from sleep and asks, "Where are my elder brothers?" you must not say "It seems that they have gone to the Land of Prosperity." Say (instead) that they have gone to look at the enormous field. We shall go and return quickly! Hey, Cāmpukā! We will go ahead with the horses. You come behind and join us quickly.

And the two lords mounted the horses.

SONG:

*My Lord, he mounted Nīlā,
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord,
With Nīlā he crossed (the land),
He snapped the stinging whip,
See Nīlā striking the stones, the stones,
See the horse creating a path on Karumalai mountains, my Lord,
See Nīlā tramping on the grass, the grass,
See him cross the Pilimalai mountains, my Lord,
See Nīlā crush the thorns, the thorns,
See him cross the Mulumalai mountains, my Lord.*

Episode 18 ☼

The Land of Prosperity shook with the speed of the approaching blue horses. The Kavunṭar clansmen and clanswomen of the Land of Prosperity heard the noise of the approaching horses and were frightened.

TOWNSPERSON: Elder sister, elder sister! Sixty years ago, the earth trembled with (the noise) "kutu, kutu" and it is happening again now.

At this time, PeriyaṆṆacāmi and CiṅṅaṆṆacāmi arrived in the Land of Prosperity and dismounted near the schoolhouse. Cāmpukā arrived and joined them.

"Hey, Cāmpukā! Take the two horses, tie them, and come inside," they said and two of them entered the school. Without anyone seeing them, they sat on a bench. Cāmpukā tied the two horses, tied a gauze cloth of twenty-four cubits length¹ around his head in a prestigious way, took his staff in his hand and came and stood near the school. In the school, the children of the Kavunṭar clansmen were studying. The six teachers were all there.

Seeing PeriyaṆṆacāmi and CiṅṅaṆṆacāmi sit down on a bench, the son of the Kavunṭar of the biggest house said to another boy:

SON OF ELDEST KAVUṆṬAR: Who are they? As strangers, they have sat down on a bench without showing us even the slightest respect. We must not let them leave without kicking them.

Gathering the other children together, they stood ready to attack. CiṅṅaṆṆacāmi realized they were going to get beaten. He thought of the gods' council chamber and of Vishnu.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: He who rescues those in trouble, or orphan-saver! Those thousand boys who are coming to beat us, allow me, by your grace, to control them with the palm of my hand, oh, Vishnu!

VISHNU: Ah ha! The two children have gone to start a fight with the clansmen and are praying to me. I must go and look after this.

And before (any) eyes could close to blink, he arrived in the Land of Prosperity. Taking the form of a fly, he alighted on CiṅṅaṆṆacāmi's knife. At that time, he gave the strength of twenty-four arms to each shoulder. The lord suddenly stood up.

VISHNU: Hey, Cāmpukā! Shut the door, bolt it, and run here!

The six teachers fearfully opened the back door and came out, shut the door and began to run towards their homes.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Gather the boys into groups of ten and beat them well with the whip.

Cāmpukā lifted the whip and started beating.

¹ Twenty-four mūla or about twelve yards, much longer than the average turban.

SONG:

*Born of a black, black Paṛaiyā woman,
Cāmpukā, the sharp, rigorous one,
With a whip of five bells, my Lord,
He beat the entreating, begging boys,
With a whip of six bells, my Lord,
He beat them in an unruly way, my Lord.*

All the thousand Kavunṭar clansmen boys were jumping up and down (from pain). Blood flowed from the children, rivers of blood joined together, the blood flowed together in streams.

CHILDREN: Oh my! Lord. We will do whatever you say. Don't beat us.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, boys! Your fathers made our mother and father subsist for five years by husking paddy. They banished them to Vīrappūr, the villains. We have come to rectify this prior sacrifice with a later one.

Not being able to control his anger, CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi swung his murderous weapon. The lord took his knife and swung it above the children.

SONG:

*Swinging the knife, the knife,
The sharp (instrument) flashed, see it flash,
Swinging the spear, the spear,
How it flashes! See it flash.*

CiṆṆaṆṇacāmi became angry. He threw his knife (so that) it cut off the noses of half the boys and the ears of half the boys and then returned to the lord's hand.¹

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Tell each of these boys to do three toppu bows.² Then tie the thousand together in groups of two and throw them out in the street, facing north.

Cāmpukā immediately seized the boys, tied them in groups of two, and put them out on the street, facing north.

KAVUṆṬAR BOYS: Oh, my, God! To a land without fear, fear has come. To a country without disgrace, a stigma has come.

They were all in group, legs tied to legs, unable to walk. As the thousand children approached in this manner, the sun was at its zenith, it was midday, and the wives of the Kavunṭar clansmen had all come to sit at the Pilliar temple.

¹ The weapons of the gods also return to their hands after use, according to Hindu tradition.

² A special ritualized and submissive bow used before the gods in temple worship.

WIVES: Elder sister! The children have still not come for lunch? The Kavunṭars have not yet come?

The thousand children came towards them from the south, legs tied to legs.

WIVES: Elder sister! Look at the children. At least when they come down the street, they cannot come without fighting. See how they are fighting, one against another, as they come.

As they spoke, the children got closer and closer and they heard the sound of crying. They all got up and ran to them, seeing that the children were tied to each other in pairs. They saw the ignominy of the severed noses and ears.

WIVES: Oh, Lords! Oh, children! Who has disgraced you like this?

CHILDREN: Mother. Two men came from the north on horses, (with the sound) "kiṭu, kiṭu." A Paṛaiyaṇ came behind them. The two who came on the horses came into the school, and without asking us, they sat down on a bench. Seeing this, the thousand of us went to beat them. The younger-looking one then turned to the Paṛaiyaṇ and said, "Hey, Cāmpukā! Close the door and bolt it." That Paṛaiyaṇ closed the door and bolted it. Then the six teachers opened the back door and ran towards their homes. Then he said again, "Hey, Cāmpukā! Seize them all, man, and beat them." Cāmpukā grabbed us all and beat us. Then the younger-looking one lifted his knife, threw it, and it cut off our noses and ears. Then we were tied in pairs, like this, and thrown out. The villains!

WIVES: Say, men! How many of them were there?

BOYS: Mother. Three men came.

WIVES: Say, men! You numbered a thousand. Not being able to seize the three of them and beat them, you have received their blows and come away in this condition? The villains!

The mothers of the children sang:

SONG:

*The body covered with perfumed paste,
That body, there
Is (now) covered with dried leaves,
The body that is covered with musk,
As he rolls and cries there,
That body, there,
Is covered with dust,
As he rolls on the earth and cries,
To a land without disgrace, to that land,
Disgrace has come, a stigma has come there.*

While the thousand Kavunṭar women cried like this, the thousand Kavunṭars came home for their noon meal. Noticing the crying of the Kavunṭar women, they asked, "Oh, women! Why do you cry?"

WOMEN: Husband! Somebody, three men, came from the north, entered the school, seized our children, beat them and disgraced them. Look!

KAVUNṬARS: Oh, women. All right! Our stomachs are hungry. Give us rice. When we have eaten, we will go, beat whoever it is and look into the matter.

WOMEN: Hey, villainous ones! The children were beaten, their noses cut off, and they stand (here) deformed. Ignoring this you ask for rice, (cooked) rice?

Hearing this, the thousand Kavunṭar clansmen became angry. Each man picked up a stick and they set off to fight.

SONG:

*With running steps, running steps,
The Kavunṭars are coming with great speed,
Searching for the school, searching for it,
The thousand Kavunṭars are coming.*

As the thousand Kavunṭars approached the school, they saw the two waiting horses. They became frightened.

KAVUNṬARS: What's this that stands (there) like the Black Mountain itself? Oh my! (These) people who have come on such huge horses, what enormous power they must have!

Several Kavunṭars, becoming frightened, ran back, saying, "We cannot (succeed in this)." Turning around, they began to run. The other Kavunṭars, looking at those who were running, said, "Hey, men. Why are you running (away)? They were born in ten months.¹ We were also born in ten months. There are only three of them and we are a thousand. Therefore, what have we to fear? Come, let's go." (But) as they crept into the school house Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi saw them coming.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā. The thousand clansmen are coming! You go stand by the door.

Cāmpukā went and stood by the door. Then, one by one, they crept inside, When the thousand men had come in, Cāmpukā closed the door and bolted it.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! Pick up your whip and let us see your work.

Cāmpukā picked up the whip and began to beat the Kavunṭars in an unruly fashion.

SONG:

*With a whip of five bells, my Lord,
Like cotton, like cotton, see it fly,¹ my God,
With a whip six bells, my Lord,
He swung it in an unruly fashion, my God,
Like a whip with a blunt tail, my Lord,
Beating until the end is worn off, my God, he struck them.*

As Cāmpukā struck them in this unruly way, the thousand Kavunṭars wiggled, unable to bear the blows.

KAVUNṬARS: Oh, my, Lord! We can't bear these blows. We will listen to whatever you say. Don't beat us, oh, kings!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, clansmen! Did you think that the boon that our mother obtained after twenty-one years of penance had come to naught? When our mother and father were old you banished them from the land and from the country. Villains! You also made a pact to kill us. With Vishnu's grace, we escaped and survived. We have now come to correct the abuses you committed at that time. Long ago, Duryodhana made a pact, seized the Land of the Paṅḍavas and banished them to twelve years of forest living. Similarly, you made a pact and banished our mother and father from the country for five years. In the same way, I now banish you from your country and send you far away never to think of this land (again).

He smiled and was unable to control his anger. Then again, he spoke.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, clansmen! Leave your homes and run quickly from this country. If not, I will mount Nīlā and reduce your land and your families to water. Run away quickly!

CLANSMEN: Oh, my Lord! We will leave the land and run away right now.

And turning towards the Pilliar temple, they set off at a run.

SONG:

*With running steps, running steps,
The Kavunṭars are coming quickly,
Searching for the Pilliar temple, searching for it,
The Kavunṭars are coming (at a) dizzying speed
The wives saw the thousand Kavunṭars running towards them with
great speed.*

WIVES: Elder sister! It seems that they are returning after having killed those boys. They are coming with anger. What have they done before returning? We don't know.

¹ They spent months in the womb just as a normal human does.

¹ A reference to the way cotton is fluffed using vibrating string.

KAVUṆṬARS: Oh, women! Go quickly, each get her things from her house, put them in a sack and bring them here. We cannot stay in this country a minute longer. Go quickly, get the things and come. If those villains come here, we cannot survive with our lives.

WOMEN: Hey, villainous ones! As a thousand men you went and submitted to the kicks of three boys and (now) you have returned in this condition? Aren't you ashamed?

KAVUṆṬARS: Hey, women! What do you know? If you had looked in their eyes you would no longer be alive. Go quickly, get (our) things, tie (them) in a bundle and run back!

Hearing this, the Kavunṭar women all went together, got the things from their homes, and tied them in bundles. They took (everything), without leaving behind a thing. They came and set (all) this down at the Pilliar temple.

KAVUṆṬAR: Hey, younger brothers! Where shall we thousand households go to live?

ELDER KAVUṆṬAR: Men. Younger brothers! The King of the Chola Country established our grandfathers here, bringing them to the Land of Prosperity. Now we shall all go to the king and tell him (what has happened). After that we shall go and live in another country.

Then they all set out for the Chola Country.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land of Prosperity, leaving it,
The Kavunṭars are going to the Chola Country,
Seeing hills and climbing them, climbing them,
Seeing valleys and crossing them, they are coming,
Not seeing water, unable to drink, unable to drink,
Without seeing shade, without a resting place, they are coming.*

The thousand clansmen families arrived in the Chola Country and rested at the Pilliar temple. Then the thousand Kavunṭars took their children and went to the king's palace.

SONG:

*They paid obeisance to the king
They offered their services
They fell at his sacred feet
They offered their services to the king.*

KING: Men. Oh, Kavunṭars! There is no death for these people who take refuge in me. Oh, Kavunṭars! What is the news that has brought all of you here? Why are all the children in such a condition?

KAVUṆṬARS: Oh, King! The sons of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar came from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, beat our children, cut off their noses and ears and caused ignominy. Having beaten us, they said we could not remain on the land and sent us far away. Oh, King! Where can we go to make a living?

KING: Men. Oh, Kavunṭars! Thinking that Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar had no sons, you banished him from the land for five years. Now his sons have come and taken revenge on you. What can be done about that?

CLANSMEN: Oh, King! Since the time of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar's sons' rule, they have not paid you tribute. We have brought our tribute every year without failure. Have you not asked them why they have not paid the tribute?

"What! The sons of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar have not paid tribute? Hey, servant! Tell the accountant to come," he ordered.

The servant went and brought the accountant. The accountant paid his respects and waited.

KING: Hey, man! Accountant! Has tribute been paid each year by Kuṇṇuṭaiyā?

ACCOUNTANT The tribute has not been paid since their mother and father died.

Hearing this, the king became angry.

KING: Oh, Kavunṭar clansmen! You must not be afraid. Having brought those villains here, and having punished them well, I will turn the Land Where the Kāveri Flows over to you. Stay here, eat in the palace, and be happy! Oh, servants! Twelve of you go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and tell the sons of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā Kavunṭar to bring a golden vaḷlam,¹ a dish of curds and a yoke here today. Tell them that if they fail to bring these (things) they will be fined fifty rupees and punished by six months in jail. Return here quickly!

Twelve servants set out immediately.

SONG:

*The light-footed, servants, the servants there,
Men that shine like silver, such men,
Leaving the Chola Country, leaving it,
Going to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, going there,
Where gold springs from the earth, where gold thrives,
Oh, famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the servants are going (there).*

The servants arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and dismounted at Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. There the lord's two fine bull-calves were resting, having grazed well and drunk well at Vaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam pond. The bulls saw the twelve servants coming. "Some foreigners are approaching," they said, getting up and

¹ A measuring vessel that is made out of gold and used to measure grain.

jabbing the earth with their horns. Then they switched their stick-like tails and cruelly attacked.

SONG:

*See them prance and stretch, my God,
The lord's two bulls, my God,
See them jump and squirm, my Lord,
The world's bravest (ones), my God.*

The bulls, full of anger, went and stood before the servants and tried to frighten them. The shepherd Maccakkōr, who grazed them, saw this.

THE SHEPHERD: Someone is coming to our king's palace. The two fine bulls have blocked the way and acts as if they will kill them.

As he came running to see, the servants were lying on the ground, shaking. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi caught the bulls with his hand and stroked their bodies.

SHEPHERD: Men. Fine bulls! Don't hurt them. They look as if they are going to our palace. Who are you? Where are you going?

SERVANTS: Man. We are going to the house of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. These bulls blocked the path and tried to kill us. We are servants from the palace of the Chola King.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, servants! You speak of our king as Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar, not expressing the least respect. If the king had heard such talk, your heads would be rolling on the earth by now. Don't speak to anyone else in the way you have spoken to me! You must say "King." Be careful!

SERVANTS: If his shepherd speaks in such a way, what will happen when we see the king? Men! We won't speak that way again. Hold the bulls. We shall go to the palace.

After a short distance, (they came to) the riverbank. At that time, Kuppi had also come from the palace, carrying pots to the riverbank to fetch water. The dog named Poṅṅācci had come with her. As the two of them approached the river, Poṅṅācci stayed to one side and sat on a hillock. Kuppi climbed down the riverbank and began polishing her pots. At that time, the twelve servants climbed down the bank and were approaching. Because there was a little more water than average in the river, the servants got their clothes wet. Reaching the other side, the servants stood on a hillock and began wringing out their clothes. Poṅṅācci was watching them and thought, "Some strangers are coming to our king's palace." She got up angrily, came running, and frightened the servants.

SONG:

*From the front and from the back, my Lord,
In thirty-two ways, my God,
Hissing like cobra, my Lord,
See Poṅṅācci leap about.*

Whirling about, Poṅṅācci sprung upon the servants, grabbed them and bit them in places not bitten before. The servants, not being able to withstand the bites, cried, "Oh my, oh my!" and made noise. Hearing the noise, Kuppi turned around to look and came running. She seized Poṅṅācci with her hand, stroked his back, and restrained his anger.

KUPPI: Woman, Poṅṅācci! These seem to be men who are going to our palace. You must not bite them. Men! Who are you! Where are you going?

SERVANTS: Woman. We are servants of the Chola King. We are going to the house of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. This earless dog has bitten us!

KUPPI: Men! If you call Poṅṅācci an earless dog once more, you will not escape with your lives. Furthermore, don't say Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar when you go to the palace in the way you said Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar to me! You will lose your life. You must say "King!" Be careful.

SERVANTS: Woman. Mother! This one experience is enough. We will not go to the palace now. Therefore, we will tell you some news. You go and tell it to the king.

KUPPI: What is the news?

SERVANTS: Woman. Mother! During the reign of your elder king, he brought a golden vaḷḷam, a dish of curds and a yoke as a tribute to our king each year without fail. After he died, the young kings have not brought this tribute. For this reason, our king has become angry and has said that if the tribute is not brought today, they will receive a fifty-rupee fine and six months' imprisonment. Our king has spoken thus. You go and tell this to your king. We shall go now.

When the servants had left, Kuppi took some water and returned with Poṅṅācci to the palace. Setting down the pots of water, she went to Pārvati.

KUPPI: Oh, princess! I went to the riverbank to fetch water with Poṅṅācci. Twelve servants of the King of the Chola Country appeared. While I was polishing the water pots, our Poṅṅācci attacked the servants and bit them. The servants cried, "Oh my! Oh my!" and made a lot of noise. Hearing the noise, I turned around and caught Poṅṅācci in my hand. Then I asked, "Who are you?" They said that they had come from the Chola Country and that we have not given a golden vaḷḷam, a dish of curd and yoke as tribute. We must take them to the Chola King today. The king ordered them to come

and announced that if we fail there will be a fifty-rupee fine and six months' imprisonment. Because our Poṅṅācci seized them and bit them, they became frightened of coming here. So, they told me and left there and then.

PĀRVATI: Hey, Kuppi! Go quickly and bring Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi.

KUPPI: All right, good.

Kuppi went to the games room and stood hidden behind a pillar, while the two lords were playing dice with Vishnu. At that moment, Vishnu put twelve fetters on Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi without his knowing it. Kuppi became frightened, ran out from behind the pillar and called: "Oh, King!"

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Kuppi! What's the news?

KUPPI: Lord. Pārvati has said to call you!

Hearing what Kuppi said, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi got up and the twelve fetters suddenly snapped.

SONG:

*Stretching, he crossed (the room), my Lord,
The younger prince, Caṅkar,
Traversing, traversing, he quivered,
My Lord, the courageous, brave Caṅkar.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi came running, took Pārvati's fine hand, kissed her jewel-like face and covered her hand with (more) kisses.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: What is it, oh, Taṅkā? Why did you call?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother. Just now, Kuppi went to the riverbank to fetch water and Poṅṅācci went with her. As Kuppi polished her pots on the riverbank, it seems that twelve servants arrived from the Chola Country. Poṅṅācci saw them and thought "Who are these strangers who have come?" She attacked them, it seems. She ran there, caught Poṅṅācci with her hand, and asked them who they were. They said to Kuppi, "Since the reign of your young kings, our king has not been brought the three tributes: a golden vaḷḷam, a dish of curds and a yoke. The king is angry and has said if the tribute is not brought today there will be a fifty-rupee fine and six months' imprisonment. He told us to come and announce (this)." Because our Poṅṅācci seized and bit them, they became afraid of coming here. They left right there and then. Elder brother! We are ploughing the Chola King's land. If we don't pay him tribute, will he let us alone? Take a golden vaḷḷam, a dish of curds, and a yoke immediately. Go pay the tribute and return.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Princess. I will not go!

PĀRVATI: Why? Elder brother. Why do you say you won't go?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Princess! I will not submit to that king while balancing a dish of curds on my head, holding a measuring vessel made of gold on my shoulder, and (holding) a yoke in my hands like a servant. Let him do what he likes (when) nothing is brought. I cannot go.

Periyaṅṅacāmi heard the noise Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi was making and came running. He looked at Pārvati and said, "My Taṅkā! What is elder brother Ciṅṅa speaking so angrily about? What is happening?"

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! The King of the Chola Country says you have not brought him tribute since you became ruler. Some servants came from there today and said the king had told them to announce that if the tribute was not brought today, there would be a fifty-rupee fine and six months' imprisonment as punishment. I told this to brother Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi. He shouted, "I cannot take it to him." Say, elder brother! Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi said, "So what if we are ploughing his hand. I cannot go." Oh, elder brother! You go, take (the tribute) and return. If not, we are asking for punishment.

PERIYAṅṅacāmi: Pārvati! Whether elder brother Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi goes or not, I shall go and come back.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: What's this, elder brother? You will go, give (the tribute) and return?

PERIYAṅṅacāmi: Yes, younger brother! I will go take it and return.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: All right, good, elder brother! If the Chola (King) asks why tribute has not been brought for three years, say that we did not know and that no man was sent to announce it. I will send Cāmpukā with you. In case the Chola (King) threatens you in some way, let Cāmpukā cut up and destroy him. Hey, Cāmpukā! The Chola (King) has said that if someone does not bring him tribute today there will be a fifty-rupee fine and six months' imprisonment. Therefore, elder brother is taking the tribute to the Chola Country now You go with him! If the Chola (King) asks why the tribute has not been paid in three years, say "We did not know. No one was sent to announce it." When elder brother becomes frightened, he will not speak. Therefore, if the Chola (King) utters any threats, destroy him with a single blow. You must bring elder brother back here by noon. Be careful! You (are to) go, bring Nīlā, and stand by the door.

Cāmpukā immediately went, brought Nīlā, and waited.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Elder brother! (When) you start, take the dish and curds and the yoke to Nīlā. Cāmpukā, take the measuring vessel made of gold and follow behind. You go first.

Hearing this, Periyaṅṅacāmi mounted Nīlā. Cāmpukā took the measuring vessel, balanced it on his head and set off.

SONG:

*He mounted Nīlā, my Lord,
He flicked the golden whip, my Lord,
He crossed (the land) on Nīlā, my Lord,
He snapped the stinging whip, my Lord,
Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
He is approaching the Chola Country, my Lord.*

Episode 19 ✪

As he approached the Chola Country, the speed of Nīlā in the cultivated fields, “titu, titu,” made the Chola region shiver with fright. Hearing this sound, the clansmen came running outside and went to the king.

CLANSMEN: Oh, King! The unspeaking, righteous elder (brother) is coming. The younger (brother) is nowhere to be seen. He was the one who shamed our children, who beat us, and sent of far away, out of the country, the villain!

KING: Men. Oh, Kavunṭars! Never mind if the elder one has come. If we seize and hold him, the younger one will come. Why are you worried?

At this time, Cāmpukā and Periyaṅṅacāmi arrived in front of the palace, dismounting Nīlā.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā, tie up Nīlā. You stay here. I will go present the tribute and return.

Periyaṅṅacāmi went into the palace. He set the tribute at the king’s feet and paid his respects.

SONG:

*He paid obeisance at the king’s feet,
He offered him his services,
He threw himself at the king’s feet,
He offered him his services.*

As Periyaṅṅacāmi set the tribute at the king’s feet and paid his respects, the conspiring Chola (King) did not ask the lord, “Why?” He did not even look at him. After a little while, the Chola (King) sat upright and looked at Periyaṅṅacāmi.

KING: Why has tribute not been paid for three years?

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, King! I did not know that tribute was expected. You did not send a man. Today a man came and I have brought it.

KING: Hey, man! You know how to shame a thousand clansmen and banish them from the land, but you don’t know (enough) to pay tribute! Isn’t that

so? Hey, servants! Seize him, put him in the (palace) jail and close the door. Let him be eaten by beetles and wasps!

The servants came immediately, seized Periyaṅṅacāmi, and dragged him into the room for vagabonds. The unspeaking, righteous, tender lord, the meritorious Periyaṅṅacāmi (prayed).

SONG:

*The good lord is crying, the lord,
The body of the royal one is wilting,
Brahma, the one who created me, the one who created me,
You have been corrupted, corrupted,
The one who writes, the one who writes,¹
I have been subjected to this fate,
I have been subjected there,
Oh, Lord of the crores of worlds in the universe,
Oh, truthful speaker with a conch, discus and lance,
He who rescues those in trouble, oh, orphan-saver,
Soothsayer of milk mountain, oh, great ascetic guru,
If I die, the whole country will not be reduced to a skeleton,²
I have lost my wealth, the one born with me,
I have not seen the chaste girl with a garland around her neck,³
I have not stepped back and gazed at this sight, oh, Vishnu,
I have not seen my sister with a garland on her shoulders,
I have not stepped back and looked at Taṅkā, oh, Vishnu!
For this to happen, my Lord,
I must have committed many sins,
Yes, I have committed many sins,
For all this to happen,
I have erred often in this country,
I have erred often,
Oh, Vishnu! If I die here and Pārvati comes to know,
For me, a good, a learned funeral ceremony,⁴
For me, the chaste woman will perform it properly,
A thousand crows, sweet crows,
Will be fed by the chaste woman, she will feed them there.*

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Seer of Bāla mountain, ascetic guru, poor mendicant, my Perumāl, Vishnu! Parantāmā, ruler of the earth, the one who lives forever, the Lord of Paṅṭarīpuram. Why have you subjected me to this fate?

1 One who writes one’s destiny or fate.

2 Said to the king, meaning that the country will not lack for leaders after his death.

3 I have not discharged my duty to see my sister safely married.

4 Part of the Karumāti ceremony performed on the sixteenth day in the Kavunṭar funeral.

VISHNU: Ah ha! The conspiring Chola (King) has locked Periyaṅṅacāmi in the room for vagabonds, the villain! It seems he has been left to be eaten by beetles and wasps. I must go immediately and look after him.

And he mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*He saddled the Garuda, my Lord,
Vishnu is flying, my Lord,
Searching for the Chola Country, my Lord,
The Supreme One is flying, my Lord.*

Vishnu arrived in the Chola Country, and, taking the disguise of a fly, alighted on a cross-beam in the vagabond's room where Periyaṅṅacāmi had been locked up. Just then, the beetles and wasps began to descend to eat Periyaṅṅacāmi. Vishnu saw the beetles and wasps approaching. He threw some sacred ash and made them stick to the walls, right where they were.

VISHNU: Poṅṅayyā! I am here. You must not be afraid! No harm will come to you. I shall look after this. You (just) lie down and sleep well.

And he returned to the milk sea.

While this was happening in the Chola Country, this is what was occurring in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

SONG:

*The swing of the chaste girl is rocking,
It moves for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess),
The silver chariot is moving for the chaste girl,
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess),
The silver chariot is moving for the chaste girl,
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture (of a goddess),
The chaste girl is in the swing,
Pārvati is sleeping deeply.*

As the younger sister of the brothers slept deeply in the swing, it rocked. At first Pārvati had a good dream. Then, as (her) elder brother began to suffer, she had a bad dream. Pārvati suddenly got up from the swing.

PĀRVATI: Hey, Kuppi! Go quickly and call Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi!

Kuppi went immediately to the gaming room and saw Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi (there).

KUPPI: Oh, King! Pārvati is crying and calling for you.

Hearing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi (said), "Ah ha!" and getting up with anger, the twelve fetters snapped and fell off.

SONG:

*Stretching, he crossed (the room), my Lord,
The younger prince, Caṅkar,
Traversing, traversing, he quivered,
My Lord, the uniquely brave and courageous one.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi approached Pārvati and stood (near her). "My Taṅkā! Why are you crying?" he said.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! Where is our Periyaṅṅacāmi?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*Oh, elder brother, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi,
Where is Periyaṅṅacāmi?
Where is our elder brother?
The righteous, unspeaking one, where is he?
Where is our righteous elder brother?
The one who was born with (us), the one who was born with (us),
Born there,
We have lost the wealth on this earth,
We have lost (it) there.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! The conspiring Chola (King) has locked our brother in a room for vagabonds. At this very moment beetles and wasps are eating our brother. Go quickly and look after him, oh, elder brother!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Oh, Taṅkā, what? Did not Cāmpukā go with elder brother? Doesn't he know about all this?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! He does not know. Our brother left him standing at the front door of the palace. He is still standing there!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Ah ha! Is that so? Hey, servants! Bring my Nīlā here.

He ran to get his sword, stuck it in his scabbard, returned, and mounted the horse.

SONG:

*He mounted Nīlā, my Lord,
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord,
With Nīlā he crossed (the land),
He snapped the stinging whip, my Lord,
Spurring with the right foot, my Lord,
The horse gallops as if he will reach (Vishnu's) heaven,
Spurring with the left foot, my Lord,
See the horse gallop as if he will reach the world above.*

Heaven and earth both shook from the speed of Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's blue horse. As Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi reached the Chola Country, the clansmen saw him coming towards them, and they turned to the south and began to run. The Chola (King) learned of Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's approach.

CHOLA KING: Hey, servants. Run! If the elder one is still alive, go get him quickly and bring him here. If the younger one arrives and the elder is not here, he will kill me!

And the Chola (King) began to shake. The servants ran to the vagabond room and found Periyaṅṅacāmi sound asleep on a cotton mattress.

SERVANTS: Oh, elder King! Our king has told us to fetch you.

Hearing this, Periyaṅṅacāmi got up immediately and went to the reception hall. The Chola (King) ordered the preparation of a seat for Periyaṅṅacāmi and made him sit down.

CHOLA KING: Oh, elder King! You must forgive my mistake! The younger king, finding you absent, is coming (here). If he learns the truth, he will dispose of me with one blow. Therefore, you must forgive me and not tell him what has happened. If he asks, tell him, "Younger brother! The Chola (King) gave me a gold crown, put gold rings on me and made me eighteen gift offerings!"¹

The Chola (King) immediately placed a golden crown on Periyaṅṅacāmi, put golden toe rings on him, completed the god's pūjā, the pūjā for the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā, and stood with his arms folded.²

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi arrived in front of the palace and jumped down from the blue horse.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Paṛaiyā! Hey, man, where is elder brother? The lying Chola has put elder brother in the vagabond's room and what have you done about it, villain?

The lord became angry, raised his sword, and threw it towards Cāmpukā. But Cāmpukā evaded the sword and rose in the air to a height of two palmyra palms. Instead of hitting Cāmpukā, the sword hit a stone, broke it into pieces and returned to the lord's hand. When the knife returned to the lord, Cāmpukā came back down (to earth).

The lord controlled his anger and said, "Hey, Cāmpukā! Go tie up Nīlā!" Having said this, he turned his mind to killing the Chola King. As he went inside, he saw Periyaṅṅacāmi and said, "Elder brother! Did not the Chola (King) take you and lock you up in the vagabond's room? What has been going on? Tell me the truth! I will kill the Chola (King) with a single blow," he said.

1 Apicekam, normally done only for the gods.

2 A sign of humility in front of a great personage.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Lord! The king has not done anything to me. After I came, he placed a golden crown on me. And gold toe rings and performed all the (possible) pūjās.

Then the Chola (King) became frightened, began to shake, and approached the younger king:

SONG:

*He paid obeisance at the lord's feet,
The Chola offered the king his services,
He fell at the feet of the king,
He offered him his services.*

CHOLA KING: Oh, King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! Please sit down!

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Elder brother! Pārvati is crying because she has not seen you. It is as if the palace were on fire. She told me to go, saying she had seen in a dream that you had been put in the vagabond's room. By denying it you are lying!

CHOLA KING: Oh, King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! I have done no such thing! From the time he came I have been performing the eighteen ceremonial offerings¹ and honouring him.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Elder brother! All right. Set off! We shall go to the palace. Pārvati is waiting.

CHOLA KING: Oh, King Periyaṅṅacāmi! I have performed the eighteen ceremonial offerings for you and am about to feast you. You must eat a grand meal in my palace, oh, King! Tell King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi this! If I tell him he will become angry.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Lord! The Chola (King) says let us feast once in his palace before going. Shall we eat a fine meal here and then go?

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Yes, elder brother! Tell (them) to prepare it quickly.

Hearing this, the Chola (King) became immeasurably happy. He called the maids and ordered everything prepared quickly. (Then) thinking in his heart about what the lord had said, he called a maid.

CHOLA KING: Go to the shop, buy four annas worth of poison and come.

The maid went, made the purchase, and returned.

CHOLA KING: Separate the rice and curries for the two men and add the poison to it. Oh, kings! The food is ready. Come, we'll bathe and return.

1 The eighteen apicekam.

The two lords bathed and sat in the courtyard where people assemble. The Chola (King) immediately called the maids and told them to lay down the leaf plates and distribute the food. The maids immediately laid the leaves and placed the poisoned portion of the food on the two men's leaves. Vishnu thought, "The Chola (King) has used poison and plans to kill the lords. I must go and look after them." Before an eye could blink, he arrived in the Chola Country and created a cat.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Periyaṅṅacāmi had just seated themselves, ready to eat, when the cat jumped on their food. It ate a little of the food on the leaf laid before Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, circled around three times, and then fell down and died. Seeing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi was shocked and he jumped up.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Elder brother! Don't eat the rice! That conspiring Chola (King) has had poison mixed into this feast.

But as the two visitors got up, the Chola King thought of another trick. He had a pit dug, a kind of underground cave. Over this he placed sticks, and on top of that were wires, and on that he had a seat prepared. He reasoned that when the lords came and sat on that chair that they would fall into the pit and die. But what the Chola King thought was one thing, and what happened was another. One of the Chola King's sons, having just eaten, climbed onto that false seat to play. Unsuspecting, it was he who fell into the pit and died. It happened just like that! Learning of this, the Chola King had the pit filled with stones.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Elder brother! The Chola King planned to kill us by poisoning. Vishnu protected us. We must no longer remain here at his palace. Get up. Let's go!

CHOLA KING: Lord. King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! What are you saying? What was that, oh, King?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Chola! Planning to kill us, you mixed poison in the rice. A cat ate it and died. Now what have you planned, villain? I would have struck you down long ago, but elder brother held me in check, and you escaped!

CHOLA KING: Oh, King! I have done nothing of the sort. It is all (in) my unlucky stars. Oh, oh, King! Even if you go without eating, if you are titled (royalty), we (royalty) have a family shrine on a desolate mountain, a mountain without steps, to the west of (this) town. If you go to that god you will attain prosperity, oh, King! Tell King Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi that.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! The Chola (King) has said never mind if we don't eat, but as we go there is a family shrine to the west of the town. He says we should worship there as we go. We should not ignore the advice of great men! Let us worship there and then go, Lord!

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Elder brother! Pārvati is crying, saying we are nowhere to be seen! All right. Setting out quickly, let us worship (there) and go. Come!

The Chola (King) was happy.

CHOLA KING: Hey, servant! A ladder is needed to climb the mountain. Therefore, get that big ladder and bring it.

The Chola (King) brought all the items required for a pūjā and taking the two lords with him he set off.

SONG:

*The Chola (King) walked in front, walked in front,
The lords walked behind, waked behind,
Searching for the mountain without steps, searching for it,
The Chola (King) is taking them to the desolate mountain.*

When they reached the mountain, the Chola (King) set the ladder up against it.

CHOLA KING: Oh, kings! You two climb the mountain first, because you are not accustomed to making this mountain climb. I will therefore hold the ladder. When you have reached the summit, you hold the top of the ladder and then I will climb it.

The two lords listened to the words of the teacher, attended to the words of the actor, heard the words of the conspiring Chola (King). The two lords climbed the stepless, desolate mountain by means of the ladder. When they reached the summit they said, "Oh, King! Now you climb and come. We are holding the ladder."

CHOLA KING: Oh, kings! You two stand a little to that side. I am going to set the ladder in a different place to climb it!

Hearing what the Chola (King) said, the two lords stood back. The Chola (King) thought, "This is my chance." He called the servants, grabbed the ladder, turned towards the palace and began to run. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, seeing the Chola (King) take the ladder and run, said.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Elder brother! Elder brother! Look at how the Chola (King) had us climb the mountain and then takes the ladder and runs! This is all because of you. I must strike you first.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi lifted the sword in his hand.

SONG:

*The sword, the sword is swinging,
The sharp (instrument) flashes, see it flash, my Lord,
Swinging the spear, the spear,
How it flashes, see it flash my Lord,
With a somersault behind, with a somersault in front,*

*Using thirty-two different postures,
To strike his elder brother, my Lord,
He swings the knife, my Lord.*

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Ponnayyā! Be calm. Don't hit me! Listen to my words.

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi controlled his anger and looked at Periyaṇṇacāmi.

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi: Elder brother! What can we do? The villain, that conspiring Chola (King)! To have done something like this! How can we leave this mountain and climb down? Pārvati will be crying. Oh, Vishnu! Did you cause us to fall into such a state?

SONG:

*Leaving the younger sister alone there, leaving (her) alone,
Oh, elder brother, we are dying,
On a mountain without steps, on a mountain there,
The one who was born with us, the one,
We have lost the chaste girl, now, we have lost (her),
We have not stood at a distance,
And seen the neck of the chaste girl,
Oh, elder brother, we have not seen (her),
We have not seen (her) from a distance, oh, elder brother,
The shoulders of our Pārvati,
Garlanded, garlanded there.*

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi: Oh, elder brother! We made a mistake there. How many sins we committed!

As the two lords cried and thought of Pārvati, all the animals of that forest came running to see them.

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi's SONG:

*Oh, Lord of a crore of worlds in the universe,
He who holds a conch, a discus and who lives in Vaikunta,
One who has a thousand names,
Seer of Bāla mountain, great ascetic guru,
Poor mendicant, my Perumā, oh, Vishnu.*

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi: The conspiring Chola (King) caused us to fall into such a state. You must come and look after us. We need your grace, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

The two lords thought of Vishnu and cried. Vishnu saw this from the milk sea and thought, "Ah ha! The two lords have been left on a desolate mountain by that conspiring Chola (King). The villain!" He mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord,
Vishnu is coming to the Chola Country,
My Lord, moves through the air,
He is flying without aid.*

Vishnu arrived in the Chola Country and went to the desolate mountain. He took the disguise of a poor man, a wanderer, an ascetic, and carried a palm leaf text in one hand. With the sounds "Shiva! Caṅkar! Parantāmā!" he came to the foot of the mountain, facing south. Then Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi saw the wanderer.

SONG:

*Who are you, wanderer, oh, wanderer?
You who pass on the path below,
Who is the wanderer who goes there?
On the stepless mountain two children are in distress,
Don't you see? Don't you see?
Who is the wanderer on the path below?
You who are passing, who is passing on the path?
The conspiring Chola (King), Chola (King),
Has taken the ladder we climbed and left,
Who are you, oh, wanderer?*

Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi: Man, wanderer! The conspiring Chola (King) had us climb a mountain without steps, took the ladder, and ran away, oh, Lord! Man, Wanderer! If you know of any way to get down off this mountain, tell us. Lord!

VISHNU: Oh, children. I hear your words, but I don't perceive a way. The ears hear, the eyes don't see. But don't be afraid. I will perform a trick.

Vishnu grew his long hair to the length of a thousand cubits and braided it in two braids.

VISHNU: Oh, children! I will throw up these braids. Catch them. Take the end of each braid and fasten it to a rock. I shall fasten (my ends) in the same way. The two of you (can) descend by this means.

He threw up the braids and the lords caught them and laid them on a rock. Vishnu threw sacred ash and (the braids) became fastened to the rock right there. Then the mendicant looked at the children and said, "Come down now." The two lords took hold of the braids and descended in that manner.

SONG:

*With the grace of Vishnu, of Vishnu,
The two lords descended safely,
With the grace of the Lord, the Lord,
They descended firmly, the two of them, there.*

The two lords, by means of Vishnu's braids, left the mountain, descended and stood on Vishnu's shoulders. Vishnu lifted the lords down.

VISHNU: Men. Oh, children! That conspiring Chola! Break his palace into small pieces.

Then Vishnu disappeared. At that moment, Cāmpukā, not seeing the lords, arrived searching (for them).

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Take the sword from my elder brother's hand.

Cāmpukā took Periyaṇṇacāmi's sword and the three men turned towards the Chola's palace and set out. Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi held a drawn sword in his hand.

SONG:

*Running fast, like a fast horse, my Lord,
He is coming fast, running, my Lord,
He is taking long strides, my Lord,
The boorish one is covering a long distance.*

The earth and the heavens both shook from the speed of the approaching men, Caṅkar having the strength of twelve elephants, and Cāmpukā the strength of sixteen elephants.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! The Chola's palace must (be broken) into pieces, small pieces. Man, lance that sword.

SONG:

*In front, my Lord, and in back,
He leaps like a tiger, my Lord,
With a somersault behind, with a somersault in front, my Lord,
Using thirty-two different postures, my Lord,
The knife, the great knife is swinging,
The sharp blade, the spear, is swinging,
The sharp instrument flashes, see it flash, my Lord,
The spear, the spear, is swinging,
How it flashes, see it flash, my Lord.*

As the lord and Cāmpukā threw their swords at the Chola's palace.

SONG:

*The stone pillars, my Lord,
Fell down weeping there, my Lord,
The iron pillars, there, my Lord,
Fell in two pieces, my Lord,
The Chola had four wounds, my Lord,
His wife had three wounds, my Lord,
So many people, my Lord,
Were destroyed, my Lord.*

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi and Cāmpukā chopped up the king's palace, and they struck down that Chola monarch, his wife and his clansmen, making their bodies unrecognizable. At that time, one clansman escaped the notice of the two men and hid in a bush. But as he began to run southwards, Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi saw him.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! One clansman has escaped and is running away. Come here quickly, man!

The two ran side by side and showing their anger, they waved their swords at the clansman.

SONG:

*Into pieces, like musk melons, my God,
That clansman was cut, my Lord,
Into pieces, like pēpal tree fruits, my Lord,
He was cut and piled up, my Lord.*

The two men poured hot water on the palace foundations.¹ Then the two of them went to Periyaṇṇacāmi.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Elder brother is growing older, but other than that there is no wisdom at all (in him). When I first came, I asked: "Elder brother! Did the Chola not lock you in the vagabond's room?" He answered, "When I came, the Chola first made the eighteen ritual offerings." That was a lie. If he had answered my question truthfully, I would have cut up the Chola right there and then. We would not have had to endure so many difficulties. If elder brother had been cut up first of all, we would not have had all these difficulties.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi! Don't start an argument with King Periyaṇṇacāmi. He doesn't understand anything. The unspeaking, righteous one thinks everything that has been bleached is milk! Don't say anything to him, Lord!

CINṆANṆACĀMI: All right. Elder brother! Let's get going.

SONG:

*Mounting Nīlā, my Lord,
He flicked the golden whip, my Lord,
He crossed (the land) on Nīlā, my Lord,
He snapped the stinging whip, my Lord,
Leaving the Chola Country, my Lord,*

He approaches the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord.

¹ An allusion to pouring hot water on the roots of a plant to prevent it from regrowing after being cut down.

When the two lords reached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, they dismounted from Nīlā. As they went into the palace, Pārvati came running and hugged Periyaṅṅacāmi.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! Did that Chola liar lock you in the vagabond's room and keep you there? The villain!

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Pārvati! Listen to what elder brother's mentality is like. I will tell you. As I left here, the Chola was putting a golden crown on elder brother, giving him gold toe rings and performing a pūjā. When I arrived, I asked: "Elder brother, did not the Chola lock you in the vagabond's room?" I asked, "What did he do? Speak up." Do you know what elder brother said to this? He lied, saying, "When I first came, the king presented a golden crown (to me) and began performing the pūjā." I answered "Yes," and did not say anything more. Then that Chola liar put poison in the food, planning to kill us. By the grace of Vishnu, we escaped from that. Then he took us to a mountain where there are no steps. As soon as we climbed the mountain, he took the ladder and ran. We climbed down off that mountain with the grace of Vishnu, made bran-powder¹ out of the Chola and his palace, and brought elder brother back (here). If he had spoken the truth, I would have cut up the Chola (way back) then. (Then) there would not have been so many problems subsequently. Do you see (now) what elder brother's righteous character amounts to, oh, younger sister?

Then the two lords bathed, ate and went to the gaming room to play dice. Vishnu came, joined (them), and the three men played dice together.

SONG:

*Poṅṅayyā's rule of justice, sweet rule,
The king ruled with authority, he ruled there,
Poṅṅayyā ruled with a golden (signet ring on his) finger, a sweet rule,
The brothers ruled alone, they ruled there,
Poṅṅayyā, the farmer, ruled with a golden ring, ruled there,
They ruled as masters of the country, they ruled there,
As farmers of the country, with golden rings, farmers there,
Lords of the earth, sweet Lords of that country,
Poṅṅayyā's good age,
It rained, it rained there,
Kaṭuku sampa paddy grew on the land, paddy grew there,
Poṅṅayyā's land was covered with rain,
Miḷaku sampa paddy grew on the land, paddy grew there,
Poṅṅayyā's country, it rained three times a month, it rained there,
In that land there hailstones fell once a year, it poured there,
Oh, Lord, elephants were used to thresh the paddy,*

¹ This is a common phrase to describe breaking something into pieces or destroying it.

*To thresh the paddy,
Oh, lovely Country, lovely Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Oh, flourishing country there!
See the faggot bundles in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, see the black-tipped paddy.
Gold grows like fine paddy, pearls grow like the first paddy crop.
Where elephants are used to thresh grain,
The beautiful Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

Episode 20 ✪

Periyaṅṅacāmi and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi ruled the country without swerving from justice. One day, the beloved younger sister, born with the brothers, the good Taṅkā, the peahen born with Poṅṅar, the good Taṅkā, was resting and swinging in her swing.

SONG:

*The swing of the chaste girl is rocking,
It moves for the girl who is shaped like sculpture (of a goddess),
The swing is singing to the chaste girl,
The golden sculptured Pārvati, who walks as if she floated (on air),
The chaste girl in the swing,
Pārvati is sleeping deeply.*

As the tender tender vine, the chaste girl, slept deeply in the swing, she had a dream:

When her mother, Tāmarai, was performing twenty-one years of penance at the place of golden power¹ in Benares, the parrot of the gods' council chamber made a nest in her mother's nose. After twenty-one years had passed and Vishnu came to see (her), he found this parrot's nest. He seized the parrots and threw them to earth. The male and the female parrot thought, "If we stay in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and if Tāmarai later has children, they will catch and kill us." Thinking this, the parrots went to Vīrappūr and decided to take shelter with the chaste Vīrataṅkā! She placed the parrots in a hole in a spreading banyan tree that had ten thousand branches and ten thousand aerial roots. Five thousand tigers and five thousand cobras were placed as guards. Seeing this, Pārvati jumped up suddenly from her cradle.

PĀRVATI: Hey, Kuppi! Call my two elder brothers.

Kuppi immediately went to the gaming room, and stood behind a pillar.

KUPPI: Oh, King! Pārvati has said to call the two of you.

Hearing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi suddenly got up.

¹ This place (likely mycoat thical) is referred to as Kāci Poṅṅampalam.

SONG:

*Stretching, he crossed (the room), my Lord,
The young, young prince, Caṅkar,
Traversing, traversing, he quivered,
This most courageous man of the world, my Lord.*

The two lords came running, took Pārvati's fine hand, kissed her jewel-like face and covered her hand with more kisses.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What is it, oh, Taṅkā? You called us?

PĀRVATI: Elder brother, because the maids are always working in the palace, I have to be alone. I want a swan to stay close to me and talk to me. I want a parrot that speaks, to stay with me, oh, elder brother!

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Is that so? All right. Good. Do you want a parrot from the south? Do you want a parrot?

Do you want a rare parrot from the land to the south? Do you want a peacock, Lady, do you want a peacock?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*If it is a parrot from the south, oh, brothers, if it is a parrot,
It will sing Telugu poems to me,
Oh, brothers, it will sing to me.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Do you want a chaste parrot from the north, do you want a parrot? Do you want a deer from the land to the north? Do you want a deer?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*A parrot from the north, oh, brothers,
A parrot that speaks, to be (here) with me,
One that speaks, oh, brothers, one that speaks.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Do you want a parrot from the west, Taṅkā? Is a sweet parrot wanted? Do you want a beautiful parrot a peacock from the up country? Is a sweet peacock wanted?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*A parrot from the west, oh, brothers,
A parrot from the up country, to be (here) with me,
One that speaks, one that speaks sweetly.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Taṅkā, do you want a parrot from the east? A peacock from the east country, is a sweet peacock wanted?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*A parrot from the east, oh, brothers, a parrot,
(here) with me, one that speaks, one that speaks*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Elder brother! Pārvati says she wants a parrot from the four directions. What direction shall we go in to fetch it? The parrot you say you want, say where it is! We will go and fetch it.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! At the edge of Vīrappūr, in Veṭṭuvā land, in Veḷḷiyaṅkiri tank, there is a great banyan, a big banyan tree. It has a thousand spreading branches and a thousand aerial roots. A male parrot and a female parrot are living together there. Only if you bring those parrots to me will they begin to speak.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, oh, Taṅkā! We share a border with the Veṭṭuvās. How can we go and take a parrot from their country under these conditions? Aren't there other parrots like that elsewhere? What is so wonderful about the parrots there? Speak up!

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! There are so many parrots in the world. But the parrots I speak of once nested in our mother's nose while she performed penance in Benares. They are the parrots of the gods' council chamber, oh, elder brother!

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, Taṅkā! Are there only two parrots from the council chamber of the gods in that tree, or are there other country parrots as well?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother. Two thousand country parrots are living in that tree.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What special marks do the parrots from the council chamber of the gods have?

PĀRVATI: I will tell (you), elder brother. Listen!

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*There are two feathers of diamonds, of diamonds¹
There are three feathers of cat's eyes, cat's eyes
There are two feathers of pearls, two pearls
There are three feathers of rubies, three rubies
The two feet, two feet are the colour of coral
There are two circles, two circles² the colour of gold
The eyes are as beautiful as red seeds, red seeds³
The mouth is as red as a kovai fruit, a kovai fruit.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! The parrots are five-colored. This is (their) special mark.

1 Vacciram, also the name of a weapon used by Lord Indra. No one can escape its special blows.

2 Probably ring-like markings on the neck.

3 Kuntumani, the seeds of a certain climbing plant.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Okay. If that parrot runs off when I go to catch it, what do I do?

PĀRVATI: You must make a net and cover the tree with it in order to catch the parrot.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: What must make a net and cover the tree with it in order to catch the parrot. What, oh, Tāṅkā! Must the net be made of wire? Must it be made of iron?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! If the net is made with threads, it will tear when it is put over the tree and the parrots will flee. Therefore, it is best if the net is made of iron.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: All right. Good. Hey, Cāmpukā! Come here!

Cāmpukā came running and paid his respects to the lord.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! Pārvati has given us an enormous task!

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! What sort of work has she given (us)?

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā. In the land of our foes from birth, the Veṭṭuvās, at Veḷḷiyaṅkiri tank, there are two parrots from the council chamber of the gods. She has asked us to fetch these parrots. Hey, man, Cāmpukā! For the sake of (her) play, shall we bring a useless quarrel (upon ourselves)? What are your thoughts about this? Speak up!

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Is that what you were shouting to Pārvati about? Lord! Don't you remember what your mother and father said to you when they were alive? They departed saying that you must give Pārvati whatever she asks for we must bring to her. Is it a big affair to bring those parrots? What need have you to worry while I am around? What must be done? Speak up!

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! First of all, a net of iron must be made. Go and fetch the artisans from the Land of Prosperity and come back!

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Good!

SONG:

*With large running steps, huge steps
Cāmpukā is coming quickly searching for the Land of Prosperity,
Searching for it
Cāmpukā flies.*

Magically, Cāmpukā arrived in the Land of Prosperity, where he saw some artisans.

CĀMPUKĀ: The King of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows has said to fetch you.

ARTISANS: Whatever it is, we will come,

All the artisans set off. As they arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and found the palace of the two kings, Periyaṅṅacāmi and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, they bowed and paid their respects.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Men, oh, artisans! Blessing to you! Men, oh, artisans! We must go and catch a parrot for Pārvati. For this purpose, we must have a huge iron net made. We have some iron in the courtyard where the public assembles for this (purpose). Take this and make a net (with it) quickly.

The artisans went to the courtyard where the public assembles, as the king had ordered. They took the iron and set up a workshop. They heated the iron, (but) as they stretched it into wire, it broke. The artisans immediately went to the king.

ARTISANS: Oh, King! We cannot make wire with our country iron. Therefore, if you want wire made, German iron¹ is needed.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Is that so? All right. Good. Hey, Cāmpukā! The artisans cannot make wire out of our country iron. They say they need German iron. What can (we) do? Where is German iron available?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! I was in Vīrappūr one day. They had some iron brought there from Germany to construct a Veṭṭuvā temple for the goddess Karukāḷiyammaṅ. They said that seven cartloads of iron were left over. I don't know if that iron has remained like that or whether they have done something with it. I will go and see. If that is there. I will perform some sort of trick and bring it (here). Oh, King! Give me leave.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Good! Go and come back! Hey, maid of the liquor (store-room)! Give Cāmpukā a thousand drams² of hard liquor.

As Cāmpukā drank the liquor he was given, his Adam's apple did not even get wet! After drinking it all he took a twenty-four cubit length of muslin cloth and tied a turban with a nosegay, took his walking staff, and came to say goodbye to the king.

"Oh, King! I shall go and return," he said and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it
He is coming to Vīrappūr, my Lord
Leaving the thick forest, my Lord
Leaving the forest called Kaṭṭapōḷḷi, Lord*

¹ It is called "German" iron to suggest the iron should be of high quality. There is no indication that iron from Germany was actually available.

² A dram is equal to about one-eighth of an ounce.

*The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord
The mountain that is hollowed out on four sides, my God
The place where there are mountains all around
The Vīramalai, the spiral mountain, my God.*

Cāmpukā arrived in Vīrappūr and stood in front of the chaste Vīrataṅkā's palace. Just then two maids came out of and saw Cāmpukā there. Frightened, they felt faint and fell down. Getting up again they went to find the chaste Vīrataṅkā].

MAIDS: Oh, princess. Somebody has come and is sitting in front of our palace. He is frightening to look at. There is no man as big as he in our whole country.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Hey, maids! Never mind who he is. Is he going to come to our palace and beat you up? Go, ask who he is and return.

MAID: Princess, good! Man, who are you?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. I am the watchman of the King of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. I came with some news for your chaste lady. I would like to see the lady. Ask her to come.

MAID: Princess! He is the palace watchman from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. He would like to see you and has asked you to come.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Okay.

SONG:

*Veiling herself with her sari, there
Without showing her midriff
The chaste girl veiled herself
Without showing any part of her body.*

Vīrataṅkā, the chaste one, came out of the palace and saw Cāmpukā.

CĀMPUKĀ'S SONG:

*He paid obeisance
He offered her his services
He threw himself at her feet
He offered her his services.*

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Men. Watchman! Blessings to you! What news do you bring?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady. Yesterday, Monday, it rained well in our country. Our king will harness the golden ploughs and plough the enormous paddy field tomorrow. For these we need to make fine metal tips, staffs and rods. For this we need German iron. He said to borrow what iron you had and come (with it). We have put in an order for German iron. It will arrive in another two days. But tomorrow is an auspicious day for ploughing. Therefore, if we take this

iron and finish our work tomorrow, when our ordered iron comes, we will come and give it to you. Therefore, lend us your seven cartloads of iron!

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Man. The farmers are our arch enemies. When things are like that, how can we give them iron? If we give it, how do we know that the farmers will return the iron?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady! You must not worry about that. I will take responsibility for the iron. As soon as the German iron arrives, I will bring it and give it to you.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Even if it is so, I cannot give you the iron on my own accord. I must ask my brothers. Maids, tell the thousand brothers that I said for them to come to the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple.

Hearing this, the maids told the thousand Vīrataṅkā kings and they came. All of Vīrataṅkā's men gathered at the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. Cāmpukā and Vīrataṅkā set off and as they approached the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple the Veṭṭuvās saw Cāmpukā and said to Vīrataṅkā, "Oh, princess! What has he come for? Tell him to leave, quickly!"

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Elder brother! Why do you tell him to go? What is the reason?

VEṬṬUVĀ: Princess! He is the farmers' First Minister. Last year, while we and the farmers were holding a cock fight, this villain kicked us and took three hundred cocks from us and left, the deranged criminal! What has he come here for? Quick, tell him to go, oh, Taṅkā!

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Elder brother! In their country it has rained well. The king of the farmers wants to harness the ploughs the tomorrow. To make fine metal tips, staffs and rods for this they need German iron. Therefore, they have asked to borrow the iron we have. They have said they will return it when their iron comes. Therefore, no matter how much enmity there is between us, it is only proper to give when an important person asks, isn't it? It will be best to give it, oh, brothers!

VEṬṬUVĀ: That's fine, princess! Those farmers are profligate! If we give him iron, we cannot get it back. If it is your wish, you give it yourself and you get it back. We are not willing to give it.

And they all went to the palace.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Cāmpukā! My brothers said they are not willing to give it to you and they left. What can be done? All right. I will give it to you. Will you bring it back within three days?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady! The kings are thinking of what I did at the cock fight and are angry. Okay, you give it. I will come within three days and give it back.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Good! Go, drive a cart here, take the iron and go.

The chaste Vīrataṅkā set off and entered the palace. Cāmpukā followed behind Vīrataṅkā as far as the palace. Then he turned and went to the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. Thinking that if the Veṭṭuvās changed their minds all would be lost, he took the seven cart loads of iron, put the seven bundles together and was tying them as one when the chaste Vīrataṅkā came back from the palace to the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple.

“Cāmpukā came behind me but I don’t see him,” Vīrataṅkā thought. As she approached, she saw Cāmpukā tying the iron in a bundle. “Hey, Cāmpukā, you are tying the seven cartloads of iron into one bundle. Why? Don’t you need a cart?”

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady. It is best to tie the seven cartloads together in one bundle, weigh it and see how much it comes to, so that tomorrow when I return the iron to you, the calculation can all be ready. Isn’t it so? For this reason, I am tying it all together as one.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Good! Weigh it all and leave it. Tomorrow, bring a cart, take the iron and go!

Having said this, Vīrataṅkā the chaste set off and returned to the palace. When the chaste woman had left, Cāmpukā thought, “This is a good opportunity,” and he took his twenty-four-cubit men’s cloth, made a ring from it and placed it on his head. Standing facing the north, thinking of the council chamber of the gods, thinking of Vishnu, (he prayed).

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, truthful speaker with a conch, discus and lance! If it is true that I was born of a god’s boon then let this bundle of iron raise up the height of two palmyra palms and come to rest on the middle of my head, oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam.

SONG:

*With the grace of Vishnu
That firm iron bundle flew
With the grace of the Lord
It flew above awesomely.*

The iron bundle raised up the height of two palm trees and came to rest on the centre of Cāmpukā’s head. When the iron bundle came (to rest on) Cāmpukā’s head:

SONG:

*(Walking) quickly, my Lord, giant
Cāmpukā, the strong one, my God
Traversing, traversing, he quivered
This most courageous man of the world,
Leaving the borders of Vīrappūr
Coming to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord.*

Cāmpukā arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and as he set the bundle of iron down at the door of the jewelled hall, there was a sound like the gusting of hot wind, “paṭir.” Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, who was playing dice, heard it, and angrily said, “Ah ha!” The twelve fetters fell from him. He went to the door of the jewelled hall and saw the bundle of iron.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! How did you tie and bring so much iron in only one bundle?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! The Veṭṭuvās said to bring a cart in the morning and take it. But I thought if the Veṭṭuvās changed their mind, all would be lost, so I tied the seven cartloads of iron in one bundle and brought it (here), oh, King!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! If sought, it cannot be found. Even if earned, it cannot be acquired. Even if I took great pains, I could not find a man of your competence. Nothing like you is available on this earth. Kuppi! Give Cāmpukā a thousand drams of hard liquor.

Cāmpukā took the liquor, drank it and slept in the horse stable.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Men, oh, artisans! Is this German iron? Look at it!

ARTISANS: Yes, oh, King! That is German iron.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Set up a workshop, stretch it into wire, and begin making the net.

The artisans constructed a workshop and began to work.

SONG:

*The body (of metal) was melted, was melted
In the artisans’ workshop, in the workshop
The gold was melted, was melted
In the blacksmith’s workshop, in the workshop.*

The artisans heated the seven cartloads of metal, made wire, rolled it in rolls, and went to the king.

ARTISANS: Oh, King! How do you want the work done?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Oh, artisans! A thousand net-strands overhead, so the parrot cannot fly upwards. A thousand net-strands below, so the parrot cannot fly downwards. A thousand golden net-strands so it cannot fly sideways. A thousand small strands so that it does not get caught in the mesh. A thousand fused strands so it does not fly on high. In this way, five kinds of strands are needed. Call some more artisans of the revenue villages and finish the work in three days.

ARTISANS: Lord. Good!

SONG:

*It was said to be good, sweet
They did it with love
A thousand artisans (making) the net
Knotting it now
Vishnu, Supreme Lord, that
He who restored Alkalikai¹
Harirāmā is knotting it
In exactly three days
The net was finished.*

In this way, with Vishnu's help, the artisans finished the net in three days. Then, seeing the king, they said, "Oh, King! We have finished the work."

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Good. What do you think, elder brother? If we catch parrots of the council chamber of the gods and bring them back in our hands, it will be dangerous. Therefore, shall we have a golden cage made to take along?

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, younger brother! Order that it be done.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Kuppi! Measure out another vaḷḷam of pearls for the artisans and give it to them.

Kuppi immediately measured out a vaḷḷam of pearls and gave it (to them). The artisans accepted it.

ARTISANS: Oh, King! How would you like the cage made?

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, artisans! Quickly made a golden cage with golden uprights and golden cross-pieces.

ARTISANS: Lord, good!

They set up a workshop and in a short time finished the golden bird cage.

ARTISANS: Oh, King! We have made a golden bird cage.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Good! Hey, Kuppi. Measure out a vaḷḷam of pearls for the artisans and give it to them along with betel leaf and areca nut.

Kuppi immediately gave a vaḷḷam of pearls, betel leaf and areca nut to the artisans. The artisans accepted the pearls, took leave of the king and returned home. When the artisans had left, the young king with the strength of eight elephants and the king with the strength of ten elephants, these two, Periyaṇṇacāmi and Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi, called Cāmpukā.

KINGS: Go to the thousand revenue villages and announce on the parai drum that Friday, at five in the morning, we are going to war against parrots and that each household must send one man.

Cāmpukā put the drum on his shoulder and went and stood on (the edge of) the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank.

CĀMPUKĀ: Friday, at five in the morning, the kings of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows is going to war against the parrots. Therefore, without fail, each household of the thousand revenue villages send a man to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, before Friday morning at five. These are kings' orders.

He thought of the gods' council chamber as he beat the drum, and the sounds were heard in all of the thousand revenue villages.

Friday morning, before five o'clock, Periyaṇṇacāmi and Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi got up, went to the Benares riverbank, bathed, called the goddess Cellāttā, and performed the god's pūjā, the pūjā for the family deity and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā. Then they went to the palace, poured water on their hands from a small pot, ate cooked rice and drank cow's milk. Then the two rested and chewed betel and areca nut.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Take our ship-like saddles and the horses Pañcakalyāṇi and Nīlā,¹ bathe them in the Vaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam pond, dress them and bring them to the front of the palace.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Good!

He went to Vaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam pond, bathed the horses, dressed them, brought them to the front of the palace and went to the king.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! Have all the men resident in our area come? Have you checked?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! They have all come and are waiting at the Pilliar temple.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Good! We will go, dress and return.

The two lords went to the room where one dresses for battle.

SONG:

*Wrapping calico around the head, my Lord
Tying a turban, my Lord, with a nosegay
Putting on, putting on various things
Adorning himself with sweet things
Collecting, collecting various things
Things, my Lord, for adorning one's front*

¹ Her name is spelled Ahalya in Sanskrit.

¹ The horses' names: Pañcakalyāṇi is a five-colored horse whose feet and face are white, Nīlā is a horse that is "blue," perhaps blue-black. They are standard horse names. These are unquestionably female names, implying that both of the heroes' horses are mares.

*The lord's adornments glittered
See how their bodies are covered with things
The silks glittered
See how they resemble gods.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Elder brother! Our spears of the righteous god Yeman that we wear, the tridents of Brahma that we carry, oh, elder brother, it is best of these swords are first held in the hands of the chaste girl and blessed. Therefore, let us call Pārvati. We will tell her to lift the swords and hand them to us.

Periyaṇṇacāmi went to Pārvati and said, "Oh, Taṅkā! Come, lift up our swords, less them and hand them to us."

PĀRVATI: Elder brother...

PĀRVATI'S SONG:
*Without reason, without reason, elder brother
I told you to go catch a parrot
I said to go there
With an unknowing (mind), unknowingly
I told you to go catch a parrot
I said to go
The chaste girl is crying
The resplendent one is fading
The good woman is crying
The flower parrot is wilting.*

Episode 21 ❖

Hearing the sounds of Pārvati crying, Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi came there and asked, "What is it, Taṅkā? You are crying?"

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! Vīratāṅkā, the chaste, has set five thousand tigers and five thousand cobras to guard the parrots. I asked for the parrots without reason. You must not go, oh, brothers! I don't want that parrot.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Elder brother! Did you hear what Pārvati said? She said she did not want a country parrot; she only wanted a parrot of the gods' council chamber to be caught. Now that we have told the village fighters of the thousand revenue villages and they have all come and are waiting at the Pilliar temple, when we are about to set out, she says, "I don't want a parrot." There are cobras set to guard it. There are tigers set to guard it. "You must not go," she cries. Did you hear her? She saw the parrots in a dream. At that time, we did not know about the tigers, the cobras and all that. Now, when (we are to) set out with the resident men, now she cries! If this is heard by the ears of the village fighters, there will be shame for us, won't there? Elder brother! Can Pārvati refuse to lift the swords, bless them and give them (to us)? If she says she cannot, (I will ask her to) stand straight (and) I will cut her up first.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Lady Pārvati! Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi has become angry. Whatever is said, he will not listen. Come quickly, lift the swords, bless them and give them (to us); We shall leave and return. We must go and bring back the parrot. If not, we must die. Come, quickly take the swords and give them (to us).

Pārvati went to the gold workshop, sat down facing north, and (prayed by) lifting her two hands.

PĀRVATI: Parantāmā, ruler of the earth, Lord of Paṅṭarīpuram! My two elder brothers are going to catch a golden parrot and bring it back. They are going to catch a silver parrot and bring it (here), they say. My brothers, two swords must come to my hands (by themselves), oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!

SONG:
*With the grace of Vishnu, of Vishnu
Those strong swords rose up
With the grace of the Lord, of the Lord
Those firm swords rose up.*

The lords' two swords came to rest in Pārvati's hand. Pārvati immediately brought the swords and gave them to the brothers. The lords took them and fastened them in their waist scabbards.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Kuppi! Look after Pārvati carefully. We shall be back before the cocks crow. Hey, Cāmpukā! We will go ahead on the horses. You show the way to the village fighters if it becomes dark and bring them (along) carefully.

The two lords mounted the horses.

SONG:
*My Lord, he mounted the horse
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord
With the horse Nīlā he crossed (the land)
He snapped the stinging whip my Lord
Spurring with the right foot, my Lord
See the horse gallop as if he will reach Vishnu's heaven
Spurring with the left foot my Lord
See the horse gallop as if he will reach the world above
See the good horse jump over the stones
See him cross the Karumalai mountains, my Lord
See him jump over the trees, the trees
See him cross the Pilimalai mountains, my Lord
See him cross the forests of Matukkarai
The horse, my Lord; is coming.*

Crossing the forest of Matukkarai, and while entering the tiger forest, the five thousand tigers saw the lords coming. They got up and showed their fangs.

TIGERS: Who's that? Who comes to our forest?

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! What is this? Many tigers have come to obstruct (the way)!

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! This is the forest of tigers that Lady Pārvati spoke about.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Having killed this many tigers, we will not be able to catch a parrot. Let's turn around and go back to the palace. Let's get going.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Why do you speak like this? If we are frightened by these tigers, we will have problems on returning (home). Get down.

Cāmpukā took Periyaṇṇacāmi's sword in his hand.

SONG:

*With a somersault in front, and one behind, my Lord
With thirty-two different postures, my Lord
The knife swings, it swings there
The sharp instrument flashes, see it flash, my Lord
The five thousand tigers, my Lord
He made orange juice of them, my Lord
Cut them to pieces like musk melons, my Lord
Cut, cut and piled up, my Lord
Into pieces like pēpal tree fruits, my Lord
They were cut well and piled up, my Lord.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI and Cāmpukā killed the five thousand tigers and poured hot water wherever any roots had fallen.¹

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Are these any tigers still alive?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! All have died. There are no more. Mount your horse and turn around east and west twice. Let the tiger juices stain² (you).

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI mounted Nīlā and turned around twice and stained (himself) with the juices of five thousand tigers.

SONG:

Searching for the cobra forest, my God

¹ A reference to the fact that if any life remains it may "take root" and the animals thus regain their former life-like states.

² There was a strong local belief that rubbing the blood of a fallen victim on one's own skin would aid in the transfer of some of that enemy's power to oneself.

*The blue horses are going, my Lord
See those firm ones fly, my Lord
The Lord's horses, my God.*

As the two lords, the village fighters and Cāmpukā, all entered the cobra forest together, five thousand cobras spread their hoods, hissed and approached.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! What is this? Many cobras have come and obstructed (the way).

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. This is what is called the cobra forest.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! We cannot kill this many cobras! Call the village fighters. We will go home.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! If this frightens us, how can we go home? Get down and take your sword in hand.

Cāmpukā took over Periyaṇṇacāmi's sword.

SONG:

*The sword, the sword swings
The sharp instrument flashes, see it flash, my Lord
The five thousand cobras, my Lord
Were cut in pieces and piled up, my Lord
Like pieces of musk melon, my Lord
Cut, cut and piled up, my Lord.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI and Cāmpukā cut up and disposed of the five thousand cobras.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Are there any more cobras who may have escaped? Go and see. If any have escaped, it will cause problems when the village fighters come. Therefore, look carefully.

Cāmpukā ran, looked and returned.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord, there are no more cobras. Get on your horse and take the juices.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI mounted Nīlā and turned to the east and west twice. He stained¹ himself with the juices of the five thousand cobras. Then looking at Cāmpukā, he asked:

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Are there any more guards?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. There are no more guards. There, see, the banyan tree! That must be the Vellīyaṅkiri tank. The parrot is on top of that very tree. From

¹ In the Mahābhārata, the hero Bhima (of whom CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI is a reincarnation) smeared the blood of the rival King Duryodhana on his body after killing him. This was thought to transfer the strength of the vanquished to the victor.

now on you must not ride swiftly on Nīlā. If the parrot hears a noise it will become frightened and run off. Therefore, I will bring the village fighters and go first. You two come, slowly, behind (us).

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! We will come that way.

Then the two arrived in the neighbourhood of Veḷḷiyaṅkiri tank.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! The parrot is in this very tree. Dismount Nīlā noiselessly.

Hearing this, the two lords dismounted from the horses. Cāmpukā pitched a white tent under the tree.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! You two rest in the tent. It will be a little while until we must throw the net over the tree.

He had village fighters encircle the tree and rest. Then Cāmpukā sat down facing east. At that time, on the top of the tree, the female parrot of the gods' council chamber saw the men that had come in a dream. The female parrot got up and said:

F. PARROT: Husband! Danger has arrived!

M. PARROT: Oh, woman! What danger is threatening us?

F. PARROT: Husband! Two farmers from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows have come with a Paṛaiyaṅ and their resident men. They have come to catch us and take us away. Look! They are (there) below.

F. PARROT'S SONG:

*To enslave us to look at, enslave us there
To capture and confine us, they have come to confine us
They carry a fine cage for us, the lord carries a cage
They have come, the villains, the farmers, the farmers there.*

F. PARROT: Husband! Since I married you, I have never been separated from you, even in my dreams. You, who garlanded me in the evening, you who gave me your hand in the morning.

F. PARROT'S SONG:

*I have lost my turmeric, I have lost it¹
I have lost my mind, my King, I have lost my flower²
The wedding necklace, the good wedding necklace, I have lost it
Now it is time to let my hair free³
Husband, that day has come.*

¹ A common mark of beauty and happiness for women.

² Flowers for the hair, a similar auspicious mark of a married woman

³ A sign of widowhood.

While the female parrot cried like this, her mate spoke to her:

M. PARROT: Oh, woman! Thinking that the farmers would come and catch us, the chaste Vīrataṅkā placed five thousand tigers and five thousand cobras as guards. Could the farmers have escaped all that and come here, oh, woman? This is all a bad dream. Be still and don't speak about it.

F. PARROT: Husband! This is not a dream. Look down. The farmers are stationed there with a silver cage¹ they have made. Near them the Paṛaiyā is seated like a monkey. Husband! See the net they will catch us with, there, near Cāmpukā.

Hearing this, the male parrot looked down. "Yes, woman," he said, believing it was true.

F. PARROT: Husband! What shall we do now?

SONG:

*Will a tree separate from the earth, my Lord?
Will shade separate from a tree, my Lord?
Will the complexion separate from the girl, my Lord?
Will the fragrance separate from the flower, oh, King?*

F. PARROT: Husband! Shiva has written on my head that I shall be separated from you. All right, husband! Get up quickly, we'll run to Vīrappūr.

Cāmpukā was listening to the female parrot talk. "If we miss (this chance), the parrots will run off," he thought, and he stood facing north, thinking of Vishnu.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, truthful speaker with a conch, discus and lance! Rescuer of those in trouble. Oh, orphan-saver. Until I can wake up the fighters, station them around the tree and throw the net up, the parrots must stay right where they are, without flying, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram.

Then he woke up the men and stationed them around the tree.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Fighters! I will throw the net up. Everyone must hold onto the net's edges. Come hold those edges (against) the foot of the tree. Lord! Time is short. I will throw the net. Be ready.

Then the two lords got up. Cāmpukā took the net, stood facing the northeast and thought of Vishnu. Then he threw the net up. Just like that, the net covered the tree and (the edges) came back down. The fighters grabbed and held those edges against the base of the tree. As Cāmpukā threw the net over the tree the female parrot saw him doing this.

F. PARROT: Husband! The Paṛaiyā is throwing the net.

¹ In other places this bird cage is described as golden. Here it is silver. Both descriptions are hyperbole. The cage is likely to have been made of iron.

The female parrot tried to get up, but she could not fly off. The net had been thrown and she was caught in it. The male parrot saw this. His partner was caught in the net. Believing he could escape, the male parrot came down to the foot of the tree and hid in a hollow. Then the female parrot began to cry and weep because she was trapped.

SONG:

*The two feet, two feet, of the chaste woman (are trapped)
The female parrot beat her breast with her two wings
What shall I do? She said
The female parrot wept well, wept and cried.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Climb the tree quickly, catch the parrot and bring it (here).

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Good.

Cāmpukā went and stood at the base of the tree. Opening the net a little on one side, he made an opening he could reach through. The male parrot was awaiting an opportunity. When Cāmpukā opened the net he quickly flew out through that open space. He flew straight to the fortress of Vīrataṅkā in Vīrappūr.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā. Something is flying away. What is it?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! The male parrot from the gods' council chamber had escaped and is running away.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! By this time that male parrot will have reached Vīrappūr and he will be talking to Vīrataṅkā, the chaste. The Veṭṭuvā fighters will soon be arriving. Go quickly go and grab that female parrot from the net and bring her here. We will leave right away.

Cāmpukā immediately climbed up and caught the female parrot in his hand.

F. PARROT: What's this, Paṛaiyā? You are catching hold of me?

Hearing this, Cāmpukā became angry. He seized the parrot's wings with a crushing grip and brought her down from the tree.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Put the parrot in the cage, roll up the net and bring it. Get all of the village fighters. We will set out quickly. Come on. Hurry up!

Having said this, the two lords mounted their horses.

SONG:

*My Lord, he mounted Nīlā
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord
With Nīlā he crossed the land*

*He snapped the war whip, my Lord
The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord
The palace where there are many mountains in a row
Vīramalai, the huge mountain, my God
The palace where there are mountains, all around Vīramalai,
The spiral mountain, my Lord
He crossed the Vīramalai mountains, my Lord
He arrived, my Lord, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

Everyone arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The two lords dismounted in front of the palace.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Have you brought the village fighters back safely?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! I have brought them all back safely.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Okay. Good! Send them all home and then come (here) quickly!

Cāmpukā was satisfied and he sent all of the fighters off. Then he went to the palace.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! Bring the parrot cage and set on that stone.

Cāmpukā brought it, as he was told to do, and set it down.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Elder brother. You take this parrot to the Pilliar temple, sprinkle it with water, perform a pūjā. (Then) bring it back and hang it in front of Pārvati's lovely swing.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: That will be fine.

Periya took the parrot to the Pilliar temple, sprinkled it with water, performed a pūjā, brought it back and hung it in front of Pārvati's lovely swing. As he hung it, Pārvati came running in. She hugged her elder brother and asked if all was well.

TWO LORDS: Yes, oh, Taṅkā! We have come back safely.

They took Pārvati's hand, kissed her jewel-like face. They covered her cheeks with kisses. Then the two lords went and bathed, ate and chewed betel leaf with areca nut. Calling Vishnu, the three of them now began to play dice. At that time, Vishnu locked CinṆanṆacāmi in the twelve fetters.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, to be sweet
See how they did things with love
Day after day, time after time
See the good age in progress
At this time the parrot sang in front of Pārvati's swing.*

F. PARROT'S SONG:
Climbing the balcony
Hear it sing like a cuckoo
Climbing (to the top) of the hall, hear it call
Raising its voice, hear it sing
The female parrot sings "Taṇ nā nē"
It sings a Telugu poem, behold!
The parrot sings "Taṇ nā nē"
It sings a beautiful poem of a god, behold!
It calls out, "Elder sister, elder sister."
The parrot sings softly, behold!

While this was the condition in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the male parrot had gone to Vīrappūr. (There) he sat on the fortress wall near the rooms of the chaste Vīrataṅkā and cried.

M. PARROT'S SONG:
(My) wife has been caught, lady, she had been caught
The farmers have taken her
To the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, to that country
Without capturing (her) husband, without taking me
She had been trapped and taken, lady, she had been caught.

"Lady! The farmers have captured and taken my wife," he cried. Vīrataṅkā the chaste heard him.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, maids! Our parrot of the gods' council chamber, (he who is) like a parrot king, is crying. Go and see what is happening.

The maids ran immediately and saw the parrot there.

MAIDS: What is it, oh, parrot? Why are you are crying?

M. PARROT: Women. The farmers came from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and having captured and carried off my wife, they left. Tell the chaste Vīrataṅkā to come here quickly.

The maids went and found Vīrataṅkā the chaste.

MAIDS: Princess! It is our parrot king from the gods' council chamber who has come. He is sitting on the fortress wall and crying. He is calling for you.

As the maids had requested, Vīrataṅkā the chaste set out to see the parrot.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Why are you crying?

M. PARROT'S SONG:
My wife, my wife has been captured
Now they have gone, they have gone, the farmers
My wife, my wife, I have been separated from her
For half a measure of time, half a measure,
I lived happily, oh, woman, lived happily.

M. PARROT: Woman! My wife has been captured and taken away by the farmers.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Men, oh, male parrot! Who came, made this capture and left? Tell me the details.

M. PARROT: Lady! The farmers from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. One Paṛaiyaṅ and a thousand village fighters came and threw a net. While they were trying to catch (us), I used trickery to escape and ran here.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Okay. I put five thousand tigers and cobras out as guards. What happened to them?

M. PARROT: Lady. The farmers and the Paṛaiyā killed all those tigers and cobras.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Is that so? Hey, maids! Go quickly and bring the thousand elder brothers to the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple!

The chaste lady set off for the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. Meanwhile, the maids went to find the thousand Veṭṭuvās. They told these men about what had happened. All these men came and gathered at the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. Having arrived, they looked at Vīrataṅkā the chaste and asked:

VEṬṬUVĀS: What is it, oh, Taṅkā? Why did you call us?

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, elder brothers! Two parrots came to us from the gods' council chamber. They were taken and put in a huge banyan tree. A thousand tigers and five thousand cobras were set by us to guard them. But last night two farmers, one Paṛaiyā and a thousand village fighters, came from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, killed all of those tigers and cobras, seized the female parrot, and took it away. Those villains!

VEṬṬUVĀS: Oh, Taṅkā? Who told you this?

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Elder brothers! The male parrot escaped, came here, cried in front of me, told me, and left.

VEṬṬUVĀS: What is that, oh, Taṅkā? While climbing such a big tree to catch them, that parrot could not fly away?

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Elder brothers! They made a net out of iron, covered the tree and (then) they seized it.

Hearing this, the thousand Veṭṭuvās became angry.

VEṬṬUVĀS: What is this, oh, Taṅkā? When (that) Paṛaiyā came and asked for iron, we told you that the farmers were bad, that the Paṛaiyā was bad, and not to give it to them. Not listening to our advice, you gave the iron to the Paṛaiyā. The Paṛaiyā, having gotten the iron from you by deception, made a net from it, came to our country to catch a parrot and (now) they have taken it away. Can we simply say "Let it go?" Has the Paṛaiyā brought the iron back within three days as he promised? Without listening to our advice, you gave the iron to the farmers. Now he has captured and taken a parrot. What can we do about it?

Hearing that the farmers had borrowed Veṭṭuvā iron, made a net and taken a parrot, all one thousand men talked together and were angry.

VĪRATAṆKĀ: Okay, elder brothers! That was my mistake. Please forgive me. But how much trouble those farmers have taken for their younger sister! They caught a parrot at night and took it! I have a thousand elder brothers! Let me see you go and fetch the farmers' younger sister, Taṅkā. Bring her here and make her my servant. There are only three thieves there. You are men. Go! Quickly bring Pārvati here.

THE THOUSAND VEṬṬUVĀS: Princess! We shall go right now, cut down the farmers and Cāmpukā, and pick up their younger sister and bring her here! But some food must be packed for the thousand of us to take with us.

Soon each of the thousand Veṭṭuvās had a bundle of rice that he could carry on his shoulder. Each man grabbed a walking stick and the thousand Veṭṭuvās set off.

SONG:

*Leaving Vīrataṅkā, my Lord
The Veṭṭuvās are coming, my God
The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord
Mountains hollow on four sides, my God
Crossing Vīramalai mountain, my Lord
They are coming quickly, my God.*

The thousand men arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and sat on the banks of the Benares, thinking they would go to the palace shortly. At that time, the palace maid, Kuppi, dressed herself and set out to the Benares riverbank with pots to fetch water.

SONG:

*The maid put a red dot on her forehead
The peahen outlined her beautiful eyes in black
The maid put make-up on her eyes
The female peahen placed a perfume dot on her forehead*

*The garlanded parrot lifted the water pots
The garlanded parrot, Kuppi, is coming.*

Kuppi arrived at the Benares riverbank and began polishing her pots. Meanwhile, the Veṭṭuvās saw her and (whispered) to themselves: "Elder brothers! The one who has come for water and is polishing the pots seems to be the farmers' own younger sister. Let's go, seize her and take off with her." Then the Veṭṭuvās went and encircled Kuppi. They noiselessly lifted her on (one man's) shoulders and the group began to run off.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, leaving it
The thousand Veṭṭuvās are running
With big running steps, big steps
The thousand Veṭṭuvās are running now
Crossing the forest of Matukkarai, crossing the forest
The thousand Veṭṭuvās are coming.*

The thousand Veṭṭuvās soon arrived at the border of Vīrappūr and they rested at the Veḷḷiyāṅkiri irrigation tank.

During all this, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the lovely young girl born just after the brothers, the good Taṅkā, the peacock born just after the golden one, good Taṅkā, was sleeping deeply in her swing.

SONG:

*The swing of the chaste girl is rocking
It swings for Pārvati, who sways like a golden garland as she walks
The chaste girl in the swing
Pārvati is sleeping deeply.*

(At first) as she rocked, Taṅkā had a good dream. Now that (something) bad was happening to Kuppi she had a bad dream. She jumped up quickly from the swing and called:

PĀRVATI (TAṆKĀ): Hey, maids! Go quickly and bring Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi here.

The maids went immediately and spoke to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi:

MAIDS: Oh, King! Pārvati is calling you. It is urgent.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi let out a gasp. He got up in anger, and the twelve fetters on him fell off.

SONG:

*Stretching, stretching, he shook
The young, young prince, Caṅkar
Traversing, traversing, he quivered
Caṅkar the strong one, my God.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi approached the beautiful girl sitting in the palace swing and asked, "What is it, oh, Taṅkā? You called?"

PĀRVATI: Elder brother...

SONG:

*The tender, tender head maid, where is she?
The one with heavy hair, heavy hair, where is she?
The one with (eyes lined) in black, in black, where is she?
The lovely one, the lovely one, where is Kuppi?*

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: What is this oh, Taṅkā? Kuppi is in the palace, of course.

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! Kuppi went to the riverbank at Benares to fetch water. I think a thousand Veṭṭuvās seized her and ran off! Go quickly and try to protect Kuppi, oh, elder brother!

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Ah ha! So that is it! Hey, Cāmpukā!

Cāmpukā came running.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. You called?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Kuppi went to the Benares riverbank to fetch water. Pārvati thinks that a thousand Veṭṭuvās seized Kuppi and ran off! Go and bring Nīlā quickly.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. How long has it been since the Veṭṭuvās took Kuppi?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: About one nāḷikai of time has passed.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! If I now go to Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷam and get Nīlā and bring them, the Veṭṭuvās will have reached Vīrappūr before you (can) start. Therefore, I will go and look after this matter myself. I will bring Kuppi back.

Cāmpukā received and drank a thousand drams of hard liquor. Then he tied a twenty-four-cubit men's cloth as a turban with a nose-gay. He took his walking stick and set off.

SONG:

*He is crossing (the land) with long strides
The boorish one is going far, my God
Crossing, crossing, he leaps
The most courageous man of the world, my God
Crossing the forest of Matukkarai, my Lord
Cāmpukā, my God, is coming.*

Cāmpukā crossed the Matukkarai forest and found the Veṭṭuvās in the neighbourhood of Veḷḷiyāṅkiri tank. They had sat down in a circle, with Kuppi in the

middle. They were talking with one another. Those Veṭṭuvās saw Cāmpukā approaching from the east.

A few of the Veṭṭuvās said, "Oh my! Elder brothers. Cāmpukā has arrived. What can be done?" and they became frightened. Several other Veṭṭuvās said, "Men, oh, younger brothers. When we are a thousand men, and he comes as one man, what can he do?" they said. While speaking to one another, Cāmpukā drew near. Then he bowed down in front of the Veṭṭuvās.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Lord!

VEṬṬUVĀS: What is it, Paṛaiyā? Hey, you! Why have you come? You borrowed iron from us and took it away. Have you brought it back? Hey, Paṛaiyā! Did you not borrow iron from us by trickery, take it and make a net, (and then) come to our country, catch a parrot and take it away? Hey, Paṛaiyā. Was this all your work?

As the thousand Veṭṭuvās addressed Cāmpukā they spoke in angry tones. Then Cāmpukā answered the Veṭṭuvās, using his trickery.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, kings! I took the iron and gave it to the farmers. Now my back is all swollen, Lord! That day, when I took the iron from you, I left it at the palace and went home. When I came back the next day and looked, I saw that they were making a net. Seeing that I said to our king, "Oh, King. I planned to make plough points, but you have now made a net." I told the king that our own iron (what we had ordered) had not yet arrived. I asked how could we now go and give back the iron we had borrowed from the Veṭṭuvās and promised to return? That villainous farmer answered: "Hey, Paṛaiyā. What does it matter to you what we do?" Then he beat me, the villain! Look at my back. Lords! I withstood his blows and went home. There my mother told me that you thousand men had come and carried off our Pārvati. I was very happy to learn that you had taken her. Lord! Do I see her now, sitting there in your midst? Who is that, oh, kings?

VEṬṬUVĀS: Paṛaiyā. That is your Pārvati!

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Good. All this is her work. She told her elder brothers that she wanted a parrot from the gods' council chamber. I came with them and we caught a parrot and took it away. Lords! Oh, Veṭṭuvā kings! You must not let Pārvati go. You must punish her severely. I will now go with you to my country. I will join you in killing those farmers. My mother will follow us.

VEṬṬUVĀS: All right. Good! Come with us.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lords! Each of you is carrying a small parcel. What is in those packets, oh, lords?

VEṬṬUVĀS: That is cooked rice.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lords! You must not carry cooked rice (packed for traveling) back to your homes. I will look after this villain, Pārvati. You all go to the Benares riverbank and eat. Leave me a little rice and come back. Then I will go in turn and eat.

VEṬṬUVĀS: Okay. We will go, eat and return. Take Pārvati.

All the Veṭṭuvās went to the Benares riverbank. While they ate the cooked rice, Cāmpukā saw his chance. He threw the sticks they had planned to use as weapons down an abandoned well nearby. (Then) he called out:

CĀMPUKĀ: Woman, Kuppi! The Veṭṭuvās have all left to eat. Get up and run over here.

Next Cāmpukā lifted Kuppi up onto his shoulders.

SONG:

*Cāmpukā put Kuppi on his shoulders
With (her) in the middle, he flew
He took long strides, my Lord
The boorish one traveled far, my Lord.*

Seeing Cāmpukā lift Kuppi on his shoulders and run, the thousand Veṭṭuvās cried out:

VEṬṬUVĀS: Brothers! Brothers! That villainous Paṛaiyā. He has tricked us all, taken Pārvati and is running away.

The Veṭṭuvās got up and started to run after Cāmpukā. They left their cooked rice behind.

SONG:

*With large, running steps, my Lord
The man is coming with great speed
Cāmpukā is in the distance, my God
The Veṭṭuvās are approaching quickly
At a distance of two miles, my Lord
They blocked Cāmpukā's path.*

The thousand Veṭṭuvās spoke to Cāmpukā while standing before him:

VEṬṬUVĀS: Hey, Paṛaiyā! You tricked us, did you not, and left us thinking you would carry off Pārvati? See (now) what we will do to you!

Cāmpukā immediately took Kuppi off his shoulders and set her down. Then he took his watchman's stick in his hand.

SONG:

*Quickly, quickly, Cāmpukā began to beat (them)
The thousand Veṭṭuvās, Lord, the Veṭṭuvās
Running, running, as Cāmpukā beat them
He made orange juice of them
Cāmpukā is doing that.*

Cāmpukā seized the thousand Veṭṭuvās and, in a disorderly way, began beating them. The Veṭṭuvās, not being able to stand the blows, began to run. Cāmpukā, having beaten them all, called to Kuppi saying, "Let's run."

He put Kuppi on his shoulders and started off.

SONG:

*Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord
Cāmpukā is coming, my Lord
To the place where gold springs from the earth
He has (now) arrived in the famous Land Where the Kāveri Flows.*

Cāmpukā arrived at the palace and set Kuppi down at the entrance to its jewelled hall. Then Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi came in.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! How far did the Veṭṭuvās get with Kuppi? How did you manage to trick a thousand Veṭṭuvās and bring Kuppi back?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Before I left (your palace), the Veṭṭuvās had (already) arrived at Veḷḷiyaṅkiri tank. I went and told them, deceitfully, that I was angry at my (own) king. (I said that) from now on, "I will come and join your country." With this deceitful speech, I sent them off to eat their packaged, cooked rice. After that, I lifted Kuppi up and took her. As I ran, the Veṭṭuvās saw me. They came after me angrily. I beat them all and pursued them. (Then) I brought Kuppi (here), oh, King.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! A man of your competence, if sought cannot be found, if earned cannot be acquired, not even by suffering, not (anywhere) in this world. Hey, Kuppi! Pour out a thousand drams of hard liquor for Cāmpukā.

Cāmpukā received the thousand drams from the maid, drank it all, and then went to rest in the elephant's stable.

Next Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi turned to Periyaṅṅacāmi.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Elder brother! Tell Kuppi to bathe and go into the palace.

SONG:

*It was said to be good, said to be sweet
See how things were down with love, there
One day, one fine day*

Look at the good things that happened at that time

This was the condition of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, at this time.

Episode 22 ✪

During Tāmarai's lifetime, when the temple cart was being pulled for Cellāttā, an artisan had fallen from its summit. He was the one who had said that Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai (must) place their own heads under the cart wheels. Of the seven artisans (involved in this) six died. But one lone man escaped. Since then, he had been supporting himself by cutting and selling firewood. This was still the case, at present. While Cāmpukā was beating the thousand Veṭṭuvās, three who were afraid of his blows had gone and hidden in a bush nearby. At that time that lone artisan-wood cutter happened to pass by. Noticing that a bush he saw in the distance was full of thorns¹ he decided to cut it down. He took one strike at it with his large knife. But then the Veṭṭuvās hiding inside started shouting:

THREE VEṬṬUVĀS: Oh my! Oh my! Stop. Stop that cutting! Don't make any noise! We were afraid that the villainous Paṛaiyā would catch and beat us. So, we came and hid in this bush.

ARTISANS: Hey, you villains! A thousand men came, submitted to² the blows of a Paṛaiyā, and you were frightened. You have hidden here under the cover of a bush? If that Paṛaiyā had said one word to me, I would have cut those farmers and that Paṛaiyā into small, small pieces. Okay, you go immediately to Vīrappūr. Tomorrow, get a thousand big baskets and come to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. I will go home and tomorrow I will come and cut down the farmers, take away all their wealth and take Pārvati, too. Go, and come back tomorrow without fail.

After saying this and sending those three Veṭṭuvās home, the lone artisan also set off.

SONG:

*With large running steps, my Lord
He is coming with great speed, my Lord
Like a flying bee, with great speed
The artisan is coming, my Lord.*

That day, the artisan's wife saw him returning home without any wood.

¹ A kind commonly used for firewood.

² In Tamil, the expression is to "eat the blows," a further suggestion of symbolic degradation.

ARTISAN'S WIFE: Hey, villain! You bring wood home daily. Why have you come without anything today? What shall we do for food today?

ARTISAN: Hey, woman! From now on we have no need to cut wood in order to eat! Okay. Inside the house is a big saw. Get it and bring it here.

The artisan's wife got the saw, brought it and gave it to him. The artisans took the saw and went to the back yard of his house. There was a pomegranate tree there that had been there for four generations. With his saw, he started to cut the trunk of the tree. Seeing this, his wife came running towards him.

ARTISAN'S WIFE: Husband! This tree has been in our house for our generations. Why are you cutting it down?

ARTISAN: Why are you asking about all that? Tomorrow morning, I will bring home a cart full of wealth. There is no need to worry.

SONG:

*Cutting down the pomegranate tree
The artisan is making a wooden measuring vessel.*

The artisan cut down the pomegranate tree, made a wooden measuring vessel out of it, and set it aside. Then he called to his wife:

ARTISAN: Go to the shop of the big merchant, buy four annas worth of gold and come back!

The artisan's wife immediately went to the shop, bought four annas worth of gold and came back. The artisan melted the gold and spread it over his new wooden measuring vessel. This is how he made it into a golden vessel.

ARTISAN: Oh, woman. Go to the shop, buy one paṭi¹ of raw rice, cook it, and tie half a paṭi of the cooked rice up in a parcel (for travel). Put the other half paṭi for me to eat now.

The wife went immediately to the shop, bought the raw rice, brought it back and cooked it. She (then) made a parcel of cooked rice for travel, just as the artisan had ordered. She served the remaining rice to her husband. The artisan ate well and then said:

ARTISAN: Oh, woman, I shall go and come tomorrow morning. I shall bring a cartload of wealth to our house. Be ready!

Having said this, the artisan lifted the measuring vessel and put it on his head. Then he started to leave the house:

SONG:

*The door mantle struck the artisan
The golden measuring vessel fell and rolled on the doorstep.*

¹ A paṭi is equal to roughly two heaping cupfuls.

Seeing this the artisan's wife said: "Husband!"

SONG:

*The measuring vessel, the gold measuring vessel
As it is rolling, as it is rolling now
So your head, your head
Will roll, it will roll there.*

ARTISAN'S WIFE: Husband. Having hit the doorpost is a bad omen. You must not go. If you go, some calamity will occur.

ARTISAN: Oh, woman! The door mantle was struck because it was not high enough. When the house was built, your brother made the door mantle a half-foot lower (than usual), saying it must stand at a half-foot (interval from the ground).¹

The artisan lifted the round measuring vessel from the doorstep again, placed it on his head and set out.

SONG:

*(With) a strong sound, the artisan
Was struck, was struck there
On the doorstep, the golden measuring vessel
Rolled, it rolled there.*

ARTISAN'S WIFE: Husband! Again, there is a bad omen. Just as the measuring vessel rolled as you left today, so your own head is going to roll!

ARTISAN: Oh, woman. All these are bad omens? Nothing will happen to me. You must not be frightened.

And the artisan again lifted the measuring vessel and put it on his head. As he came onto the street:

SONG:

*A woman who had left her husband²
Carried the hot coals left (from a fire)
A good cat crossed
The artisan's path, crossed it
A good jackal, crossed it
The artisan's path, crossed it
A single Brahmin came towards him³
The artisan, came towards him there⁴.*

1 A seeming reference to a ritual prescription about the required height of an auspicious door mantle.

2 Literally translated: "A non-sustaining woman."

3 All of these events are considered to be bad omens

4 There is a parallel here with the Kaṭṭabomaṇ story, another popular Tamil epic. In the latter, Kaṭṭabomaṇ's wife also sees a number of bad omens, such as a burning splinter falling from heaven, turmeric catching on fire, a fort falling into the hands of the enemy and plantain trees burning. As a result, she too, advised her husband not to leave.

ARTISAN: Hey, woman! How many people there are who come and go on the street! Are these all bad omens? You (must) go home without worrying. I will come in good health tomorrow morning.

The artisan set out.

SONG:

*Leaving the country with many steps, big steps
The artisan is going to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
With big running steps, big steps
The artisan is coming with great speed.*

As the artisan as approached the Land Where the Kāveri Flows Periyaṅṅacāmi was sitting at the Pilliar temple. He was there because of the celebration of the Garuda festival. The artisan arrived and saw Periyaṅṅacāmi. He paid obeisance at his feet and offered his services. He threw himself at his feet and offered his services.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man. Blessings to you! Man. Who are you! What town are you from?

ARTISAN: Oh, King! I am from the Land of Prosperity, one of your own artisans, Lord!

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Hey! Now I remember! When my mother and father were having our temple cart pulled for Cellāttā, six artisans fell into the earth with the cart. They say that one man escaped. You are the artisan who escaped?

ARTISAN: Yes, Lord. It is I.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Okay. Now where are you going at the end of the day, taking this golden measuring vessel with you?

ARTISAN: Oh, King! In Vīrappūr, in the house of the Veṭṭuvā King there are nine golden measuring vessels. They said that they are in need of one more. Therefore, I thought of taking (this one) to them, oh, King!

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Okay. Good! Artisan. But it is getting dark. There are thieves in the Nākamalai mountains. If you take a golden measuring vessel out now, thieves will beat you and take it away. Therefore, come and stay in our palace tonight. Get up and go tomorrow morning. Do come in!

ARTISAN: Oh, King! Good! I shall do it that way.

The artisan set off with Periyaṅṅacāmi and the two of them arrived at the palace.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Artisan. In our gold workshop there are twelve golden measuring vessels. We shall take (yours) there and come back. Come.

The two of them went to the gold workshop.

ARTISAN: Oh, King! In your twelve golden measuring vessels, there is only a little gold. My vaḷḷam is made of pure gold. If I place it with your vaḷḷams I will not be able to distinguish it when I come for it in the morning. I shall set my measuring vessel alone near a small lamp.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, artisan! Do as you like.

Hearing this, the artisan took his measuring vessel and left it by a small lamp. As he returned, he saw that the lord's two swords were (lying) there.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Artisan! Come. Let's go eat! Maids! Serve the artisan!

ARTISAN: Oh, King! I don't want food. I have brought a parcel of rice (for traveling). I will eat that. I am an artisan who wears the sacred thread.¹ I will only eat in my own home. If you give me one eating leaf it will be enough.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay. Good!

He called a maid and ordered that an eating leaf be brought and given to the artisan. Then he said:

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Artisan! Eat and sleep well. Call a maid and tell her you want to leave at the crack of dawn. Then go to sleep. In front of the house is a dog who will bite you. That's why I say you should sleep. Okay. Go eat and then sleep well.

Having spoken (thus), PeriyaṆṆacāmi ate and went to sleep on a cotton mattress. The artisan also ate and went to lie down. As the artisan reclined, an evil thought (appeared) in his heart. He thought of killing the two lords. So, after everyone in the palace had gone to sleep, he got up quietly and went to the gold workshop. He went to the place where the lords' swords were kept.

SONG:

*The artisan lifted a sword in his hand
Taking it from its scabbard
The artisan raised the sword
He raised it above his waist, the artisan
Lifted it high above his waist
Lifted it well above the shoulder.*

As the artisan started to raise the lord's sword and tried but failed to put it on his shoulder, Vishnu saw him and thought: "Ah ha! The villainous artisan has lifted a sword in order to cut up the lords." Then Vishnu threw some sacred ash. When the ash was thrown, the artisan's hand slipped and the lord's sword fell

¹ Called the "flower thread". People who wear this are usually very particular about who they will accept food from.

from the artisan's shoulder and cut up one whole side of his body. Blood ran from the artisan, blood flowed. It ran, it flowed. The artisan could not endure the pain of the wounds.

ARTISAN: Oh my! Oh my!

As the artisan cried, PeriyaṆṆacāmi heard some kind of noise, He got up, and came running. But when he looked at the place where the artisan had been sleeping, there was no one there. Then he heard the cry of "Oh my. Oh my!" coming from the gold workshop. When PeriyaṆṆacāmi went to the gold workshop to see, he saw that the artisan had been cut from shoulder (to foot) all along one side.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, artisan! What is the reason for your having come here, taken a sword and gotten cut up like this?

ARTISAN: Oh, King! I was reaching to take (a look at) your sword. I have made a better sword than this, and I thought of giving it to you. So, I lifted this sword wondering how many rāttals¹ it had, and I weighed it. My hand slipped and it cut me up like this, oh, King!

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, artisan. Let's go, come! Hey, maids! Put some medicine on the artisan's wounds and apply heat.

Periya took the artisan and called the maids. The maids immediately put medicine on, bandaged him and applied heat. The artisan's pain lessened a little.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Man, artisan! How is the pain now?

ARTISAN: Oh, King! Now it is not too bad!

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay. Now, without saying a word, go to sleep. You went and took the swords without telling anyone. If CiṅṅaṆṆacāmi had learned of this, he would have cut you up by this time and (also) have cut me up. Okay. Do not make any more noise. Go to sleep. Don't get up until it is good and light.

PeriyaṆṆacāmi said, "Okay," and went back to sleep on (his) cotton mattress. The artisan also went to sleep. When the artisan got up the next morning, PeriyaṆṆacāmi had already risen and gone outside.

ARTISAN: Oh, King. (Please) go and fetch my measuring vessel and give it to me. I must go to Vīrappūr. It is getting late.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Man, artisan. Why should I come? You go and get your vaḷḷam and bring it here.

¹ The rāttal is a measure used for weight. One rāttal is equal to forty tūlams, specifically 466.4 grams, or roughly one pound.

ARTISAN: Oh, King! That is fine. But if any of your measuring vessels are there and I go alone and take one you will say I exchanged (one of) my measuring vessels for yours. Therefore, it is not right for me to go alone and take my vessel. It is necessary for you to come too.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay. Come. I will also go!

As the two of them went and looked, they saw that all the four annas of gold had melted off the artisan's vessel. Only a plain wooden vessel was left. Seeing this, the lying artisan spoke out:

ARTISAN: Oh, King! I was simply on my way to Vīrappūr. Your trickery brought me into the palace. Then you took my solid gold measuring vessel by deceit. You brought a wooden vessel and set it in its place. Did you think you could trick me? When one trusts those in high places this is what they do! Oh, King! What good does your avaricious and evil heart accomplish? Do not say a word. Just give me back my golden vessel.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Man, artisan! I did you a favour, and you think you will affront me like this! When we already have twelve measuring vessels, what is your vessel worth to us? I did not take your measuring vessel. Don't think you can profit at my expense.

ARTISAN: Oh, King! You must have taken it. If not, I don't know who did this. Give me my measuring vessel.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Man, artisan! I told you, I did not take your measuring vessel. You are demanding that I give it back. How can I give it back to you when I did not take it?

SONG:

*The lord is crying, is crying there
His body is wilting, my Lord
Because of the lying artisan's plan
Due to his plan, there
For how many days did the villain plot?
For how long did the artisan plan?*

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Man. Artisan! For how many days have you been planning this deceit? Villain!

ARTISAN: Oh, King! It if it like that, give me an oath that you did not take my measuring vessel!

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, artisan. Come, we will go to the Pilliar temple and take an oath.

ARTISAN: Oh, King! I don't want an oath taken at the Pilliar temple.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay. Tell me, then, how you want me to give you an oath.

ARTISAN: Lord! The Veḷḷāṅkulam tank, seven miles from here, is covered in one place. Go, descend at the southern end into its mouth, emerge, and climb the bank on the northern end and come back to the palace. I will go too.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, good. Come!

Without anyone in the palace knowing, the two went to the covered sluice gate at Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. At that time, about twelve feet of water was flowing through the tank. The artisan was thinking of drowning the lord in all that water and so he took the lord to the south (upper) end.

ARTISAN: Oh, King! If you did not steal my measuring vessel, then climb down into the tank!

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Ah ha! Oh, Lord of the crore of worlds in the universe! One who rescues those in trouble. Oh, orphan-saver! Parantāmā. The lying artisan has asked me for an oath. He will kill me in all this water. You must come and protect me, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram.

As Periyaṅṅacāmi began to think of Vishnu, Vishnu saw him praying. He was playing dice. Invisibly, he came to Periyaṅṅacāmi. He stood (there), invisible to the artisan, and spoke to him:

VISHNU: Poṅṅayyā! You must not be afraid! I will descend into the water first. You come behind me.

Then Vishnu entered the water.

SONG:

*Making a small path, a path
Vishnu is bringing him, my God
With the Lord's grace, his grace there
Periyaṅṅacāmi is coming towards the bank
Coming towards the bank, there.*

Periyaṅṅacāmi climbed up on the bank and then spoke:

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, artisan! The oath is finished, is it not? Shall we go home now?

ARTISAN: Oh, King! The oath is not yet finished. You came (through) very quickly in all that rushing water! That is no good. Therefore, you must go now to the northern end (bottom of the sluice) and swim upstream so that you emerge at the southern end.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Okay, good!

Then, thinking of Vishnu, Periyaṅṅacāmi climbed down into the water and began to swim in the opposite direction. During this time, while he was in the water, the artisan climbed on top of the Veḷḷāṅkulam sluice. There was a stone (image) of Pilliar nearby. He decided to lift up that statue and kill Periyaṅṅacāmi with it by throwing it at his head as he climbed back up the bank (after finishing the swim). So, the artisan went to the Pilliar statue and squatted down beside it.

ARTISAN: Man, oh, Pilliar!

SONG:

*For you, young coconuts will be offered
A thousand, a lakh¹ of young coconuts
Will be offered to Pilliar
A thousand, ten lakhs of them for you, Pilliar.*

ARTISAN: Oh, Pilliar! If you come to my shoulder, I will buy and offer to you a lakh of young coconuts!

Hearing of this wealth, hearing the artisan's words, Pilliar jumped up on his shoulder. Having set Pilliar on his shoulder, he proceeded southward in order to (position himself) to drop (the stone image) on Periyaṅṅacāmi's head.

Meanwhile, in the palace, Pārvati, who sways like a golden garland as she walks, was swinging in her fine swing, in a perfect golden swing. Pārvati, who walks as if she floated (on air), slept deeply in her swing. Previously her dreams were good ones. But now that elder brother was in danger, she had a bad dream. Pārvati jumped up from her swing and called out:

PĀRVATI: Hey, Kuppi! Call Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi quickly.

Kuppi went immediately to the dice playing place.

KUPPI: Oh, King! For some reason Pārvati has called you to come quickly.

Ciṅṅa got up angrily and all the twelve fetters fell from his body.

SONG:

*Stretching, he crossed the room, my Lord
The young, young prince, Caṅkar
Traversing, traversing, he quivered
The skillful Caṅkar, my Lord.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi now came running.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: What is it, oh, Taṅkā? Did you call? Why are you crying?

¹ A lakh equals one hundred thousand.

PĀRVATI: Brother! A deceitful artisan has lied to my elder brother and taken him to Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. Oh, brother! He has had him descend into twelve feet of water, the villain! Go there quickly, oh, brother.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: What is this, oh, Taṅkā? Where did the artisan come from? Why did elder brother listen to his words and go there with him?

Ciṅṅa's eyes became red. The man with the strength of twelve elephants became very angry. He ran to the gold workshop, took a sword, stuck it in his scabbard and set off at great speed.

SONG:

*In front, and behind, my Lord
He leaps like a tiger, my Lord
With a somersault in front, and one behind, my Lord
With thirty-two different postures.*

As Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi approached, the artisan had lifted the Pilliar on his shoulder and carried it southward. The lord, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, took his sword out of its scabbard:

SONG:

*The sword swings, my Lord
The sharp instrument flashes, see it flash, my Lord
Quickly, quickly, it moves
Lightning flashes, my Lord, see it flash
The artisan was cut with blows, my Lord
The Pilliar was cut with three blows, my Lord.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi cut up both the artisan and the Pilliar into small pieces. As he stood up (from this), Cāmpukā arrived from the palace. Seeing Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, he paid his respects.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. You come in anger. What is the reason?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! Yesterday evening, this artisan came, deceitfully lied to my elder brother, and brought him here. He told him to take an oath and climb down into the water. Can anyone survive alive in twelve feet of water? Vishnu came and protected him. Hey, Cāmpukā! This morning, when the artisan called him to take the oath, what would elder brother have lost by coming to tell me? Cāmpukā! Elder brother has no brains at all. If it were not for Vishnu, he would have drowned in the water by this time. Then this artisan thought of lifting the defective Pilliar and dropping it on elder brother's head to kill him. The chaste woman (Pārvati-Taṅkā) saw this, told me, and I came and cut up the artisan. If I had not come, he would have killed elder brother by now. The deceitful artisan! Hey, Cāmpukā! This is the way our elder brother is!

While Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Cāmpukā were talking, the Veṭṭuvās arrived from Vīrappūr with baskets on their heads.

CINṅANṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Who are these people who are bringing baskets on their heads?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! They are Veṭṭuvās from Vīrappūr.

CINṅANṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Run and cut them down, all of them.

Cāmpukā took his sword in his hand.

SONG:

*Running, running he cuts them, he cuts them up
The wicked Cāmpukā, Cāmpukā
Breaking their legs as they run
Chopping the Veṭṭuvās into pieces
The wicked Cāmpukā.*

Cāmpukā beat up the thousand Veṭṭuvās and drove them away, and then came to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and stood beside him. Then the two of them took Periyaṅṅacāmi and returned to the palace with him. When they arrived, Pārvati came running and hugged her elder brother.

PĀRVATI (crying): Elder brother! You listened to what the artisan told you and went to Veḷḷāṅkulam, where that artisan was planning to kill you, the villain! If your younger brother had not come, what would have become of you by now?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi comforted Pārvati, and then they all went to eat. After eating, the two lords chewed betel with areca nut and were happy.

SONG:

*The time of the just Poṅṅar, a sweet time
The elder brother ruled with authoritative commands
He ruled there
Poṅṅar ruled with a golden finger
A time of sweet rule
A single authority ruled the land
He ruled there.*

*It rained three times a month,
In the Land Where the Kāveri Flows,
Hailstones fell once a year.
See the faggot bundles, see the black-tipped paddy.*

In the Land Where the Kāveri Flows the two brothers ruled without swerving from justice. While the two brothers ruled, they had grown older. Now they had reached the age of sixteen. Their youthful years were ninety percent finished.

Episode 23 ✪

Previously, when Tāmarai was on her way to Benares to obtain a boon, she kicked a boar who was lying on the path, did she not? That boar did penance at the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple in Vīrappūr and obtained the boon of seven children. Six of the children were small, but the seventh grew to be sixty feet high and seventy feet long. He was called Kompaṅ. Kompaṅ, the strong, Kompaṅ the diviner of events. Born under the right stars, Kompaṅ the boar with neem leaves¹ and a flushed face, who had a ring of flowers on his tail, gold ornaments, and a garland of holy basil leaves in his navel. Kompaṅ, the one who has a star mark on his tongue. The boar, grown to the size of Karumalai² mountain, was now sixteen years old. His youth was ninety percent over. Kompaṅ had been raised by Vīrataṅkā the chaste, of Vīrappūr.

That day, Kompaṅ was resting and thinking. He was sleeping in a huge hole he had made in the ground to the west of the town.

KOMPAṅ (speaking to himself): I am now sixteen years old. It is time for me to go and see the farmers' country with my own eyes. Vīrataṅkā the chaste, I no longer need your food.

At that time, Vīrataṅkā's maid had just gone into the palace. She went up to Vīrataṅkā and spoke:

MAID: Princess! Today Kompaṅ the boar has not come for any his three meals of cooked rice. Usually he can be seen sleeping near the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple. Today, he is not there.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh my! Oh my! Where has Kompaṅ gone? Oh, maids? Did any of you people start an argument with Kompaṅ or something like that?

MAIDS: Lady! We did not say anything to him.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Okay. Come. We will go see.

So they all went to the Karukāḷiyammaṅ temple.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Hey, maids! Go look behind the temple and come back right away.

The maids went, looked all around and returned.

MAIDS: Lady! The boar is not to be seen anywhere.

"The boar is gone," thought the chaste lady. Vīrataṅkā, the fine tender vine, was confused.

¹ Neem leaves here probably refer to his "cool" as opposed to his "hot" qualities. Neem is the plant *Azadirachta indica*, commonly known as holy basil.

² Karumalai literally means "black mountain."

SONG:

*Kompaṇ, you have left me alone and gone
You have gone somewhere and hidden
Why can't I find your footprints?
Why did you go and take shelter elsewhere?*

The chaste Vīrataṅkā began to cry because she could not find Kompaṇ. So the maids took her to search for him. As they went west of the town, they saw a thicket that seemed to have a well-like depression inside it. Thinking "Maybe the boar is here," Vīrataṅkā the chaste went close to it and stood there, looking down.

SONG:

*Kompā, why did you change your place of rest?
Why did you change your shelter?*

At that moment, Kompaṇ heard the sound of Vīrataṅkā! the chaste crying. He thought to himself, "She found me gone. So the chaste Vīrataṅkā! is searching for me and has found me here." From his ditch, he let out a big sigh. The force of that sigh struck Vīrataṅkā! and her maids and threw them to the ground. As Vīrataṅkā! the chaste got up, she looked into the ditch and there she saw Kompaṇ asleep with his head to the west. Vīrataṅkā! the chaste then climbed down into the ditch and sat beside the boar.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, Kompā! What have you been thinking that has brought you here to sleep? Open your mouth and explain what has caused you to come here, man.

KOMPAṆ: Oh, princess, oh, Mother! Climb out. I will get up and speak.

She climbed out of the hole and Kompaṇ came out, too, and stood before her.

KOMPAṆ: Oh, princess! From now on I will not take food from here.

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Kompaṇ! Why will you not stay here? Have you gotten into an argument with someone?

KOMPAṆ: Oh, princess! I have not picked an argument with anyone. I want to see the agriculturalists' country with my own eyes. I must hasten to the country of the brave ones, oh, princess! I must destroy the ripe paddy, war against the sampa rice,¹ war against the upcoming paddy crop, and destroy the coconut grove, oh, Mother!

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, man! Kompā!

¹ A particular delicious kind of rice.

SONG:

*If the farmers see a boar
The farmers will sacrifice him
If the farmers see Kompā
The villains will stab and kill him.*

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, Kompā! Listen to what I say. You must not go to the country of the farmers. If the agriculturalists look into the eyes of a boar, they will spear and kill him! Man! Oh, Kompā! I raised you like sugarcane and you now will let yourself be a sacrifice for the farmers? You must not go, oh, Kompā!

KOMPAṆ: Oh, princess. I was born on account of a boon. I am now sixteen years old; my time is now ninety percent over. My mother, when the boon for me was received, said I would give my right tusk to Poṅṅar and my left tusk to Caṅkar. She made an agreement that half of their guts would fall out. Therefore, I must now go and see the farmers once. I cannot stay here longer. Send me off at once.

SONG:

*Give me your blessings, Mother
I shall go and return, Mother
Having scorched and blackened the land
Of the agriculturalists, I will come back
Having ruined the land of the agriculturalist
And killed the farmers, I will return.*

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, Kompā! You come and tell the goddess Karukāḷiyammaṇ and then go.

KOMPAṆ: Okay. Good.

Then they all went to the Karukāḷiyammaṇ temple. Having arrived at the temple of Karukāḷi, Kompaṇ circled it to the right and to the left¹ and came and stood in front of the goddess.²

¹ It is unusual to circle to the left. Here it is being done because Kompaṇ is hoping to execute a dangerous and fearsome plan.

² The distinguished French Indologist Madeleine Biardeau reports a complex ritual she observed over a wide area in coastal Andhra involving the goddess Vīrakkālī, where a mare is brought in front of her shrine and treated with honor (seemingly inducted as her representative), and then returned to its master. After this, a buffalo (most certainly a male) is brought forward and beheaded as a sacrificial offering and its parts quickly buried in front of the same goddess. In the story being told here, the wild boar Kompaṇ, asks for this forest goddess' blessing, and then seems to represent her anger as Kompaṇ (soon) destroys the farmers' crops that have been threatening her domain. Biardeau suggests that the Andhra version she observed references both the ancient Vedic horse sacrifice where a queen symbolically coupled with a dead stallion (in order to absorb its power and then pass it on to the king) and the Māriyamman festival, as practiced in the Kongu area, where a buffalo is sacrificed, and its head buried before the goddess, who absorbs its power and also seems to resurrect it, to become her servant. See Madeleine Biardeau, 2004, *Stories about Posts: Vedic*

KOMPAṆ: Lady Kāḷi! I was born on account of your boon. I am sixteen and my time is ninety percent over. Now I must go and see the agriculturalists' kingdom with my own eyes! Give me leave to go, oh, Mother!

As the boar was granted leave and left, Vīrataṅkāḷ the chaste looked at Kompaṇ.

VĪRATAṅKĀḷ: Your mother and your six siblings live in the Vīramalai mountains. Go see them and tell them and then go.

KOMPAṆ: Okay, princess! I will go there and then return.

Kompaṇ took leave of Vīrataṅkāḷ the chaste and set off for the Vīramalai mountains.

SONG:

*At every step he takes note of auspicious omens
For every stride he consults the almanac and the star groups
He, Kompaṇ, is coming, my Lord
Leaving Vīrappūr, my Lord
See Kompaṇ coming, my Lord
In between the Nākamalai mountains and the
Tōkamalai mountains, my God
Lay the Vīramalai mountains, my Lord
Searching for the Vīramalai hills
Kompaṇ went with great speed.*

As Kompaṇ approached the Vīramalai mountains, all the other animals that saw him became frightened and began to quiver. Kompaṇ's own mother became frightened and, seeing Kompaṇ coming, she took her six children and hid with them in a thicket. Kompaṇ felt sorry for his mother and approached that thicket.

KOMPAṆ: Mother! Why have you become frightened and hide yourself on seeing me? I am your own son! You left me with Vīrataṅkāḷ the chaste, told her to raise me for sixteen years, and went away, oh, Mother! Have you forgotten? Mother! The sixteen years of life you won for me have been expanded. Therefore, I am going to the country of the agriculturalists. I shall

return when I have killed the farmers and destroyed their crops. Give me leave to go, dear Mother!

MOTHER: Man, oh, son! If the farmers look a boar in the eye, they will spear and kill it! What can be done?

KOMPAṆ: Mother! Did you not bear me with the plan that I would kill the farmers and destroy their crops?

MOTHER: All right, oh, son! If it is so, you must go at night and destroy the crops, but return by dawn to the borders of Vīrappūr to sleep. In this way, within three days you must destroy their harvest, kill them and return to me!

KOMPAṆ: All right, Mother! I shall return by then.

Kompaṇ took leave of his mother and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving Vīramalai, my Lord
Kompaṇ came, my Lord
At every step he took note of auspicious omens
For every stride, he consulted the almanac and the star groups
Searching for the forest of Matukkarai
The boar came, my Lord.*

Kompaṇ arrived in the forest of Matukkarai. That forest was of the boundary line between Vīrappūr and the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Kompaṇ went to sleep in a thicket there, planning to go to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows when night fell. He woke up after dark. At ten o'clock at night, Kompaṇ got up and set off to destroy the farmers' crops.

SONG:

*Searching for the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord
Kompaṇ came, my Lord
Searching for the enormous paddy fields
The boar came, my Lord.*

Kompaṇ arrived and stood on the Veṅkalamata sluice of Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. In the moonlight, he turned northward and saw the farmers' enormous paddy field full of ripe heads of grain. Seeing this, Kompaṇ smiled a sly smile. "Say! With so much prosperity, those farmers must be full of pride." With anger, Kompaṇ descended into the harvest with the intent of destroying that enormous paddy field.

Variations around the Hindu Goddess. Trans. Alf Hiltebeitel et. al. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) as well as Beck, 1981 (see the bibliography on page 338).

At a later point in the present story Kompaṇ (now the buffalo's stand-in) is sacrificed by the twin heroes and his head is then likely taken to the shrine of a similar forest-dwelling goddess. Vīrataṅkāḷ, who is a devotee who serves as the priest for her goddess Karukāḷi (the black Kāḷi), can perhaps be likened here to a Vedic style queen of the forest. The story states that she has been feeding Kompaṇ a mound of rice each day (as one would feed a husband). He is a proud beast who calls himself Raja Kompaṇ. One can therefore imagine Kompaṇ as being Vīrataṅkāḷ's forest-dwelling king. Certainly, from other passages in this story Vīrataṅkāḷ appears to be in love with him!

SONG:

*Knocking with his tusks, my Lord
See him trample with his feet
So much paddy grain, my Lord
See Kompaṇ turning it to orange juice
Pulling it out by the roots, my Lord
See him throw it here and there
With his feet he tramples there
See him crumple up the paddy stalks.*

Kompaṇ uprooted all of the paddy grain growing in that enormous field. He planted the ripe heads of the grain in the earth, leaving the roots in the air above. His destruction was horrific. Then Kompaṇ returned and stood on Veṅkalamata sluice. Facing the door of the biggest canal there, he began to sing:

SONG:

*See Kompaṇ's anger as he comes
The furious Kompaṇ
His eyes, as red as if
Red oleander blossoms were blooming inside them.*

A great anger came over Kompaṇ. Then he tapped the Veṅkala sluice gate with his tusk. That gate opened and the water rushed out. A great flood flowed onto the enormous paddy field and stood there like a vast, flat ocean. Seeing the heads of the grain stalks above the water, the paddy tops above the sea, Kompaṇ became happy. Thinking, "Tomorrow night I must destroy Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank," he set off for Matukkarai forest to sleep.

The next day, a man named Tēvēntira Kuṭumpaṇ from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, who was living as an ascetic, got up very early in the morning. He put his spade on his shoulder and set out for the sluice channel. He walked through the enormous paddy field, wondering if the gate of the irrigation sluice had broken.

SONG:

*With the running steps, my Lord
The man is coming with great speed
Searching for the enormous paddy field
Kuṭumpaṇ is coming now
Kuṭumpaṇ came to the Veṅkala sluice
At Veṅkala tank, and stood there.*

Kuṭumpaṇ came stood at the Veṅkala sluice, and as he looked to the north and saw water standing like a sea over the thousand fields, Kuṭumpaṇ cried out, "Oh my!" and he then fell down in a faint.

SONG:

*To a land without fear to that land, now
Today ruin, ruin has come to it, come to it today
To a land without disgrace to that land now
Disgrace has come, my Lord, now it has been steeped,
Steeped in disgrace.*

As he cried, Kuṭumpaṇ got up again. When he went to look at all four sides of the thousand fields, he saw the paddy heads above the water everywhere. Seeing the tops above the sea, Kuṭumpaṇ set off towards home and lay down with sadness. When evening arrived, Kompaṇ woke up in the Matukkarai forest and before ten o'clock he set off for Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank.

SONG:

*Leaving the forest of Matukkarai, my Lord
Kompaṇ is coming, my Lord
Searching for Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank, my Lord
The boar is coming, my Lord.*

Kompaṇ left Matukkarai forest and came and stood at Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank. As he looked around, he saw the mature sugarcane standing as tall as bamboo. Kompaṇ, seeing the sugarcane fields, smiled a little smile. "Say! When the farmer's sugarcane has grown so well, will they be without pride?" he thought to himself. Then he descended into the sugarcane field with anger and began to destroy it.

SONG:

*He struck with his tusks, my Lord
He trampled with his feet, my Lord
So much sugarcane, my Lord
See how Kompaṇ has turned it into orange juice, my Lord
He pulled it out by the roots, my Lord
He threw it here and there, my Lord
He trampled with his feet there, my Lord
See how all he saw was torn into bits, my Lord.*

Kompaṇ tore apart the entire sugarcane field. He made it into a mire and trampled it, having opened the big door on the Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank sluice. The water rushed out and flooded the sugarcane field and stood there like vast, flat sea. Then, Kompaṇ went and stood at the head of the tank. "Will anyone come today? I shall wait and see," he thought and he stood there for two nāḷikai. At that time, Tēvēntira Kuṭumpaṇ, the ascetic gardener, thought he would go and see if the standing water on the enormous paddy field had dried up. Kuṭumpaṇ put his spade on his shoulder and as he approached Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank the boar saw him coming. He began to snarl.

KOMPAṆ: Who's there? A man is coming.

Hearing that noise Kuṭumpaṇ became frightened.

KUṬUMPAṆ: Oh my! What a calamity has befallen our land!

Kuṭumpaṇ fell down next to Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank in a faint. Frightened, he lay there without making a sound.

Kompaṇ, after waiting a short while, thought, "What has happened? A man came, but now he is nowhere to be seen. Okay. Tomorrow I must come and destroy the farmer's flower garden." Kompaṇ then set out for Matukkarai forest and went to sleep there.

A little while after Kompaṇ had left, Kuṭumpaṇ got up and looked at the sugarcane. The water stood like a sea in the fields. Only the leaves of the sugarcane stood above the water. Seeing all that, Kuṭumpaṇ turned around and ran towards the brothers' palace. When he had reached the palace, he stood by the front door and cried. At that moment, some palace maids came and they saw Kuṭumpaṇ there.

MAIDS: Oh, man! Are you crying?

KUṬUMPAṆ: Ladies! Go quickly and tell the king to come!

Hearing this, the maids went immediately to the king's gaming room.

MAIDS: Oh, younger King! Tēvēntira Kuṭumpaṇ is standing at the door and crying! For whatever reason, he is asking that you come quickly.

Hearing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi said, "Ah ha!" Rising quickly, the twelve fetters fell off suddenly.

SONG:

*Quickly, quickly, he leaps up, my Lord
The good junior, the young prince
Jumping, he traversed, traversed, he,
Caṅkar of great strength, my Lord.*

Seeing the speed of Ciṅṅanna's approach, Kuṭumpaṇ was frightened and fell at his feet, crying.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Kuṭumpaṇ! Why are you crying? What is the news. Speak up!

KUṬUMPAṆ: Oh, King. Your land, once without troubles, is beset with problems today. Your land, once without disgrace, has fallen into disrepute today. Oh, King. I don't know what it is that came last night and destroyed our enormous paddy field and our Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank. The crops were uprooted and only the heads are above the mud. The gates of both the Veṅkala tank sluice and the Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank sluice were opened and the water is standing

like a vast, flat sea. The tops of the grain stalks stand above the water. The paddy heads are above the sea.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, having heard what Kuṭumpaṇ said, stood there for three nāḷḷikai without breathing,¹ just like a tree stump. Afterwards his consciousness returned.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Kuṭumpaṇ! Since the mountains are nearby could some elephants have come and torn things up?

KUṬUMPAṆ: If elephants had come and destroyed things, they would have eaten the paddy and the sugarcane. And furthermore, why would they have opened the sluice gates, oh, King?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Okay. In any case, I shall go and see.

He called Cāmpukā and told him to bring Nīlā.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! What is Nīlā for? Where must you go?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Cāmpukā. Last night some animal or other came and destroyed our enormous paddy field and also the sugarcane at Vaṅṭūrāṅkuḷa tank. The sluice gates were opened wide. Kuṭumpaṇ came crying about it. We shall go see it and come back.

The two lords mounted Nīlā. The two lords set off telling Cāmpukā and Kuṭumpaṇ to follow behind them.

SONG:

*He mounted the blue horse, my Lord
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord
With the horse he crossed the land
He snapped the war whip, my Lord
Searching for the enormous paddy field
See the magical horse fly.*

The two lords came and stood above Veṅkala tank. Looking down at the enormous paddy fields and seeing the standing water, it seemed to them as if the sky had fallen. The hearts of the two lords beat fast.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Our land, which was once without problems, is beset with problems today. What can we do now?

The heart of the lord became faint and he lost his energy. Then he spoke up:

¹ Three twenty-four-minute periods. The likely implication is that Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi has the powers of an ascetic, and thus is able to hold his breath for a very long time.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! I don't know what animal could have come and done this. You take the path to the areca nut garden, see if you can see any animal tracks, and come back.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Good!

Cāmpukā took the path along the channel, around the garden bed. As he looked, he saw the tracks of the boar. These look like the tracks of a large stone mortar. Seeing that, he broke off a stick, and measured the depth of one pint with it. Then he returned to the place where the lord was waiting.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, younger King! I took the path along the channel, around the garden bed and as I looked, I saw tracks made by the mortars that we pound our grains in. It seems that last night all the mortars of this revenue area got together and grazed over the crops, oh, King.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: What's that, Paraiyā That is nonsense. Hey! Would mouthless mortars come and take an interest in this?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Come. Let us go to the palace and measure our mortars and see. If this stick is the correct length, then believe what I have said.

They all set out and arrived at the palace. The two lords dismounted their horses.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Bring the measurement of the mortar's track. Let us see.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! I am bringing it.

He brought the measuring stick and examined the height of a mortar with it. As he did this, he found the stick to be the correct length.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Have you seen this? You said that I had lied? Hasn't what I said turned out to be correct?

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā! I do doubt what you say, I cannot believe that a mortar would go and eat the crops.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, younger King! Okay. Don't believe what I have said. Now I shall break apart a wooden mortar from the palace. I'll show you. Watch!

Then Cāmpukā took an axe and broke open a mortar. At that time, a half a measure of paddy was found to be inside the mortar. The reason? The maids of the palace were accustomed to husking paddy in that mortar. Having pounded and pounded, that mortar had developed a large crack in the bottom. Paddy had gotten stuck in that crack. The maids had not scooped it out. As soon as Cāmpukā broke open the mortar the half measure of paddy fell out from the crack.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Have you seen that? If this one mortar ate half a measure of paddy how much paddy will all the mortars of all the villages in the revenue unit have eaten?

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Okay. It must be that. What shall we do about this, Cāmpukā?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! I will go and tell all the thousand villagers to bring their mortars here. I will bring the blacksmiths, have them peel off the mortar's bark and put chains on them. I will stand guard. We will see if they manage to go and destroy the crops tonight.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Okay, good, Cāmpukā! Do that and we will see what happens today.

CĀMPUKĀ: Good!

Cāmpukā took leave of the lord. He put his watchman's stick on his shoulder and set off to the many villages.

SONG:

*With big running steps, my Lord
The man is coming with great speed, my Lord
Like a flying bee with great speed, with great speed, my Lord
Cāmpukā is coming, my Lord.*

Cāmpukā went to the thousand villages and told the residents that all mortars of all houses be put in a cart and brought to the Pilliar temple in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Then he went to the Land of Prosperity. When Cāmpukā reached the Land of Prosperity, he fetched the thousand blacksmiths and returned with them to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. The blacksmiths reached the palace, saw the king, and paid him their respects.

BLACKSMITHS: Lord. What work do you want us to do?

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Men, oh, blacksmiths! All of the mortars from our thousand revenue villages got together at night, according to Cāmpukā, and ate the grain in the enormous paddy field. Therefore, I have ordered all the village mortars brought to our Pilliar temple. We will drill a hole for a wooden plug in each mortar, tie them down with a chain and then see.

BLACKSMITHS: Lord. Good.

Before the blacksmiths arrived at the Pilliar shrine, the mortars of the thousand revenue villages had all been brought there and left at the temple. The stone-masons immediately drilled holes in the mortars, drove in wooden plugs and tied the mortars together with an iron chain. Then they returned to the palace and took leave of the king. The blacksmiths returned to the Land of Prosperity. When night came, Cāmpukā took his stick and stood guard over the mortars at

the Pilliar temple. While Cāmpukā stood guard there in the Matukkarai forest, Kompaṇ̄ awoke at about ten o'clock. He thought about destroying the farmer's flower garden and soon set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the forest of Matukkarai, of Matukkarai
See him coming, the fierce Kompaṇ̄
For every step he takes note of auspicious omens
At every stride he consults an almanac.*

Noting the auspicious omens at each step and consulting the almanac at every stride, Kompaṇ̄ arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Once there he stood in front of the farmer kings' flower garden, just looking at it. In that garden the domestic jasmine, the climbing jasmine, and the roses had all flowered and were looking lovely. The garden had an inner area with a locked golden gate. Kompaṇ̄ stood, looked at all this, and smiled a little smile. Then he became angry and with his tusk he gave a quick blow to that gate. The gate broke into pieces. Kompaṇ̄ entered the garden and started destroying the many flowering plants and trees growing there.

SONG:

*See the striking with tusks, my Lord
And the mashing with feet, my Lord
So much wealth, my Lord
See Kompaṇ̄ destroying it
See Kompaṇ̄ pulling plants up by the roots, my Lord
And throwing them here and there.*

In one nāḷḷikai, Kompaṇ̄ destroyed many flowering plants and trees, and ruined much more. He then went to the southern wall, but left one coconut palm and one flowering plant there undamaged. Then Kompaṇ̄ thought, "I have watched for two days. No one has come to this inner garden. Somehow, today, the farmers must come to know of my visits." Then Kompaṇ̄ went and lay down at the extreme southern edge of that garden, near the one standing flower bush that was left. That morning, before daybreak, at the time that the cocks always crowed, a man known as a Cempulinka Paṇṭāram¹ picked up a flower basket and went to pick flowers for the pūjā to Pārvati. He went to the flower garden. When he arrived and saw all the wealth of the flower garden in ruins, the Paṇṭāram fell to the ground in a faint.

SONG:

*The abundant beauty, my Lord the beauty there
The Paṇṭāram slipped along the ground
Rolling, rolling, he wept there
The graceful beauty, my Lord the beauty there
The Paṇṭāram felt as if gnawed by worms
Rolling, rolling, he wept there.*

Having fallen on the ground, weeping, Cempulinka thought, "Let me go into the garden and look around." He got up, went into the garden, and as he looked around, he saw one flower bush standing at the far southern edge. The Paṇṭāram saw Kompaṇ̄ sleeping there, looking very, very black. He thought, there must be a large rock outcropping there. He climbed on the rock, stood on the middle of Kompaṇ̄'s back, and began to pick flowers. Then Kompaṇ̄ opened his eyes to look, thinking "something like an ant" was touching his body. He realized that the Paṇṭāram had climbed up on him to pick flowers.

KOMPAṆ̄: Who's that who has climbed on my back to pick flowers?

PAṆṬĀRAM: Oh my!

The Paṇṭāram was frightened. He dropped his flower basket and climbed quickly up the nearby coconut palm. He went and sat near the new (highest) buds. Then he looked down at the boar and asked, "Hey, so it's you who has destroyed the enormous paddy field and the flower garden of our king?"

KOMPAṆ̄: Hey, Paṇṭāram! You! Come down from there! I will speak to you afterwards.

PAṆṬĀRAM: Hey, you habitual excrement eater, you pig! Having destroyed so many crops, and now having destroyed the flower garden, are you going to overpower me too? I cannot climb down. You do whatever you want.

Hearing what the Paṇṭāram said, Kompaṇ̄ became angry and got up, stood, and began striking the coconut palm with his tusks. The coconut palm broke into two pieces and fell into the neighbouring rice field. Kompaṇ̄ ran there and held down the Paṇṭāram's hair bun with his foot.

KOMPAṆ̄: Hey, Paṇṭāram! What did you say to me from the top of the coconut palm?

PAṆṬĀRAM: Oh my! Lord! You are King Kompaṇ̄! I did not recognize you! Not knowing you, I said any old thing. Please forgive me.

KOMPAṆ̄: Hey, Paṇṭāram! Did I tell you to climb down out of the coconut palm so that I could kill you? I told you to come so that I could send you to the farmers with a message. While you were on top of the tree, you spoke disrespectfully. That is why I broke the tree and brought you down. Okay. Tie your

¹ Literally a man of the Red Lingam subcaste of Paṇṭārams, a non-Brahmin community of temple priests.

lower cloth up as a loin covering. Go into the irrigation ditch, roll in the mud, get up and come to me.

The Paṅṭāram, immediately did as Kompaṇ had ordered. He tied a loin covering with his lower cloth, rolled in the mud, got up and came and stood before Kompaṇ.

KOMPAṆ: Hey, Paṅṭāram! Lean over well. I want to write a message to your king.

Having told the Paṅṭāram to bend over he began to write on his back with his tusk. He wrote a letter:

LETTER: Hey, farmers! You were born of a boon. I, too, was born of a boon. I have now complete sixteen years of life. Therefore, it was I who destroyed your enormous paddy field. Today it was I who destroyed the flower garden. If you are true men, take note! Three days from now I will be in the Vīramalai mountains. Within these three days, you must come to fight with me. If you don't come, I will come here on the third day, give my right tusk to Poṅṅar and my left tusk to Caṅkar and lift out your two left guts. I will make myself a garland of them, and destroy your country, and your palace. I will take your younger sister Pārvati to Vīrappūr and have her grind turmeric for the chaste one. Therefore, you must come to fight with me within three days. This is my last warning to you.

Sincerely, King Kompaṇ

Kompaṇ had now finished writing on the Paṅṭāram's back. Then he took two coconut bunches and tied them to the Paṅṭāram's ears.

KOMPAṆ: Hey, Paṅṭāram! Go quickly to your king and show him what I have written.

Speaking like this, Kompaṇ sent the Paṅṭāram off.

Cempulinka Paṅṭāram thought to himself, "It is enough that I have escaped." He then turned towards the palace and began to run.

SONG:

*With big running steps, big steps
The Paṅṭāram is coming with great speed
He comes like a flying bee with great speed, with great speed
The Paṅṭāram is coming to the palace.*

The Paṅṭāram arrived at the palace and stood at the door of the jewelled hall, crying and calling the maids.

PAṆṬĀRAM: Tell the king to come.

The maids went immediately to the gaming room and spoke with Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi:

MAIDS: Our lord is calling you for some reason.

Hearing what the maids said, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi cried, "Ah ha!" He got up in anger the twelve fetters suddenly broke off.

SONG:

*Quickly he crosses the space, my Lord
The good young prince, my Lord
He crosses, crosses the space in jumps
The brave one, my Lord.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi ran quickly to the door of the jewelled hall.

CINṆAṅṅACĀMI: What is it, Paṅṭāram? Why are you crying? Why is your body covered in mud? What is the news?

PAṆṬĀRAM: Oh, King! A time of ruin has come to our kingdom. Look at the work of that excrement-eating boar.

The Paṅṭāram turned to show him his back. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi saw the letter and read the boar's writing. Shocked, he just stood there like that for three nāḷḷikai without taking a breath. Then he looked at Periyaṅṅacāmi.

PAṆṬĀRAM: Oh, elder brother! We no longer have merit in this land. A boar that lives by eating excrement, look what he was written.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man, Ciṅṅayyā! You must not become angry on account of this. Need we lose our lives on account of this boar? This is not called for, Lord! Be calm.

Hearing the two make noise, Pārvati came running to her elder brothers.

PĀRVATI: Elder brothers! What is happening? Have you been speaking loudly to one another?

CINṆAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! A boar has destroyed our enormous paddy field and our flower garden and now see the challenge he has written! He will go to Vīramalai in three days. Before that we must go to fight him. If we don't go, after three days the boar will come here and destroy our country and our palace. See! He has written he will kill us two, kidnap you and take you to Vīrataṅkā the chaste. He will make you grind turmeric for her!

Having read that, Pārvati responded:

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! Having seen what that excrement-eating boar has written, I think we must not go to fight it.

1 This would be a very demeaning task for a queen.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, oh, Taṅkā! When the boar has written us a threat everyone will speak badly of us if we decide not to go out of fear. Furthermore, if we don't go to fight him within three days, the boar has written that he will come here, kill us and carry you off. Therefore, we must kill that boar! If we don't then we must die! For both courses of action, only one end can be seen, oh, Taṅkā!

SONG:

An army of elephants, an army of elephants

A Yāḷi¹ has come and cornered them, cornered them, oh, Taṅkā

An army of horses, an army of horses

A slender tiger has come and cornered them, cornered them, oh, Taṅkā.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! We must fight the boar; we must go for a momentous fight. The whole community must go to fight the boar!

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! I am younger than you. Do not be angry at what I say. Oh, brothers! Don't feed the stomach with vain words from the mouth.

SONG:

If you go to the boar, oh, brothers

There will be a sacrifice

If you go to Kompaṇ

He will turn into the god of death.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! I did not say that I did not want you to go to fight. But I have one doubt. That is, if you go to the Vīramalai forest to fight the boar, and win, the golden weapon and the saddle should return. Our silver weapon should return home. Oh, brothers, I want to clear my doubts now!

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Why, oh, Taṅkā? How can you test for your doubt?

PĀRVATI: Elder brother! We all three of us will bathe. Then we will take a handful of black peppercorns and a handful of mustard seeds, go to the Pilliar temple, and spread out a white cloth there. Periyaṇṇaṇ stood on the right side, facing south, and you will stand on the south side facing north.¹ I will go between you, kneel and throw the black peppercorns and the mustard seeds as high as a palmyra palm tree. Then you two must rush towards them. Before the black peppercorns and mustard seeds come down to earth, you must split them so they fall in two and three pieces. If you do as I have said, our silver weapon and saddle will return. The silver weapon will return to our home. Elder brother, this is so I may know your skill and see your bravery.

¹ A mythological animal with the head of a lion and enormous protruding eyes.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, oh, Taṅkā! We shall do that.

The three of them bathed, took black peppercorns and mustard seeds, and went to the Pilliar temple. In front of the Pilliar temple, they spread out a white cloth. As Pārvati had said, Periyaṇṇaṇ stood on the right facing south and Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi to the south facing north.¹ Both held their swords in hand. Then Pārvati went between them. Bending one leg and stretching out the other, she sat facing north. She took one handful of black pepper and one handful of mustard, and thinking of gods' council chamber, and of Vishnu, she threw these upwards. The black peppercorns and the mustard seeds rose to the height of the two palmyra palms. Then, as if they were strung together, they came down in a line. Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi, seeing this:

SONG:

In front and in back, my Lord

In thirty-two positions, my Lord

The sword, the sword swung there

Like lightning, see it flash, my Lord.

Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi fell on them and threw his sword upwards. The knife advanced, cut both the black peppercorns and the mustard seeds into three pieces, and then returned to his hand. The black peppercorns and mustard seeds fell in pieces onto the white cloth. Pārvati came running and put them into her winnowing fan. While winnowing, she looked at them and noticed that one black pepper and one mustard seed were still whole. Seeing this, Pārvati thought, "No matter how many days it takes, the Veṭṭuvās will destroy my brothers. However, if I say this to my brothers now, they will lose half their elephant's strength." While she was thinking, Ciṅṇa asked:

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What is it, oh, Taṅkā? Were the black peppercorns and mustard seeds cut into three parts or not?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! Even with so many black peppercorns and mustard seeds, not one has escaped being split into three pieces. Oh, elder brother. I want to see one more thing. That is, if you go to the Vīramalai forest and see the boar, and if you raise and swing your sword there, I want to see what kind of battle you will fight.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: All right, good, oh, Taṅkā! We shall do that.

Hearing this, Pārvati stood Ciṅṇaṇṇacāmi on the right, facing south, and Periyaṇṇacāmi on the south, facing north. Pārvati stood in the middle and told them to whirl their swords. Immediately the two lords raised up their swords.

¹ The temple evidently faces east. The brothers are to stand on its south side with the shrine immediately to their left.

SONG:

*In front and in back, my Lord
In thirty-two positions, my Lord.*

At that moment, Vishnu performed a deceptive trick, that is, he made Periyaṅṅacāmi look like a Veṭṭuvā. But he made him look like a Veṭṭuvā only in Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's eyes.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi then had a special vision and thought to himself: "Ah ha! Has a Veṭṭuvā come to our country to fight?"

Seeing that, he became angry.

SONG:

*Swing a sword, a fine sword
Like lightning, see it flash, my Lord
Quickly, quickly it swings
Lightning is there, see it flash, my Lord.*

Pārvati saw the fast movement as Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi threw a sword at Periyaṅṅacāmi's changed from. She thought, "it seems as if it will strike Periyaṅṅaṅ." So she ran, caught the knife in her hand and stopped its flight.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi! If I hadn't been here, you would have killed Periyaṅṅaṅ by now.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! A little while ago, while looking at elder brother's face, I saw it as the face of a Veṭṭuvā. That is why I threw the sword at Periyaṅṅaṅ, oh, Taṅkā!

PĀRVATI: All right, elder brother! Come. Let's go to the palace.

The three of them soon arrived at the palace and ate. Then Pārvati went to sleep in her lovely swing. Meanwhile, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi ate, chewed betel leaf with areca nut, and came outside. He called Cāmpukā. Cāmpukaṅ came and paid his respects to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Within five nāḷḷikais of this Friday, we must go to fight the boar. We must go to a great battle! The entire community must go to war against the boar. Go immediately and announce this to the thousand revenue villages and the fifty lands with a parai drum.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. Good! But our great drum is at the bottom of Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. Long ago, when there was a great deal of water in Veḷḷāṅkulam tank, and it was overflowing, my grandfather used the great drum to dam it up. It sank to the bottom¹ of the tank. Now, in order to make an announcement with it, we must perform a pūjā first to raise it up, oh, King.

¹ Alternately, to the internal regions below.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: All right, good, oh, Cāmpukā! What things will be needed for the pūjā? Speak up quickly?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, kings!

SONG:

*We need fine lentils, mixed with
Five hundred measures¹ of husked, raw rice, oh, King
Also, good tuvarai, the tuvarai pulse, mixed with ninety measures of
husked, raw paddy
A lakh of small coconuts of splitting are needed, oh, King
Ten lakhs of good small coconuts are needed for the sacrifice, oh, King
Four hundred nata plantains, and three hundred monta plantains
Like the trunks of elephants, five hundred sugarcane stalks, oh, King
Like the heads of horses, a crore, a lakh of sugarcane stalks.*

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! In addition, a thousand black goats, a thousand black cocks, a thousand black pigs, and a thousand buffalo calves are needed. Only if we sacrifice all these can we lift out the great drum.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Cāmpukā! Good. Get these things and take them quickly, perform the pūjā and lift out the drum.

CĀMPUKĀ: Hey, Kuppi! Give Cāmpukā the things he wants quickly.

Cāmpukā took the necessary things, tied them in a bundle, put them on his head and went home. Upon arrival he spoke to his mother:

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, Mother! Today we must perform a pūjā for the great drum and lift it out! Bathe quickly, pound some raw husked paddy into flour and come to the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. I will go on ahead.

Having said this, Cāmpukā took the things, and drove the buffalo calves, the male goats, the black cocks and the pigs before him. Leading two young buffalo heifers, he set off for Veḷḷāṅkulam tank.

SONG:

*With big running steps, big steps
Cāmpukā is coming with great speed
With the speed of a rocket he comes, he comes quickly
Cāmpukaṅ is approaching, my Lord.*

Cāmpukaṅ arrived at Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and set down all the things. With the sugarcane stalks, he built a large canopy. Then he sat down facing north, with one leg bent and the other leg extended, and thought of Vishnu:

¹ One measure (a kalam) equals twelve marcals.

CĀMPUKĀ: If it is true that I was born of a boon, then a thousand of Shiva's fighters must descend from the gods' council chamber, oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam!

As Cāmpukā thought of Vishnu, Vishnu saw what Cāmpukā wanted and immediately went to the gods' council chamber. He asked Shiva to send down to earth a thousand of his warriors. A thousand warriors arrived at the Veḷḷāṅkulam tank in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, and seeing Cāmpukā there, they paid him their respects.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, fighters! You have come? Very well! Okay. Now! Leaving aside these two young buffalo heifers, take all the rest of the pigs, cocks, goats and buffaloes, behead them and cook them up quickly.

At that moment, Cāmpukā's mother arrived from the house.

CĀMPUKĀ: Mother! Make some rice flour lamps and perform the poṅkaḷ¹ ceremony. I will go to the palace and return.

Cāmpukā set off and soon arrived at the palace. Seeing Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, he said:

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Get the great spear used to spear boars and give it to me. We must lift the great drum out with that alone.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi brought the great spear immediately. Cāmpukā took the spear and returned to Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. He descended into the water there, bathed and washed the great spear with care. Then he brought the great spear out and set it inside the sugarcane canopy, carefully placing it there.

CĀMPUKĀ: Mother! Is the poṅkaḷ ritual finished?

MOTHER: Oh, son. The poṅkaḷ is finished.

CĀMPUKĀ: Okay, good.

Cāmpukā set out three heaps of cooked rice inside the sugarcane canopy. Then he set the rice flour lamps in front of these and performed the first pūjā. Next, he laid out a thousand leaves, and divided up the rice and the cooked meat. The set those foods on the leaves. Finishing this, he thought of Vishnu:

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, Vishnu. Oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam! Before I finish this pūjā, Shiva's thousand demons who guard the great drum in the underworld must come and stand before me with their arms folded.

Having said this, Cāmpukā began the pūjā. At that moment, a thousand demons rose up from the water and stood before Cāmpukā with their arms folded. Seeing this, Cāmpukā ran and brought forward the two young buffalo heifers. He cut off their heads, caught the blood, and mixed some cooked rice

with it. Then he sprinkled water on the thousand servings of food and began the pūjā for these demons. When the pūjā was finished, he took the blood and rice mixture and threw it around the edges of Veḷḷāṅkulam tank. Then the thousand demons from the underworld ran and seized the blood and rice. Cāmpukā looked at these demons that had come from the gods' council chamber and said:

CĀMPUKĀ: Hey, giants! Each of you take one serving of food and return to the gods' council chamber.

Immediately the thousand giants took one serving apiece and went to the gods' council chamber. Then Cāmpukā went to his mother and said, "Oh, mother! Take the remaining poṅkaḷ rice and the other things laid out here and go home, leaving me my share."

Immediately Cāmpukā's mother took the poṅkaḷ rice and the other things and left for home. Then Cāmpukā sat down facing north. He thought of the gods' council chamber and of Vishnu. Next, he took one serving of food, made three round balls from it, ate these, and washed his hands and feet. Then he stripped the skin off the two young buffalo heifers and joined the two hides together. He took the great boar spear, stood facing north and thought of Vishnu. He stuck the spear into the earth. It trembled. The Land Where the Kāveri Flows shook, while the spear descended to the world below. When it arrived, it struck the great drum. Making the sound "tumi," that drum came up to the surface.

Cāmpukā then took the drum, put it in water, and rubbed sand on it to clean it. After having cleaned and polished the drum well, he carried it and set it on a small hillock. There he tied the stretched heifer skin on it. Thinking that he needed a stick to beat the drum with, Cāmpukā then went to the top of Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and cut down a short palmyra palm tree. He cut that tree in two and stood facing north, near the drum. Then, Cāmpukā thought of Vishnu, and began beating the drum. A great sound was heard, such that:

SONG:

*The army of chariots, elephants, cavalry and infantry
The guardians of the eight directions
The eight universes, the fourteen worlds
All of them were stirred up and shook to their very centres¹.*

At that time, in the gods' world, Shiva and the other devas spoke with one another:

THE GODS: On earth, it seems that Poṅṅar and Caṅkar are going to war against the boar. That is why Cāmpukā is beating his drum and the heavens are shaking.

¹ An important ritual in which rice is boiled in a mixture of water and milk.

¹ Literally, "in their wombs."

Then Cāmpukā spoke as he stood at the top of Veḷḷāṅkulam tank and beat the drum:

CĀMPUKĀ: The following is to be announced to the thousand revenue villages and the fifty-six countries. This coming Friday, the two kings of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows are going to the Vīramalai forest to hunt. They are going to a great war. The community is going to war against Kompaṅ. Therefore, one dog from each sheep fold and one man from each house must come without fail, with cooked, packaged rice and a large stick. The men should gather in the cuckoo forest of heron valley. These are the orders of the King of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

As Cāmpukā drummed and spoke, these sounds were heard in all of the thousand revenue villages and by the kings of all fifty-six countries. Then Cāmpukā set off and went to the palace. Seeing the king, he said:

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! I have beat the drum and made the announcement to the thousand revenue villages and the fifty-six countries.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā! Good.

And the two lords went and ate. The Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi chewed betel leaf with areca nut, came outside and called Cāmpukā. "Brush the horses well and clean them bring them to the door of the jewelled hall and tie them."

On Friday morning, early, before five o'clock, Pārvati got up and ran to her elder brother.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother. Today I myself will cook for you, and with my own hand I will serve you. I know that if you go, you will not be able to return.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What is that, oh, Taṅkā? Once we have killed the boar we will return immediately.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! I have come to know that you will not return. Therefore, today I myself will cook rice for you and serve you.

Pārvati immediately cooked rice and served her two elder brothers. After the two had eaten, Pārvati said:

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! I wanted to see that you two had eaten. Now I want to see you two sitting handsomely in a palanquin and carried through the town.

Pārvati called the maids and told them to decorate the palace palanquin and bring it to her. She put her two elder brothers in that palanquin. The entourage first circled the palace. Then it paraded through the town.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother:

SONG:

*Teeth, fine teeth all in a row
On life's path, oh, elder brother
Shall I see you, shall I see you again?
Those wise words, oh, elder brother
Shall I hear them, shall I hear them again?
Your beautiful, golden face
Alone, my eldest brother
Shall I see it alone, shall I see it again?
Oh, a face like gold, the beautiful face of my elder brother
Here on the earth
Shall I see it, shall I see it again?*

Episode 24 ✪

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! If you two die in the Vīramalai forest, on foreign territory, who will come and tell me? Leave me five tell-tale signs and go. Watching those I shall come to know, oh, elder brothers.

The chaste one cried, wilted, and wasted away there.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What is this, oh, Taṅkā? You cry like this? What tell-tale signs do you want? Speak up.

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*A mango as one sign
A jasmine flower as one sign
A coconut as one sign
An oil lamp as one sign
And a vessel of water and ground sandal.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! After having placed all of these on a plate, you should take leave.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: What is this, oh, Taṅkā? What will you know from these signs?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! If you die in the Vīramalai forest:

SONG:

*The beauty will leave the mango
The jasmine flower will wilt
The coconut will split open
The oil lamp will go out
And the water level in the pot will fall
The ground sandal will get dried.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! If you die the tell-tale signs will change in these ways.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: All right, oh, Taṅkā. We shall do that.

Having set out the above signs, the two lords went to the palace dressing room and fastened their waist girdles tightly. Then they went to the gold workshop, took their swords, put them in their scabbards, and came out with shining faces.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Have the standing men of the thousand revenue villages arrived yet?

Cāmpukā: Oh, King! Without fail, one man from every house and one dog from every sheep fold in the thousand revenue villages has come.

SONG:

*There are a crore of Muslims
A crore of wrestlers
A crore of Marāṭṭa fighters
A crore of silk weavers
And a crore of resident men
That makes five crores of fighters,
Plus a dog from each sheep fold
And a man from each home
We have come, without fail
With their packaged, cooked rice and large sticks
The army in cuckoo forest is ready
The army is ready in heron valley.*

Hearing Cāmpukā say this, Cinṇanṇacāmi became happy. Taking his elder brother, the two of them went to Pārvati.

“Oh, lady, Taṅkā! We shall go and return. Give us your blessings, oh, woman. Give us a magical verse and bless us with your hands, oh, woman!” said the two lords.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brothers! You put your swords in your waist scabbards and then you come asking me for my magical blessings! How can I give them to you? Oh, elder brothers! If you were going to go and return you would have called me previously and have asked me to lift the swords and hand them over to you. Oh, elder brothers! Having gone to the Vīramalai forest, you will not return. I will not see you again.

Pārvati took hold of her elder brothers’ swords and cried.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! You must not cry, woman.

Cinṇa took her hand, touched her jewel-like face, hugged her and covered cheeks her with affectionate kisses.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! This is my last kiss. I shall not see you again!

CINṆANṆACĀMI: What is that, oh, Taṅkā! You speak like this? We shall return very soon.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! You will be unable to return. I know that. All right, goodbye!

CINṆANṆACĀMI: All right, oh, Taṅkā! We shall go and return! Hey, Kuppi! Look after Pārvati well.

Having said this, the two lords left the palace courtyard.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, Cāmpukā! Get the boar spear and bring it and bring the resident men with you. Be careful. We will go on ahead.

Then the two lords thought of Vishnu and mounted their horses.

SONG:

*He mounted Nīlā my Lord
He held and used the golden whip, my Lord
With Nīlā he crossed the land
He snapped the stinging whip, my Lord
Spurring with the right foot, my Lord
See the horse gallop as if he will reach Vishnu’s heaven
Spurring with the left foot, my Lord
See the horse gallop as if he will reach the world above
See him jump over the stones, the stones
See him cross the Karumalai mountains
See the horse jump over the trees, the trees
See it cross the Pilimalai mountains
The Nākamalai mountains and the Tōkamalai mountains, my God
The mountain that is hollowed on four sides, my Lord
The place where there are mountains all around
Vīramalai, the huge mountain, my Lord
Searching for the Vīramalai mountain, my Lord
See the magical horse approaching.*

The two lords arrived in the Vīramalai mountains and dismounted. Just a short while later, Cāmpukā also arrived in Vīramalai, bringing the resident fighting men with him. Cāmpukā took the horses and tied them up. He pitched a white tent, and told the two lords to rest inside. He had the fighting men sit down in a circle around it. At the same time as these events were occurring in the Vīramalai, in the palace of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the dog Poṅṅacci started to think:

POṅṅACCI (to herself): Our king and the Paṛaiyā¹ have taken all of the very, very big dogs with them, but without remembering me. In their pride they

¹ The caste name for Cāmpukā.

have decided not to take me with them to war, because I am only one hand-span tall.

Thinking about this made Poṅṅācci angry. Deciding to curse the two brothers, she set out for the Cellāttā temple.

SONG:

*With big running steps, my Lord
Poṅṅācci, coming with great speed
With the speed of a rocket, she is coming, my Lord
See Poṅṅācci approaching, my Lord.*

Before going to the Cellāttā temple, Poṅṅācci jumped into the Benares River, bathed, and came out. Then she circled the temple, placing it on her right side, paid her respects, and then she stood before Cellāttā.

SONG:

*Oh, Cellāttā of this temple
Are you there, lady, are you there?
Leaving your home in this country
Have you gone, lady, have you gone?
Oh, Cellāttā of this palace
Are you there, lady, are you there?
Leaving your palace, Cellāttā
Have you gone, lady, have you gone?*

POṅṅĀCCI: Oh, Mother, oh, Cellāttā! The farmers were born of a boon. I too was born of a boon. My mother obtained a boon to kill this boar called Kompaṅ. I was born for that reason. Even so, the farmers and that Paṛaiyā have taken five crores of fighters, and five thousand fanged dogs with them and left without showing me respect. If I don't go, will they be able to kill Kompaṅ? Therefore, when those farmers raise their swords in the Vīramalai mountains, let them not have even a quarter of their strength. Let them not have the strength to return blows, oh, Cellāttā!

Then Poṅṅācci cried and beat her breasts. After having pronounced her curse, she set off and came to the Pilliar temple. There she dug a deep hole under a rock and went to sleep inside it. At this time, the curse of the goddess Kāḷi left that temple and went and hovered in front of the Vīramalai mountains. Lord Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi became feverish and cold in turn. He even lost the strength to lift his sword.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Oh, elder brother! To our country that knew no disgrace, disgrace has come. Thinking of going to war against the boar we called up the men and came. Now god's vengeance has fallen upon me, oh, elder brother!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's heart became discouraged and he cried.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Don't speak like that, oh, Poṅṅar! You must not cry! If misfortune comes it will not stop halfway.

SONG:

*In the midst of an army of elephants, oh my, amid an army of elephants
A yāḷi has come and torn things apart
Oh my, torn things apart
In the midst of an army of horses, oh my, an army of horses
A slender tiger has torn things apart, oh my, torn things apart
The oil pot, oh my, the oil pot
Ants have come and surrounded it, oh my, surrounded it
The water pot, a good water pot
Frogs have come and surrounded it, oh my, surrounded it.*

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, Poṅṅar, man! You have become feverish. How can we make war against the boar now? Shall we go back to the house, Lord?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Oh, elder brother! We could go, but we don't know if the boar is here or not. In this state, I cannot lift my sword and do anything! If, in this condition, we turn and go home, the three days the boar gave us will be completed today. If we fail to go to war against the boar, he has said he will come to our country, kill us, and destroy the palace and the lands. What can we do? Okay, in any case, we shall order Cāmpukā to go and see if the boar is here, or if he has returned to Vīrappūr. After he returns, we will think about what to do.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi called Cāmpukā:

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Cāmpukā! You go quickly, see if the boar is in the Vīramalai mountains or not, and come back.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. Good!

Taking his field staff and putting his elephant horn on his shoulder, Cāmpukā set out to search for the boar.

SONG:

*Searching for the boar, searching
The furious Cāmpukā is coming
Hoping to see Kompaṅ, to see him
Searching for the disturbed one, searching.*

As Cāmpukā was searching for the boar, there existed in the Vīramalai mountains, three stones that were united and close together. On these stood a split tree. Seeing this, Cāmpukā thought:

CĀMPUKĀ (to himself): That boar is nowhere to be seen. I shall rest under this tree for a little while on account of the sun and then proceed.

So Cāmpukā went to the shade of the tree and sat down. After a little while, he thought of starting again. At that moment, Kompaṇ got up from a well-like hole a little way to the east, where he had been sleeping. Kompaṇ thought, “The farmers said they were coming for the battle today. Have they come or not? I don’t know! Let me go and see.” So Kompaṇ got up, and as he came out, he let out a big snort. The leaves of the split tree rustled from the force of that snort. Noticing this, Cāmpukā thought, “What is this?” As he turned to the east to look, he saw Kompaṇ rise up and stand. He saw Cāmpukā, smiled a little smile, and asked:

BOAR: Hey, who are you?

Cāmpukā did not answer.

BOAR: Hey, man! I called you. Did not you hear?

Cāmpukā did not answer.

BOAR: Hey, boy, you! Will you speak? If not, shall I kill you?

Cāmpukā, acting as if he had only just then heard the question, got up.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Lord! Respects to you!

BOAR: Hey, small boy! Greetings only? Let it be. What town are you from? Speak up!

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King Kompaṇ! My hearing is not very good. Did you ask what town I was from? I will say, just ask, Lord! The land where goodness is abundant, where paddy grows. Where prosperity is everywhere, that is, the Land Where the Kāveri Flows. Lord! I am a Paṛaiyaṇ from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

BOAR: Hey, man. Oh, Paṛaiyā! You servant. Isn’t it you who came to our chaste Vīrataṅkā, took some iron, went and made a net, and you who came to our country, seized a parrot and carried it off? Oh, Paṛaiyā?

CĀMPUKĀ: Yes, sir! Oh, King! That belongs to that time. Now troubles have come upon me. The way the farmers treat me now, you would not believe that I was once number one.

BOAR: Hey, man! Oh, Paṛaiyā! What kind of troubles do you have?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! It is true that I took the iron, made a net, caught a parrot and took it back, I asked the farmers then, that within the four days the iron be returned to Vīrappūr. To that the two farmers replied: “Hey, Paṛaiyā. Don’t we know how to return it? Who are you to ask?” and they beat me and sent me far away. My body hurts from the beating. I took medicine for four days. Today my mother said to me, “Oh, son! King Kompaṇ has come to the Vīramalai mountains. Our kings are all going to war against

King Kompaṇ.” So I immediately came to you. The farmers have beaten me. I think they should be paid back, blow for blow. I came to the Vīramalai mountains searching for you. Not seeing you anywhere, I sat down under this tree. I did not know that you were hiding inside this hole! I only came to know when you rose up, oh, King! Seeing you, I am infused with pleasure and feel great joy.

BOAR: Hey, man! Paṛaiyā! Are you playing tricks, thinking of deceiving me? Everyone says that the farmers will not violate your words of advice. Are you really ready to abuse their name?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Until now it has been like that. But after they beat me, I came searching for you, wanting to take revenge on them. Speak up, oh, King! Why would I lie to you?

BOAR: All right, good! Hey, Paṛaiyā! What is that you have on your shoulder?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! It is a horn.

BOAR: Hey, man! Can you play the horn well?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. I play moderately well.

BOAR: All right, good! I will go and rest for a little while. You play the horn.

Having said this, the boar went into his hole and lay down. Cāmpukā took the horn, thought of Vishnu, and began to play.

CĀMPUKĀ’S HORN SONG (to a lullaby rhythm):

*Rāri, rāri, rārārō
Lord, rāri, rāri, rārārō
You were born of a boon,
Have you come like Bhima with a sword?
You were born as a result of penance
Oh, brave one, have you come?
You were born of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā
Lord, have you come with the strength of an elephant?
Have you come as a murderer
To destroy Kompaṇ, Lord?
Have you come as an avenger to kill the boar, Lord?
You will spear Kompaṇ, oh, Lord
And divide him into seven parts.*

The boar, hearing Cāmpukā play these words rose up angrily and stood in front of him.

BOAR: Hey, boy! Oh, Paṛaiyā! What words did you play on your pipe? Have you come to kill Kompaṇ, you murderer? Did you play the words “Kill Kompaṇ

and cut him into seven pieces?" Did you come ahead of the farmers to spy, oh, Paṛaiyā?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! I did not play my song like that. I said that King Kompaṇ and I had come, and that we would kill you farmers and cut you into seven pieces. I played those words, but because my horn is bent, the sounds were inverted as they came through it. So it sounded otherwise to you. Speak up, oh, King! Would I play words about killing you?

BOAR: Oh ho! Is that it? All right, good!

Kompaṇ asked him to play a little more and he went back and lay down. A little while later Cāmpukā, hearing nothing, got up and went and looked in the hole, wondering, "Has the boar gone to sleep?" Indeed, the boar was sleeping soundly. Cāmpukā realized that this was his chance. So, he climbed quietly down into the hole, stood on the boar's back and looked around. He was trembling. The boar did not move. Seeing that he was sleeping soundly, Cāmpukā wrapped nine of the boar's hairs around his palm, and with piercing pain, he pulled those hairs out. Then, with a spring in his knees, he jumped out of the hole.

SONG:

*He crossed the land quickly, my Lord
The heavy¹ Cāmpukā, my God
The brave one, my Lord
He jumped and traversed, traversed the land.*

The boar, noticing Cāmpukā run off with some of his hairs, called out in anger:

BOAR: Hey, man. Oh, Paṛaiyā! Deceiving me by trickery, are you running off with some extracted hairs?

SONG:

*See him traverse quickly, my Lord
The evil Kompaṇ, my Lord
The angry boar Kompaṇ, my Lord
Saw Cāmpukā at a distance.*

Before the boar could go very far, Cāmpukā had already returned to the spot where his two lords were waiting. The boar, unable to catch Cāmpukā, stood and thought: "What cleverness! That Paṛaiyā came, and by trickery extracted some hairs from my back and left!" Kompaṇ's heart sank. "All right let it be. We shall see!" he thought to himself and he went into his hole again and slept.

Cāmpukā went to the tent, saw Periyaṇṇacāmi, and paid his respects, "Oh, King. How is the younger king feeling?"

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Cāmpukā. Ciṇṇacāmi still has a high fever.

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi heard the sounds of Cāmpukā and Periyaṇṇacāmi speaking. Leaving the tent, Ciṇṇa came out.

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! Is the boar still there or has it left? Did you find out.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. The boar is there. I have brought some evidence. Look!

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi: What evidence did you bring? Show it! Let us see.

Hearing this, Cāmpukā put the nine boar hairs he had been holding in his palm down in front of the tent.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. This is boar's hair.

Then Cāmpukā took a match from a box and, striking it, he held the hairs to that flame. As the flame seized the hairs and burned them, a charred smell arose. As the smell hit Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi, his illness flew from him like cotton blowing in the wind.

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! Where is that boar hiding?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! He is on the mountain in the very middle of the Vīramalai range. He has dug a hole as deep as a well and is sleeping in that. While the boar slept soundly, I used a trick and extracted nine hairs from his back. I brought these to show you as evidence.

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi: Hey, Cāmpukā! If the hairs of the boar are that big, then how enormous the boar itself must be!

CĀMPUKĀ'S SONG:

*Speaking of a boar, that boar
It is a boar that has come to take revenge, oh, King
Speaking of Kompaṇ, that Kompaṇ
He has come to gore a king, that Kompaṇ.*

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. It has come here like another Yeman. It is sixty feet tall and seventy feet long. It seems to be very brave, oh, King! It is not really a boar. It has come to us like Yeman himself.

Ciṇṇaṇṇacāmi: Oh, Cāmpukā! Right now, I don't even have the strength to lift a sword. Therefore, we will go home and after the fever has subsided, we must come back and kill the boar! Let us get going!

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. You remain here in the tent. I will take the five crores of fighters, kill the boar and return, oh, King! If we don't kill the boar today it will return to our country tonight.

¹ A paramulla, which means having a weight of "one param" or about five hundred pounds.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā. It is better if I come. The boar is such a huge animal for you alone to take the men. Suppose our village fighters become frightened, what can be done about that? You are a very strong man. Somehow or other you will escape, but can our village fighters escape? If they die, then we cannot return to our country with honour. We will have to take our own lives here in this forest.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! That boar is sleeping in a hole. Having stationed our fighters and the five thousand dogs around that pit, and without letting the boar come out, I shall strike King Kompaṇ in his hole itself and proceed to kill it. Don't you worry, oh, King! Give me leave to go.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā! All right, take the village fighters, go kill the boar, and bring back what you will take from here. You must not allow anything to happen to our fighters. You must not allow anything to happen to these men. You must take them, be careful and return with them safely.

CĀMPUKĀ: All right, good, Lord!

Cāmpukā took leave of the Lord, took the five crores of village fighters and the five thousand dogs with him, and set out to war against the boar.

SONG:

*With big running steps, big step there
Cāmpukā, is going with great speed
Cāmpukā walks ahead, walks ahead
The fighters follow behind, follow behind.*

CĀMPUKĀ: Stay here without making a noise. I will go and see if the boar is asleep or awake and come back,

Cāmpukā took the fighters to the place where the boar was and stopped the men at the base of the split tree there. As he looked into the hole, the boar was sleeping soundly. Cāmpukā thought, "This is our chance." So he went back to the men, and taking all the fighters, he stationed and tied them around the pit where the boar was sleeping. Then he ordered that the dogs standing on the north side be untied and allowed to attack. The fighters immediately untied the dogs stationed to the north. Those dogs jumped into the boar's hole, angrily seized some of its hairs and pulled. At that moment, the boar noticed a problem. But those dog's bites just seemed like those of ants.

BOAR'S SONG:

*In the farmer's country, in the country there
There are many biting ants they say, many they say
In the warrior's country, in this country
There are many small ants, many they say.*

Thinking that there were too many ants in the farmer's country, the boar that had slept facing south rolled over to face north. At that time, the dogs in that pit got stuck under him, and crying "kay, kay," all the dogs were squashed and quickly died. Seeing this, Cāmpukā ordered all the dogs on the south side untied. The fighters immediately untied the dogs there. The dogs jumped into the hole, sized the boar's bristles and eagerly pulled them. Then the boar thought:

BOAR'S SONG:

*In the farmer's country, in the country there
The biting ants are abundant they say, abundant they say
In the warrior's country, in that country
The small ants are abundant they say, abundant they say.*

The boar that was now asleep facing north, again thinking he was being bitten by ants, turned over to rest facing south. At that moment, all the newly arrived dogs also got caught under him and quickly died. In this way, all five thousand dogs lost their lives. Dismayed, Cāmpukā looked at the village fighters and said:

CĀMPUKĀ: Lords! The dogs have all died. We must not remain here any longer. Let's run off!

The boar heard what Cāmpukā had said to the village fighters.

BOAR: Hey, man. Oh, Paṛaiyā! Having extracted hairs from my back and gone off, have you now brought the resident men to kill me?

As the boar became angry and rose up from the pit, Cāmpukā became frightened and turned to run back towards the tent.

SONG:

*Quickly, he crosses the land, oh, my Goddess
The boorish one takes long strides, my God
The skillful Cāmpukā, my Lord
Jumps and traverses, traverses the land.*

Without looking out for the village fighters, moving quickly, Cāmpukā soon arrived at the lords' tent. Seeing the village fighters run off, Kompaṇ thought, "Those fighters must not escape," and so he quickly ran ahead and blocked their path.

SONG:

*Like a hissing cobra, my Lord
See him strike and scatter them, my God
With a stick he beats them, my God
With his feet, see him trample them, my God
Five crores of fighters, my Lord
See him make them into orange juice, my Lord.*

Having just killed five crores of fighters, Kompaṇ walked east and west,¹ stained himself with the liquids of the vanquished and thought: "When so many village fighters have come, the farmers will have come too. All right. Let them come. We shall see what happens!"

Again, Kompaṇ went into his hole and slept. Meanwhile, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi was sitting in the farmers' tent, regretting that Cāmpukā had taken all the village fighters to use in fighting the boar. At that moment, he saw Cāmpukā running up. He was alone.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, man! Oh, Paṛaiyā! You alone are running back? Where are the village fighters, man?

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King. That boar has killed five crores of fighters and five thousand dogs!

Cāmpukā began to cry.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Paṛaiyā! Did you let that happen?

SONG:

*The lord is crying, he is crying now
My Lord, his body is wilting, wilting now
The body that wears perfumed paste, the whole body
Is wilting like a fallen leaf, is wilting now
The must-covered body, the whole body
Is covered with dust, is crying now*

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, Man! Oh, Paṛaiyā,² you villain. Not listening to my words, you took all of our village fighters and gave them as tribute to that boar! You sinner! If we had died, there would be no problem. But now, if we escape with our own lives and go back to our homes, all those men's wives and mothers come and inquire. How can I answer them? What can I say? It is best that we now die ourselves, right here in the Vīramalai mountains.

Ciṅṅa prayed. Afterwards, he thought of Vishnu and began to cry:

CINṆA'S SONG:

*Seer of Bāla mountain
Oh, great ascetic guru!
Oh, poor mendicant, my Perumāl, my Vishnu.*

From the milk sea Vishnu noticed the lord crying. "Oh my! That villainous Paṛaiyā has taken and killed five crores of fighters," he thought. He felt sorry for

the elder brother, Periyaṅṅacāmi. "I must go and look after this," he thought, and Vishnu mounted his Garuda bird and set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord
Vishnu, is coming, my Lord
Searching for the Vīramalai mountains, my Lord
Searching for the Vīramalai mountains, my Lord
He is coming with great speed, my Lord.*

Vishnu soon arrived in the vicinity of the Vīramalai mountains and dismounted. He then took disguise of a mendicant and carried an almanac in his hand. "Oh, Shiva! Great god!" he cried and set off for the white tent. After the mendicant had gone a short distance Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi heard someone calling out: "Oh, Shiva! Great god!"

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, man! Oh, Paṛaiyā! It seems that some mendicant is coming and making noise. You go and see and bring him here immediately.

"Lord, good!" he said, set out and went to the mendicant. "Lord! Our king has told me to bring you to him."

VISHNU: Man! Where is your king?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord! Look over there. You can see him. He is in the white tent. Come!

Having said this, Vishnu set out with Cāmpukā. The two of them went to the tent and saw the two lords.

VISHNU: Why have you called me?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and Periyaṅṅacāmi got up and paid respects to the mendicant.

VISHNU: Men! Blessings to you!

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Lord! Do you know fortune-telling or have a knowledge of medicine?

VISHNU: Men! I don't know about any of those things.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Lord. Don't say that! From looking at you it seems you are wise and know about all things! When we first came to the Vīramalai mountains to fight a boar, I found myself without even a quarter of my sword-lifting strength. Ever since my arrival, I have had a high fever. Furthermore, that villainous Paṛaiyaṅ, not listening to my words, took five crores of village fighters and gave them as tribute to a boar! What conjunction of planets could be the cause of this? Please look at your almanac and tell us, Lord.

Vishnu immediately took the astrological manuscript in his hand and handed a gold thread to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi took the gold thread and placed

¹ That is, turned around several times.

² The caste name for Cāmpukā's community. It is used here in a demeaning way, treating Cāmpukā as a servant.

it between the leaves of the astrological manuscript three times. Then Vishnu took the gold thread, opened the manuscript and read from it. He began to tell their fortunes.

VISHNU: Men. I will read explanations given in the manuscript. Listen. Men. A curse given you by Kāḷi is passing over you. A curse has been pronounced by an earless dog. You did not bring your palace dog Poṅṅācci with you for the hunt. When your mother asked for a boon, Poṅṅācci was given to her as a way to kill Kompaṅ. When things are like that, can you come away without her? Even if you had brought crore upon crore of fighters, without bringing Poṅṅācci, she became angry. So she went to the Cellāttā temple and pronounced a curse. That is the curse that has brought you the fever. This is the reason for the death of the five crores of fighters. Therefore, go quickly, appease Poṅṅācci and halt the curse. Only when you bring Poṅṅācci can you kill the boar!

Having said this Vishnu took leave and returned to the milk sea.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! As we left, did you not call Poṅṅācci?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord. You did not say anything, and I forgot as well and came away.

CINṆAṆṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! The mendicant has spoken and is leaving. it seems that Poṅṅācci went to the Cellāttā temple and pronounced a curse because she was not included, but rather left behind. This is why we have had so many problems. Without Poṅṅācci's inclusion, Kompaṅ cannot be killed. Therefore, you go immediately to the palace, tell Pārvati about this, and then take Poṅṅācci to the Cellāttā temple. Let her halt the curse. Then quickly bring Poṅṅācci here.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord, good! I will return quickly.

Episode 25 ✨

Picking up his field staff, Cāmpukā set off.

SONG:

*Leaving the Vīramalai mountains, my Lord
He is going to the Land Where the Kāveri Flows
Crossing the Nākamalai mountains, my Lord
Cāmpukā is magically approaching.*

Cāmpukā arrived in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows and, as he approached the palace, Pārvati was standing in the doorway of the jewelled hall waiting, watching. She thought, "There is no sign of my elder brothers." As Cāmpukā drew near Pārvati, he paid his respects to her.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Cāmpukā! Where, oh, where are my brothers, man? Oh, huge Cāmpukā, oh, Cāmpukā. My brothers have been killed, killed! You have

come with this news. You have come to me like this? Hey, man! Oh, Cāmpukā! Where are my brothers? Are you bringing me the news that they have been killed?

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady! The two kings are well and in the Vīramalai mountains! When we left for the battle against the boar, we left without inviting our Poṅṅācci to join us. As a result, Poṅṅācci became angry. She went to the Cellāttā temple and uttered a curse. From the time we left here, King Ciṅṅa has not even had the strength to lift his own sword. He has been lying ill with a fever and chills. Then a mendicant came and said that the reason for all this was the curse Poṅṅācci had placed on him. He said that if Poṅṅācci did not come along that no one could kill the boar. Furthermore, oh, lady, not having taken Poṅṅācci, I gave five crores of fighters to that boar, as tribute. This is why the younger king sent me here. He told me that I must tell you all this, as well as appease Poṅṅācci, arrest her anger, have her halt the curse, and then take her with me and come there.

PĀRVATI: Hey, villain! Paṛaiyā! Having taken and killed five crores of fighters, have you made the women of the thousand revenue villages widows?

She asked this and started to argue with Cāmpukā. Next, she called her maids and asked them: "Have you seen Poṅṅācci?"

MAIDS: Lady! Poṅṅācci has not come for her food. We did not notice whether or not she went with the kings to the Vīramalai mountains.

PĀRVATI: All right, good. Come. We shall go and look.

Taking the maids with her, she set out to search for Poṅṅācci.

SONG:

*The fine tender vine, had an upper cloth covering her waist,
Her tender waist was unseen
Pārvati wore an upper cloth
Her tender breasts were unseen.*

Pārvati was wearing an upper cloth as she went to search for Poṅṅācci. First, she went and stood by the Pilliar temple and called to her maids.

PĀRVATI: Hey, maids! Poṅṅācci was born of boon. The angry one, my dog. I don't know where she has gone. Go search and look for her.

The maids came, and having looked all around, came back to Pārvati.

MAIDS: Oh, lady! Poṅṅācci is not to be seen anywhere.

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*It is said Poṅṅācci is not to be seen
They say she is not to be seen there
The fine tender vine, the swan, is crying
I am becoming pale, becoming pale now
You have left me completely alone
You have left me alone here
Where have you gone and hidden?
Poṅṅācci, you have hidden yourself from me!*

Pārvati, still crying, looked down. Now she saw Poṅṅācci sleeping in a hole she herself had dug.

PĀRVATI: Hey, Poṅṅācci! Did you go to the Cellāttā temple and utter a curse that said my elder brothers should die? You villain!

Pārvati sat down with her legs crossed and lifted Poṅṅācci into her lap.

PĀRVATI: Oh, lady! Poṅṅācci! So be it that my elder brothers forgot to call you and left. Does that mean you should you go and utter a curse? Because you did this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi does not even have the strength to lift a sword. He is suffering from a high fever and chills in the Vīramalai mountains. Because you did not go to the Vīramalai to help out, that villainous Paṛaiyaṅ gave five crores of fighters as a tribute to that boar.

PONṆĀCCI: Oh, princess! Let me go, go! Am I not equal to you? Why did you come here looking for me? You were born of a boon. I too was born of a boon. Even so, your elder brothers left, taking five crores of fighters and five thousand dogs, without giving me the slightest respect! That Paṛaiyā also did not call me. Therefore, I became angry. So I went to the Cellāttā temple and uttered a curse. All right. Let me go. You go back to the palace! Your elder brothers will kill that boar, divide him into portions and return. Go and have your feast.

PĀRVATI: Oh, lady Poṅṅācci! Whatever faulty actions there be, you calm yourself and go immediately to the Cellāttā temple. Halt the curse that you have given, and go to the Vīramalai mountains, oh, lady Poṅṅācci! Some mendicant or other has said that if you don't go, no one can kill Kompaṅ. Start off immediately, oh, Poṅṅācci!

As she cried, Poṅṅācci's anger was appeased.

PONṆĀCCI: Oh, lady, Pārvati. I will go on account of you.

Poṅṅācci set out for the temple.

SONG:

*With big running steps, my Lord
The woman is coming with great speed
To the temple of the goddess Cellāttā
See Poṅṅācci coming quickly.*

Poṅṅācci went to the Kāci riverbank, bathed and then returned. She circled past the left side and right side of the Cellāttā temple and paid her respects.

PONṆĀCCI: Oh, lady! Please lift the heart-stopping curse I sent to the younger king. Let him have the strength of twelve elephants and the prowess of the bravest, as he had before. These must be his, oh, Mother! Īswari!¹

Having said this, Poṅṅācci paid Cellāttā her respects.

At that time, in the Vīramalai mountains, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's prior strength and prowess returned. The lord suddenly awoke and sat up. Meanwhile, having halted the curse, Poṅṅācci went back to the palace.

PĀRVATI: Lady Poṅṅācci! Have you brought an end to the curse?

PONṆĀCCI: Princess! I have done it. I am starting for the Vīramalai mountains right now. Please see me off.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Poṅṅācci. You were born of a boon. Therefore, I shall decorate you, place you in a palanquin, parade you around the town and then see you off.

PONṆĀCCI: Princess! I do not want all that done for me. Just give me leave to go. I shall go there and return.

PĀRVATI: All right, good. You go, kill the boar, turn it to dust, and come back in good health, bringing my elders with you, oh, lady Poṅṅācci.

As Pārvati gave Poṅṅācci leave, she looked at Cāmpukā and said:

PĀRVATI: Hey, Cāmpukā. Don't say anything nasty to Poṅṅācci. Take her with you, carefully, and turn her over to my elder brothers.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, princess! Good!

Cāmpukā took Poṅṅācci and set off.

¹ A name for the wife of the great God, Shiva.

SONG:

*Leaving the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, my Lord
Cāmpukā is coming, my God
Cāmpukā walks ahead, my God
Poṅṅācci follows behind, my Lord
The Nākamalai and Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord
The mountain hollow on four sides, my God
The place where there are mountains all round
They have arrived at the frightening Vīramalai mountain.*

Cāmpukā and Poṅṅācci arrived at Vīramalai and were now just a short distance from the tent.

Poṅṅācci thought to herself: "Since I spoke a curse in the Cellāttā temple, the younger king will kill me if I go to him now. After Cāmpukā has gone and announced me, and if the king calls, then I will go." So Poṅṅācci went and sat on a rock a little distance from the tent. As Cāmpukā approached the tent Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi saw him.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Where is Poṅṅācci, man?

Hearing this, Cāmpukā turned around and looked behind him.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Look there! She is sitting on that rock there.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, seeing Poṅṅācci sitting on that rock, became angry and lifted his sword.

SONG:

*The sword, the sword is swinging
See if flash like lightning, my God
Quickly, quickly it is swinging
See it flash like lightning in front of him, my God.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi threw the sword at Poṅṅācci. Poṅṅācci saw the sword coming and thought, "It seems it might strike me," and so she jumped the height of two palmyra palms. With the speed of its approach, the sword cut to pieces the rock on which Poṅṅācci had been sitting. Then it returned to the lord's hand. Poṅṅācci, having risen to a height of two palmyra palms, came straight down towards the tent and now sat in front of it.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, villain! Treacherous Poṅṅācci! Did you pronounce a curse on me so that I should die?

POṅṅĀCCI: Oh, King! Please forgive me. When you went to fight that boar, you did not call me, and the Paṛaiyaṅ also did not call. Therefore, I became angry and uttered a curse, oh, Lord.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, woman. Poṅṅācci! That was indeed a mistake on my part. If you had been brought along, would five crores of fighters have died? That villainous Paṛaiyaṅ! Not listening to what I said, he took the fighters and the dogs and gave them as tribute to that boar!

POṅṅĀCCI: Oh, King! What has happened? What must be done now? Speak up.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, Poṅṅācci! That boar must be killed.

POṅṅĀCCI: Lord. Where is the boar now?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Tell Poṅṅācci where the boar is.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lady Poṅṅācci! If you go to the central mountain of this hill area, there are three stones laying together, joined. On top of these three stones is a split tree. To the east of that, the boar is sleeping in a pit dug as deep as a well.

POṅṅĀCCI: All right, good. Oh, King, you three take the great boar spear, bring it, and wait cautiously on that rock outcropping. I shall go, seize the boar, and in some way or other, bring it to those rocks. You immediately lift the great boar spear, and thinking of Vishnu, spear the boar in the middle of its back.

Having said this, she added, "I shall go there and return, Lord."

Taking her leave, Poṅṅācci set out.

SONG:

*With big running steps, my Lord
Poṅṅācci is coming with great speed
Searching for the boar, my Lord
Poṅṅācci is coming, my Lord.*

As Poṅṅācci approached the central mountain of the Vīramalai area, there were three stones laying together, joined. She thought, "This is the spot Cāmpukā described. The boar will be here." As she climbed on the rocks and looked to the east, there was a pit. "The boar will be there. All right let it come out," she thought and Poṅṅācci sat down on the rock.

After Poṅṅācci had sat there for a short while, the boar in the pit thought, "That Paṛaiyaṅ brought crores of fighters and gave them to me as tribute. Then he left. The farmers have not come looking for me yet. Let me just see if anyone is here." Thinking this, the boar stood up and stood looked to the west. He soon saw Poṅṅācci sitting on the rock and he smiled a little smile.

BOAR: Hey, you! What is this? Just as Duryodhana sent messengers to the Paṇḍavas,¹ first a Paṛaiyaṅ came and then he came a second time with five crores of fighters. Now a dog without ears has come! All right, good! Hey, you! Earless one! Who are you?

Poṅṅācci did not answer.

BOAR: Hey, you! Oh, earless dog! Even though you did not have ears, how much arrogance you have! If you had ears, you would be even more proud. Who are you?

POṅṅĀCCI: Hey, man! Oh, Kompā! Speak carefully! If you say "earless" once more, I will make you earless too. Be careful!

BOAR: Hey, you! Earless one. You are only one span tall. I will crush you with my foot. You speak to me with great courage.

Kompaṅ smiled as he spoke.

POṅṅĀCCI: Hey, man! Kompā! Do you know why I was born earless? It was in order to seize your two ears, eat them, and kill you!

BOAR: Hey, you! Earless dog! Why do you continue to speak with such pride? If I let out one snort, you will be blown across the Vīramalai mountains and land in the Nākamalai region. Under these circumstances, do you think you can manage to seize my ears? Can you?

Hearing the boar speak like this, Poṅṅācci became angry, and in her heart, she thought of Vishnu.

SONG:

*In front and behind, my Lord
See Poṅṅācci spring with the leaps of a tiger
By means of the front, and the back, my Lord
By thirty-two different means, she attacks, my God.*

Poṅṅācci, sprung to the height of a palmyra palm, descended and suddenly seized the boar's right ear, biting it off. She took it and went to sit down, as before, on that rock she had found. With the sound "pata, pata," she chewed and swallowed big pieces of Kompaṅ's ear!

BOAR: Hey, earless one! You are eating something. What is it?

POṅṅĀCCI: Hey, man. Oh, Kompā! You keep saying "earless one, earless one." Look and see if you have your own right ear. This is it. I am now eating your ear. There is only a little bit left.

The boar touched the place of his right ear. Without that ear, Kompaṅ lost a quarter of his strength. At that time, doubt entered the boar's heart. Again, he looked at Poṅṅācci.

BOAR: Hey, man. Oh, earless one! If one ear is gone, let it be. There is still an ear left. You do not have the other ear.

Looking at Kompaṅ, Poṅṅācci said, "Oh, Kompā! Be patient for a little."

SONG:

*By means of the front, and the back, my Lord
By thirty-two different means she attacks, my God
In front and behind, my God
See her spring with the leaps of a tiger.*

One more, Poṅṅācci sprang and before one could blink, she went straight for the boar's left ear. She suddenly seized it, tore it off and then went and sat down on that same rock.

BOAR: Hey, you! Earless dog! Again, you are eating something. What is that?

POṅṅĀCCI: Hey, man! Earless boar! Now you too are without ears. Look and see if your left ear is there.

Kompaṅ touched the place of his left ear. There was no ear. Then he thought: "If I remain here, they will kill me." Overcome with fear, the boar turned towards Vīrappūr and ran in that direction with great speed. Seeing the boar set off, Poṅṅācci quickly sprang on him, grabbing and biting his tail. The she seized the boar's testicles and, adhering to them, she bit them too. At that moment, the poison from Poṅṅācci's teeth spread into the boar's whole body.

SONG:

*The boar is running quickly, quickly now
See the Vīramalai mountains shake, see them shake
On the slopes of the Vīramalai, the Vīramalai
Kompaṅ, whose tusks are sixty feet long, is running off.*

The boar ran quickly. As it moved, the poison from Poṅṅācci's teeth caused his whole body to burn. Soon half of Kompaṅ's strength had left him.

SONG:

*To the valley of the garden
Poṅṅācci is bringing Kompaṅ
Bringing Kompaṅ there, by herself.*

As Kompaṅ came towards the rock outcropping where the two lords were, they heard the sounds of his approach.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! The boar is coming. Stand ready.

¹ A reference to a major figure in the Mahābhārata.

The younger prince Caṅkar had the strength of eight elephants. Caṅkar had the strength of ten elephants. Now, with the strength of twelve elephants,¹ Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi lifted the great boar spear in his hand and stood waiting. The boar came towards the west. As it turned towards the north, Poṅṅācci, who had clung to him, shouted:

POṅṅĀCCI: Oh, King. This is our chance. Lift the great spear and throw, it.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi immediately thought of Vishnu, and as he speared the boar's back with the great spear. The spear passed through the boar's back and stuck in the ground. The boar fell down, and as life left him, he called out three times.

BOAR: Vīrataṅkā, the chaste, protect me

Vīrataṅkā, the chaste, protect me

Vīrataṅkā, the chaste, protect me

That sound did not stop at the borders of Vīrappūr. It was heard by the whole world.

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! The boar died after giving the call for protection. Therefore, it may be that the Veṭṭuvā men will come.

"Let's lift him quickly," he said and the three together lifted the boar and set him on the rock outcropping. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi looked at Cāmpukā:

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā. Singe the boar with a flame, clean it, cut it up and separate the meat from the bones. I will go and see if the Veṭṭuvā men are coming.

Having said this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi climbed to the top of a tree and kept watch. Cāmpukā held a flame to the boar and singed it. Then he cut it up and separated its different parts. After that he went to Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi.

CĀMPUKĀ: Lord, I have cut up and separated all the meat! Tell me, how many portions you want me to make?

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: I will tell you. Listen!

¹ Caṅkar is repeatedly described as having the strength of ten elephants while his elder brother has the strength of just eight equivalent beasts. Interestingly, the only other place in this story where Caṅkar's power is said to equal twelve elephants is at the moment of his birth! Now, sixteen years later and nearing the end of his young life, the bard is trying to say that Caṅkar first applied the lifting power of eight elephants, then of ten and finally, not succeeding, had to summon up the lifting power of all the twelve elephants hidden inside his body, in order to raise that great boar-killing spear. This is a dramatic and central ritual moment. It is appropriate that it took this much strength to lift the weapon Caṅkar used.

SONG:

*For my elder brother, my elder brother
Cāmpukā, set out one for him
For me, for me, one good portion
Cāmpukā, set out one for me
For Taṅkā, one portion
Cāmpukā, set out one for her
For Vishnu, for Vishnu, one portion
Cāmpukā, set out one for him
For the revenue villages, the revenue villages, one portion
Cāmpukā, set out one portion for them
For Poṅṅācci, for Poṅṅācci, one portion
Cāmpukā, set out one for her
For you, for you, one good portion
Oh, courageous Cāmpukā, set out one for yourself.*

CIṅṅAṅṅACĀMI: Make seven correct portions in this way. I see the Veṭṭuvā men coming.

At this very time, in Vīrappūr, Vīrataṅkā! the chaste had heard the boar send out his call for protection. Looking at her brothers, she said:

VĪRATAṅKĀḶ: Oh, elder brothers. It seems as if the farmers have killed the boar. Did not you hear the sound our boar made?

VEṬṬUVĀS: Princess! We did hear it. What shall we do about it?

VĪRATAṅKĀḶ: Oh, my brothers! We raised Kompaṅ like a child for sixteen years and those farmers have killed him!

SONG:

*The chaste one's tranquility and physique, her physique
Are wilting, she is rolling and crying on the ground
She is crying and rolling there
The fine tender vine, her soul and body, are on the ground, crying like a dove
She is rolling and crying there.*

VĪRATAṅKĀ: Oh, elder brothers! We must not let the farmers who killed our Kompaṅ escape! Set off to the battle! Immediately get a thousand Veṭṭuvās and fighters, go quickly to the Kāḷiyatta temple and form a group there.

SONG:

*The good men joined together; an army joined together there
At the borders of Vīrappūr, Vīrappūr at the borders
A good army grouped together; all the men grouped together there
At the Kāḷiyatta temple, at the temple there.*

As the Veṭṭuvā fighters gathered together and grouped in Vīrappūr, Vishnu noticed them. He thought: "Those farmers, Poṅṅar and Caṅkar, are now sixteen years old. Their allotted time on earth is ninety percent finished. I must now take their lives." So he set off, arrived, and joined the Veṭṭuvā men.

VISHNU: Men, oh, Veṭṭuvās! Set off. I am here. Do not be afraid! Having killed the farmers, we shall return. Come!

Standing in front of the fighters, he grouped them behind him and then set off.

SONG:

*Vishnu walked in front, my Lord
The Veṭṭuvās followed behind, my Lord
Leaving Vīrappūr, my Lord
The fighters are coming
Searching for the Vīramalai mountains
See them coming with great speed, my Lord.*

Vishnu took the men, arrived in the Vīramalai mountains and halted them at the foot of a hill. He told them: "Stay here. I shall return quickly." Having said this, Vishnu changed his form to that of a washer man. Then he went to the place where the shares of the boar meat had been set out. Seeing Periyaṅṅacāmi, he paid him his respects.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man. Who are you? What town are you from?

VISHNU: Lord. I am a washer man from Vīrappūr.

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: All right, good! What news do you bring?

VISHNU: Lord. It seems someone told my wife that some King from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows had come, killed a boar and was dividing up portions. Because she is pregnant, she has a longing for boar meat. She asked me to go, receive some meat from you and return. This is the reason I have come to you, Lord!

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man. If you had come a little sooner, it would have been better. The portions have now been carefully calculated. We cannot take meat from those portions now. What can be done?

VISHNU: Oh, King! Good. Lord, there is something you have laid off to the west. What is that, Lord?

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man. That is the boar's head.

VISHNU: Lord. Give me that to take away, I beg you.

Thinking that a simple washer man had asked for the boar's head Periyaṅṅacāmi took that leftover piece and gave it to him. Vishnu received the

head, tied it in a bundle and returned to the place where the Veṭṭuvā men were waiting. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi saw that washer man leave from the top of the tree where he was sitting.

"Someone has been to the place where the portions of the boar are lying and is leaving. Why did he come? I don't know. I shall go and see," he thought, and he ran to the place where the portions of the boar lay. "Oh, elder brother! Who is the person who is leaving this place? For what reason did he come?"

PERIYAṅṅACĀMI: Man! He is a washer man from Vīrappūr. It seems that his wife knew that the boar had been killed and portions were being allocated. It seems she is pregnant. In account of this, she has a craving for boar meat and she sent her husband to us, asking him to receive a little meat from us to bring back. For this reason, he came and asked for meat. I said that all the meat had been divided and that there was none left. Again, he begged, asking for the head. Feeling sorry for him, I gave him that head.

CINṅANṅACĀMI: Oh my! Elder brother! Instead of taking some meat from the allocated portions you let him have the head? Just as the boar's head has gone, so we shall now give up our own heads, oh, elder brother!

As they were speaking, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi heard the sound of the Veṭṭuvā men approaching.

CINṅANṅACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! It seems as if the Veṭṭuvā men are coming! Quickly, take elder brother's sword and run here.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi took his sword and ran ahead. Vishnu, having taken the boar's head away, brought the Veṭṭuvā fighters and approached. But Vishnu, using magic, also approached, unseen. When the men had drawn near, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi called out:

CINṅANṅACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Run here quickly, man! The men have come.

Cāmpukā took Periyaṅṅacāmi's sword and came running.

VEṬṬUVĀS' SONG:

*The good, strong ones are gathering
A lakh of Veṭṭuvā fighters, a colourful army,
A Veṭṭuvā army there.*

CINṅANṅACĀMI AND CĀMPUKĀ'S SONG:

*Striking, striking, they heap them up, heap them up there
Like seeing musk melons, like seeing them there
Cutting, cutting, they heap them up, heap them up there
Like seeing pieces of pumpkin
Seeing pieces there*

The two of them, having cut down so many fighters, heaped them up.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Say, man! So many Veṭṭuvās came.
All right. Now we shall go there. Come.

As he turned around Vishnu created an innumerable quantity of
Veṭṭuvā fighters.

SONG:

*Coming from the east, coming now
An innumerable quantity of Veṭṭuvā fighters, Veṭṭuvā fighters there.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, man! Oh, Cāmpukā! What is this, man! Again, from the
east so many fighters are coming!

Cinṇanṇacāmi and Cāmpukā raised their swords.

SONG:

*Striking, striking, they heap them up, heap them up there
An innumerable quantity of Veṭṭuvā fighters, Veṭṭuvā fighters there
Cutting, cutting, they heap them up, heap them up there
So many fighters, fighters are there!*

The younger of the two, having just cut down all the fighters and heaped them
up, spoke up:

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā! Now we shall leave!

As he turned around, Vishnu again produced an uncountable number of
Veṭṭuvā fighters.

SONG:

*Coming from the east, coming now
An innumerable number of Veṭṭuvā fighters, Veṭṭuvā fighters there.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! What is this, man? There must be a
reason. We are striking, striking the fighters, yet they are sprouting up again.

SONG:

*Striking, striking, they heap them up, heap them up there
An innumerable quantity of Veṭṭuvā fighters, Veṭṭuvā fighters there
Where the roots reach, on all such places there
They pour hot water, pour it there.*

The two of them cut down many, many fighters and heaped their bodies up.
But, as they turned around, Vishnu again created an enormous number
of fighters.

SONG:

*Coming from the north, coming now
A liberal lakh of Veṭṭuvā fighters, Veṭṭuvā fighters there.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā! We have been striking the Veṭṭuvā fighters
down over and over again, yet more keep sprouting up. Look, now, an enor-
mous number of new fighters are approaching from the north. We cannot
fight any more! Come, man! Let's leave it.

As the two of them set off running, Vishnu, who was wearing three Vaisnavite
marks,¹ brought the Veṭṭuvā men along behind the two, at a distance. Cāmpukā
turned around and saw that those fighters were following them.

CĀMPUKĀ: Oh, King! Not leaving us, the fighters are following at a distance.
What can we do, Lord?

Hearing this, Cinṇanṇacāmi stood and turned to look behind. At that moment,
he saw Vishnu, wearing three Vaisnavite marks on his forehead, coming and
bringing the fighters with him.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Look at that! A man with three
Vaisnavite marks is leading those fighters! It is he who is producing more,
even as we strike them down. This is all his doing, man! First, let us run up
and strike him. We can kill him with a single blow. Then we shall strike the
rest of the fighters.

Vishnu heard what Cinṇanṇacāmi said to Cāmpukā. He came running, seized
the lord's hands:

VISHNU: No, please, Lord! You must not do anything to me. These are all the
fighters there are. No more will come after these. Climb down off your
horses. Strike and kill all the fighters you see here and cast them away.

Having said this, Vishnu left. Immediately, the lord and Cāmpukā again lifted
their swords.

SONG:

*In front and in back, my Lord
Springing like leaping tigers, my Lord
Striking, striking, they heap them up, heap them up there
In the narrow pass in the Vīramalai mountains, in the narrow pass there.*

The two of them struck down those fighters, without omitting a single one, and
cast them away.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, Cāmpukā! This is all Vishnu's doing! Okay. Come! The
swords are covered in blood and cannot be lifted. Let us go to the Vāṇi river
and wash the swords. Then we can go to elder brother, take our allocated
portions of boar meat, and set out for home.

As the two set out for the Vāṇi river, Vishnu thought, "These two are sixteen
years old. Their youth is ninety percent over. Now I must take their lives and

¹ These marks, namam, are worn on the forehead and identify devotees of Lord Vishnu.

send them to the gods' council chamber." He went and hid in the hollow of a suma tree¹ in the neighbourhood of the Vāṇi river. At that time, where the lord and Cāmpukā were approaching that suma tree, the tree shook with sound "sala, sala."

Seeing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi said, "Oh, Cāmpukā! The wind is not blowing. What is the reason for this suma tree shaking like this? I don't know why this is." The two descended into the river, stood in breast-deep water and washed their swords.

SONG:

*The Vāṇi river flows there
The lord is washing his sword
In breast-deep water
The lord has washing his sword well
Now Vishnu, Perumā
The shepherd of plantain stalk there
He gave it an arrow, made of jasmine flowers
He made a bow out of a stalk of maize
He lay curuli² flowers on it as the arrow
The notorious Vishnu
Placed an arrow there
The arrow came to Lord Ciṅṅa
And tore a single white thread from his chest.³*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, man! Oh, Cāmpukā! Some arrow came, tore off my sacred thread and carried it away, man!

SONG:

By means of the front and the back, my Lord

1 Tree which is associated with many rituals and also with fire. It is called a sami tree in Sanskrit.
2 A flower with a long stem like an arrow (probably *Strobilanthes barbatus*). The god of desire or love, Kāma (Manmatan), uses similar arrows for his sugarcane bow.
3 This is the thread that all adult men belonging to the highest three Varnas are supposed to wear as a mark of their "twice-born" status. Note that the two heroes each put on a similar special thread before going to fight, something that their other family members are not accustomed to wearing. As farmers by heritage, these two brothers must be classified as Shudras (the fourth Varna), and hence they cannot be considered twice-born. But they aspire to that higher status, a wish that is never expressed verbally but is definitely reflected in their various behaviors. In the animated version of this story the artist initially (in episode 20) shows their "added" thread being worn garland style (around the neck) and then later (in episode 24), slung over one shoulder as is actually the practice of the twice-born. The progression is subtle but significant as it illustrates the heroes' increasing confidence in their claim. The animation artist also added a short ritual to the basic story text. That ritual, which he clearly felt would be required, takes place in the heroes' dressing room. It is performed just before the two men don their thread in the orthodox, twice-born way. Vishnu, furthermore, also references this aspiration when he decides to remove Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's thread as a way of signaling to both brothers that it is now time to die. Their sister also likely references it during a brief resurrection ceremony she conducts (see episode 26).

By thirty-two different means.

With the speed of lightning, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi leapt up and caught the arrow in his hand. As he looked at it, a white thread was caught on its point. Seeing this, Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi spoke up:

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, man! Oh, Cāmpukā!

SONG:

*That notorious Vishnu
Has shot an arrow at me
The arrow came to Ciṅṅa
And tore off my sacred thread
It finished off my sacred thread
Finished off that thread of ours.*

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Having broken our sacred thread, we cannot retain our lives a minute longer.

Cāmpukā: Oh, King! When the sacred thread is broken, are we to give up our lives? Oh, King. This is not necessary!

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Hey, man. Oh, Cāmpukā! Run over here. Let's go to the little hillock by the suma tree.

The lord set out and went and stood on the little suma tree hillock. Cāmpukā came running behind. As he looked at the lord, he saw Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's whole body shaking.

Cāmpukā: Oh my! Oh my! Oh, King! Why are you shaking like this?

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi: Oh, Cāmpukā! It is nothing. Go quickly, place Poṅṅācci as guard over the meat, and bring my elder brother here.

"All right, good, oh, King!" he said and set off. Arriving, he saw Periyaṅṅacāmi and said, "Oh, King! The younger king has told me to bring you quickly! The younger king, for some reason, is shaking all over."

Periyaṅṅacāmi: Oh, Cāmpukā! Where is Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi now?

Cāmpukā: Oh, he is on the small hillock of a suma tree near the Vāṇi river, oh, King!

Periya thought to himself: "All right, good!" Then he placed Poṅṅācci as a guard over the meat and set out at great speed. Running fast, he soon arrived at the small hillock by the suma tree. He embraced Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi and said, "Poṅṅayyā! Why are you shaking like this? What has happened?"

Ciṅṅa's SONG:
*Oh, elder brother
 I went to the Vāṇi river
 There I washed my sword
 In breast-deep water
 I washed my sword
 That notorious Vishnu
 Shot an arrow at me
 The arrow came to Ciṅṅa
 And tore off my sacred thread
 It finished off the sacred thread
 Finished off that thread of ours.*

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, elder brother! Having broken my sacred thread, we cannot retain our lives any longer.

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: No. Don't say that, Ciṅṅayyā! Don't panic! Control your anger! Are we to give up our lives just because one thread has been broken? We must not, Lord.

Periya embraced Ciṅṅa around his chest as he spoke.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, elder brother! Whatever you say, I will not listen! My body is flawed, it has been flawed. The body is speared, it has been speared. Oh, elder brother! We are sixteen years old. Our life is ninety percent finished. Our time has come to an end. It is not correct for us to remain alive any longer. The creator who has written our fate will not rewrite it. I shall not remain alive any longer. If you are afraid to renounce life, go to the palace and see Pārvati. I shall renounce life here.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi made this announcement and said all this at one go.

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh, man! Poṅṅayyā!

SONG:

*The one who was born with us, the one who was born with us
 The one who was born there
 Leaving the wealth alone leaving it alone there
 The one who was born with us, oh, the one, oh, the one who was born
 Leaving the unique one the unique one oh, leaving her alone.*

PERIYAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Ciṅṅayyā! Must we leave behind our sister, our Korṅṅavai,¹ leave her and go?

CINṆANṆACĀMI: Oh elder brother! The younger sister of the six maidens of the god's council chamber,¹ is our Pārvati! Like us, she is not a human by birth. She was born to be our younger sister on earth. She was born with us in order to tell us in advance what calamities would befall us in the future. There is no need for us to worry about her. After we die, she will perform all the necessary rites and then she will join us in the gods' council chamber. If you have such worries, go to the palace. I shall not remain alive here for even a minute.

Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi lifted his sword above the rocky hillock. The man with the strength of twelve elephants thought of Vishnu, and then he planted his sword in the rock.² It sunk deep into that stone, up to the depth of one cubit, and stood by itself. Then Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi went eastward a short distance and stood facing west. Thinking of Vishnu, he ran up at great speed and, jumping, fell forward. The blade of the sword sank into his chest, exited the other side more than a cubit, and stopped. The pulse stopped in Ciṅṅa's arms, and legs, and movement left his eyes. Vishnu then took Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi's life away from the suma tree.

As Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi died, Periyaṅṅacāmi thought to himself, "Oh my! Now that my younger brother had died so bravely, so should I. What reason is there for me to remain alive?" He now ran to the east, stood facing west, thought of Vishnu, ran back and fell bravely upon his own sword. That sword pierced his chest and came out the other side a distance of one span. Motion left his arms, legs and eyes. Vishnu took Periyaṅṅacāmi's life away.

Cāmpukā, seeing the two lords' bodies hanging on their swords like tamarind fruits, thought, "My two kings have died. What is the reason for me to exist?" So Cāmpukā broke off a large branch from that suma tree, came running, and set it upright on the same stone outcropping. Then he stood facing north and thought of Vishnu. The branch began to sink into the stone. It went down to a depth of one cubit and stood upright, just like that. Cāmpukā ran to the east, turned and faced west, and thought of Vishnu. He came back running and fell forward on that suma branch. It pierced Cāmpukā's chest. The pulse stopped in his arms and legs and movement left his eyes. Vishnu took the three lives, closed them inside a gold box and went to the gods' council chamber. Shiva was waiting and watching for Vishnu's arrival. He welcomed him and asked him to sit down.

SHIVA: Oh, brother-in-law! Did you not obtain a boon for sixteen years of life for the two sons of Tāmarai Kavuṅṅācci, who were living in the Land Where the

¹ Korṅṅavai, an important ancient Tamil goddess whose name can also be used for the great goddess Pārvati herself.

¹ That is, the seventh and youngest of the maidens who dance for Indra, king of the gods, known elsewhere as the Kaṅṅimār (who are seven in total, six when one is on earth as Taṅkā is at present). The Kaṅṅimār reference the star constellation known as the Pleiades.

² The handle of the sword being pointed downwards.

Kāveri Flows? Their sixteen years are now completely finished. Have you brought their lives back to me?

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! Here, I have brought them. I have obtained and brought their lives. Give me back my right-spiralled conch and my sacred powder box.

Shiva immediately took the lives and handed Vishnu the right-spiralled conch and sacred powder box. Vishnu accepted these, took leave of Shiva, went to the milk sea and slept. As this was happening in the gods' council chamber, in the Land Where the Kāveri Flows, the cherished younger sister, heir of the two brothers, the good peahen born with Poṅṅar, was swinging in her beautiful swing.

SONG:

*The cradle of the chaste girl is rocking
See the girl who is shaped like a sculpture of a goddess
The silver chariot sways for the chaste girl
It moves rhythmically for the girl who is shaped like a sculpture of a goddess
The graceful swing sings for eye-like jewel
The swing flies back and forth for Pārvati
The chaste girl is in the graceful swing
Pārvati is sleeping deeply
As Pārvati slept deeply in the swing.*

RECITATION:

*As they approached country:
Pārvati dreamt a good dream
As they approached the town
The fine tender vine dreamt truthful dreams
But now that misfortune had befallen the brothers
She had bad dreams
Now that lovely parrot had illusions had imaginary dreams
Evil dreams, these are what Pārvati the golden tender vine saw now.*

SONG:

*She saw the pavilions for cooking milk, the pavilions there,¹
She saw moss spreading,
She saw it spreading there
She saw the pavilions for cooking ghee, the pavilions there
She saw them growing dark
She saw them growing dark there
An elephant's stall, an elephant's stall there*

¹ This seems to describe a great palace in decay.

*She saw aruku grass,¹ aruku grass growing there, growing there
She saw a horse's stall, a horse's stall there
She saw garbage, garbage collecting there, collecting there.*

Episode 26 ✪

The lovely parrot has illusions. The tender vine had evil illusions. Pārvati became frightened while experiencing these bad dreams and suddenly she called out from her lovely swing:

PĀRVATI: Hey, maids! Run here!

Hearing Pārvati's voice, the maids came running. Seeing her, they said:

MAIDS: What is it, oh, lady? Did you call?

PĀRVATI: Hey, maids! The lovely parrot has had illusions! I have had dreams today like I have never had before! All right. Come! When my brothers were leaving for the Vīramalai mountains, they left five predictive signs. Let's go see them.

As she went and looked at them, this is what she saw:

SONG:

*The mango has rotted there
The jasmine flower has wilted
The coconut has rotted
The sacred oil lamp has gone out
The water in the pot has decreased
The gathered sandalwood paste in the bowl has dried out.*

Seeing this, Pārvati sang the following:

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*It seems that my brothers have died together
Pārvati has come to know of it
It seems that they died honourably
The good woman has come to know of it.*

PĀRVATI: Hey, you! Oh, maids! What shall I do now?

SONG:

*In the Vīramalai forest, in the Vīramalai forest, there itself
In the woods, in the woods, surrounded by a wild river torrent
My brothers have died, they have died they were destroyed there*

¹ This is the Tamil name for Durva grass, *Cynodon dactylon*. The term is a synonym for the sun. This is a very sacred grass for Hindus because it is a symbol of revival, something like the phoenix bird, partly because it can grow anywhere, any time.

*They have joined the feet of Shiva, of Shiva they have joined them there
They died with honour, with honour they died there
My brothers have arrived in Vishnu's heaven they have arrived there.*

Parrot: Hey, you. Oh, maids! The brightness ended in a swoon in the Vīramalai mountains. My brothers died together. They have joined the feet of Shiva. Go quickly to my sisters-in-law, the women who have rights. Get and bring the desirable female parrot who came to my elder brother, and the chaste peahen who came to Poṅṅar in marriage.

The maids went immediately to the palace of prosperity and called the sisters-in-law, saying that Pārvati had called them. Hearing this, the wife of Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi looked at the wife of Periyaṅṅacāmi and said:

SISTER-IN-LAW: Elder sister! So many days have passed and no one has ever called us. I don't know for what reason the palace is calling us now! All right, whatever it is, we will go there and return.

The two set out and went to Pārvati.

SISTERS-IN-LAW: Sister-in-law! For what reason have you called us?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:
*Oh, sister-in-law, sisters-in-law,
The goddesses of my brothers, goddesses there
The ones who came to my brothers, have come today
Oh, desirable peahens.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, sisters-in-law! Misfortune has befallen my brothers in the place they went to hunt, oh, ladies! Treachery has befallen them in the place they went to fight. My brothers have died together. They have arrived at Shiva's feet. They died honourably and have gone to Vishnu's heaven. Come! We shall go and see, take them, and having performed the rites, we will return. Come!

Hearing this, the wife of Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi looked at her elder sister and said:

YOUNGER SISTER-IN-LAW: Elder sister! Come! We shall go. What is it to her, that queen? By now the brothers will have killed the boar, divided the meat into portions and be on their way back. She'll fry it and eat it. She is lying to us that they are dead. All right, come! We must not remain here. If the brothers come and see us with her, they will kill us. The villains!

As the two sisters spoke in this quarrelsome way, Pārvati became angry. She looked at them and said:

PĀRVATI: Sisters-in-law This is not the time to speak jokingly. My brothers lie dead in the Vīramalai forest without aid. Let us go and see, take them, finish the rites and return. Come!

SISTERS-IN-LAW: Lady, Pārvati! Your elder brothers have died and you call us to go to them? What rights have your brothers given us? There is nothing! How can we come? When our brothers married us...

SONG:

*For their hand, for their hand, they gave us fingers, metal fingers instead
The brothers, thinking their honour would be lessened, thinking that
Had fingers made of gold, of gold fingers made
Using trickery, they gave us these fingers gave us these fingers there
They gave us these (false) fingers gave us metal fingers there
Thinking their strength would be lessened,
oh my, thinking it would be lessened
Your brothers made fingers of silver, made fingers there
For the sake of convention, they gave us a finger, oh, lady,
they gave us a metal finger
We only garlanded them, oh, lady, that is all we did
We gave not experienced any other pleasures oh, lady, none at all
We gave our hands as wives, oh, lady, that is all we did
If we experienced any pleasures, oh, lady, we don't know what they were
We only touched our finger extensions made of gold, oh, lady, that is all we did
We, the chaste wives, have not experienced any other pleasures
Oh, lady, we have not seen them.*

SISTERS-IN-LAW: Oh, sister-in-law! Pārvati! Since the day your elder brothers married us, we have been locked like prisoners in the palace of prosperity. We have not seen a single enjoyment. Is there any woman in this world who has suffered like we have? Who is there, who like us has never seen her husband's face? From the day of the wedding itself, we have not seen a single pleasure. When such is the case, why must we come to you?

Soon the two sisters-in-law decided to leave. The wife of Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi looked at her elder and said:

YOUNGER SISTER-IN-LAW: Elder sister, come! We shall leave. Her elder brothers have not died. She is lying. They will be returning any time now. If we are here, then they will kill us. Come. Let's go.

PĀRVATI: Oh, sisters-in-law! You say that my elder brothers have not died? Truthfully! My elder brothers lie dead in the Vīramalai mountains.

PĀRVATI'S SONG:
*Oh, sisters-in-law
Your wedding necklace, your necklace, I saw it fall off
Oh, sisters-in-law, I saw it fall off
The sacred wedding necklace, I saw it fall on the ground, I saw it fall here
My sister-in-law's wedding necklace,
This wedding necklace, I saw it peel off*

*Oh, my, I saw it peel off your neck
And the nose, and the nose jewels too
Oh, my, those jewels too
Breaking and falling off, sister-in-law, I saw that, oh my, I saw that
The golden chain on your nose jewel, the golden chain there
I saw it hanging lose my sister-in-law, I saw that
The string of pearls, my sister-in-law, the string of pearls
I saw it break and the pearls scatter, oh my, I saw that.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, sisters-in-law! I saw all these unprecedented things! We must go and see, take them, perform the rites and return. Come.

SISTERS-IN-LAW: Oh, sister-in-law! Why do you bother us so? Since we came to this town...

SONG:

*We have a carpenter's spinning wheel
Oh, lady, a spinning wheel
There is cotton from the forest
Oh, lady, there is cotton
There is a blacksmith's spinning wheel
Oh, lady, a spinning wheel
There is cotton from Korāṅkāṭṭu¹
Oh, lady, lady, there is cotton.*

SISTERS-IN-LAW: Oh, sister-in-law! If your brothers have died, let it be. Whatever happens, fine! We will not come! At the time of death, we will tear off the wedding necklace and throw it away. If you want, you go and see. We cannot come.

Having spoken, the two returned to their own home, known as the palace of prosperity. After they had left, the fine tender vine, the chaste one, the all-knowing one, turned to the maids and said:

PĀRVATI: Hey, you! Oh, maids! Call the twelve guards of our palace.

The maids went and called the twelve guards and returned.

PĀRVATI: Men. Oh, guards! Oh, maids. All of you, take what wealth you like and each of you go home.

Immediately the guards and the maids each took what wealth they could and went home.

After everyone had left, Pārvati thought of the gods' council chamber, of Vishnu, and of Lord Akṣi.² "If it is true that I was born of a boon, then fire must

seize and burn our palace, oh, Vishnu!" As she thought of Vishnu, the palace suddenly caught fire and burned. Then she thought of Lord Varuna.¹ It rained, and the fire was put out. Then she went and stood before the palace of prosperity where her sisters-in-law were. She burnt this with fire and then had Lord Varuna bring rain and put the fire out. Then she sat down with her legs crossed and collected her sisters-in-law's bones in her lap. Then she went to the banks of the Benares River. She put the bones of her sisters-in-law in the river there. Then Pārvati, having washed her head three times in that river, went to a hillock and sat down facing north with one leg extended and the other one bent. She took a handful of river sand in her hand and thought of the gods' council chamber and of Vishnu once more.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Vishnu. If it is true that I was born of a god's boon, then this handful of sand must turn to cooked rice, oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam!

As Pārvati thought of Vishnu, the river sand in her hand turned directly into cooked rice. Pārvati placed the rice on top of the hillock and, having offered food to a thousand crows, she correctly finished the funeral rites for her sisters-in-law. Then, having descended into the Benares River and bathed, she thought to herself: "Let me go to my brothers." Trying her sari tightly and letting loose the thousand strands of her hair, Pārvati set out.

SONG:

*The one born with them is searching for the brothers
The beautiful parrot, the wretched one, is coming
Searching for Poṅṅar, the brother
The one born as a tender vine is coming
The path where fine palanquins, fine palanquins had passed
The path of the brothers is not hidden
The path where the palanquins had passed
That path was not hidden from me
I search for the path that Ciṅṅanna took
I shall protect my lost brothers
I shall search for the place you rest
I shall search for the place that you Ciṅṅanna moved about.*

As Pārvati came searching for her brothers in the forest, the thorn bushes caught her sari and tore it.

SONG (in the metre of a funeral dirge):
*Oh, brothers, young ones born with me
My hair hangs in tangles
I am coming in search of you, my siblings
Oh, brothers, the chaste one is coming.*

¹ A fallow ground.

² The god of fire. His name is spelled Agni in Sanskrit.

¹ God of rain.

ANOTHER SONG:
*I am thirsty for good water
 I go with my tongue parched
 I am thirsty for cool water
 My teeth are dry
 For my thirst not even a spoonful
 Of water is available, oh, brothers!*

As Pārvati became thirsty, she stood facing north and thought of Vishnu.

PĀRVATI: If it is true that I was born in the gods' council chamber, then for my thirst let there be a needle-like flash of lightning and some clouds, and let there be a measure of rain enough to fill this small depression with a mouthful of water, oh, Lord of Conjeepuram!

While praying and thinking of Vishnu, the god, in his grace, immediately arranged for a measure of rainfall, and a small depression near her filled with water. Pārvati became happy. She sat down with her legs crossed and drank, quenching her thirst. And then setting off once more, she entered the Matukkarai forest.

Long ago, when Tāmarai was on her way to obtain the boon of bearing children, a cobra had come to her in the cobra forest and begged Pārvati's mother, saying: "Oh, Tāmarai! When you obtain a boon for yourself, also obtain the boon of a child for me." Now that cobra's child was living in the Matukkarai forest. Seeing a human, it thought to itself: "Ah ha! Who is in my forest? A woman is coming!" And this Cobra King decided to approach Pārvati.

SONG:
*A small cobra, my Lord
 A little one, see it coming, my Lord
 It is furious, my Lord, gritting its teeth
 See, it is coming along that very path, my Lord.*

The Cobra King approached Pārvati and looked at her angrily. Thinking that she must be a goddess, he said:

COBRA: Oh, princess! Who are you? What is the reason that you must come into my forest crying! What town are you from? Speak up!

PĀRVATI: Oh, Cobra King! I am from the Land Where the Kāveri Flows.

COBRA: All right. Good. Who are you, daughter of the Land Where the Kāveri Flows?

PĀRVATI: My father's name is Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar. My mother's name is Tāmarai Kavunṭācci. My two elder brothers went to war against a boar in the Vīramalai mountains and have died there. I am going to look for them.

COBRA: Oh, princess! Good! When your mother went to obtain the boon of a child, my mother came begging and asked that she obtain the boon of a child for her. When she had obtained that boon and returned and told my mother about it,

my mother said, "If there is ever a time when the sons you desire have been born, and if they should go to fight a boar and die, my child will spread its hood over your daughter Taṅkā! When she sets off to the Vīramalai forest to search for her brothers, my child will hold its hood as an umbrella over her. He will lead Pārvati forward carefully so that the sun will not strike her and the rain will not wet her down. My child will leave Pārvati at the place where Arukkaṅṭi performs her regular penance." This is what my mother said to your mother. Therefore, it is my duty to take you and leave you there. Come with me, oh, lady!

The Cobra King placed his hood over Pārvati, holding it wide open above her head, keeping the sun from striking her and the rain from wetting her. Now the two of them set out together.

SONG:
*Crossing the forest of Matukkarai, my Lord
 The cobra is coming, my Lord
 Searching for the Nākamalai mountains, my Lord
 The cobra is coming, my God
 The hissing cobra, my God
 See its fast slithering, my Lord.*

The Cobra King arrived in the Nākamalai mountains and set Pārvati down in the neighbourhood of the sun maiden Arukkaṅṭi's pillar of penance.

COBRA: Oh, lady Pārvati! Here we are! This is the pillar where Arukkaṅṭi is doing penance. If you go and worship her, she will take you and leave you with your brothers.

Having said this, the cobra took leave from Taṅkā! and returned to his forest. At this time, while lying on the milk sea, Vishnu had seen all this and thought to himself: "Ah ha! Pārvati is searching for her brothers. She has arrived at Arukkaṅṭi's pillar of penance in the cobra forest. I must go immediately and obtain a boon for her so that she can re-awaken her brothers and speak with them." He mounted his Garuda vehicle and set off.

SONG:
*Leaving the milk sea, my Lord
 Vishnu is flying, my Lord
 Searching for the Nākamalai mountains, my Lord
 He is coming, Vishnu is coming, my Lord.*

Vishnu arrived in the Nākamalai mountains and dismounted near the neighbourhood of the sun maid's pillar of penance.

VISHNU: Oh, lady, oh, Arukkaṅṭi! Leaving your place of penance descend for a while¹ and come!

¹ For three nāṅṅikais, periods of twenty-four minutes each.

Hearing this, Arukkaṅṭi climbed down, came close and worshipped Vishnu.

ARUKKAṅṬI: Oh, Lord! For what reason did you ask me to climb down and come. What blunder have I committed?

VISHNU: Oh, lady, Arukkaṅṭi! This lady is a chaste woman, just as you are. Her elder brothers went to war against a boar in the Vīramalai mountains and died there. Now she has come searching for them. Therefore, I will try to obtain a boon from Shiva to re-awaken her brothers for a while so that she can speak with them. For this purpose, leave your place of penance for an hour. Let her climb the pillar.

ARUKKAṅṬI: Lord, good! She may do as you say.

VISHNU: Lady, oh, Pārvati! When you climb this pillar of penance, think of Shiva and be penitent.

PĀRVATI: Lord. Good!

Pārvati now climbed the pillar of penance, stretched out her two hands and began her penance. At the same time, Vishnu thought to himself: "I must go and tell Shiva and obtain a boon for Pārvati." He turned to face the gods' council chamber and set out.¹

SONG:

*Vishnu is leaving the cobra forest
He is flying to the world of the gods
Searching for the everlasting abode of Shiva
Harirāmā is coming, there
To be in the presence of Shiva
My Perumāl is coming*

Shiva, seeing Vishnu approach, looked at him, welcomed him and gave him a seat.

SHIVA: Oh, brother-in-law, oh, extensive one! For what reason have you come to Kailāsa?²

VISHNU: Oh, brother-in-law! The brothers have died in the Vīramalai mountains. Their sister Pārvati is crying. She is now doing penance in the Nākamalai mountains to obtain a boon from you to re-awaken them for a short while so she can talk to them. Therefore, in your abundant grace, give her the boon that her brothers will awaken and speak. Afterwards we shall take away their lives.

SHIVA: Oh, brother-in-law. Good! I will give her such a boon. Leave in happiness and come again!

Vishnu immediately took leave of Shiva, arrived in the Nākamalai mountains and went to Arukkaṅṭi's place of penance.

VISHNU: Oh, lady, Pārvati! Now you may climb down. Having gone to the bank of the Kasi river and bathed, and if you then think of Shiva, a golden wand will descend from the heavens. Then, having awakened your brothers and spoken with them, send the golden wand back to heaven.

Having spoken, Vishnu went to the milk sea. After Vishnu had left, Pārvati looked at Arukkaṅṭi and said:

PĀRVATI: Oh, lady, oh, Arukkaṅṭi! Until my brothers have awakened and spoken, I must not become dizzy. I must drink buttermilk to cool my throat. I must drink water to cool my head. Therefore, please give me:

SONG:

*A bowl of cooked rice, of lady
A pot of water
A bowl of cardamom berries
A pot of tender coconut juice.*

"Oh, lady, oh, Mother! You must give all of this to me," she said.

ARUKKAṅṬI: Oh, lady, Pārvati! I will give you all you have asked. But I have not got pots for you to take it in. Go immediately to the village of Vīrappūr and ask a potter there to make you seven tiered pots as one set. Bring these back here, oh, lady!

PĀRVATI: All right, good, oh, Mother.

Pārvati took leave, turned to face Vīrappūr, and set out.

SONG:

*The Nākamalai mountains and the Tōkamalai mountains, my Lord
The mountain hollowed on four sides, my God
In the unrelenting sun, my God
Ignoring the heat, my God
Searching for Vīrappūr, my Lord
The chaste lady walked the path, my Lord
The hot dust blew against her, my Lord
Like holy powder thrown on an idol in worship.*

Pārvati arrived in Vīrappūr and started towards the potter's house. Near his home there was a collection of pots, and clay statues of horses, bulls, and even images of children doing penance. These and other things were all laid out as if there were going to be big Poṅkal¹ festival held soon.

¹ Kailāsa is Shiva's famous mountain-top abode.

¹ A ritual that involves boiling rice in a mixture of water and milk. An important winter solstice festival is named after this ritual.

The Vīrappūr potter was busy working. Pārvati saw the potter and said:

PĀRVATI: Man, oh, potter! My elder brothers have died in the Vīramalai forest. I want to re-awaken them and speak to them. So that I won't become dizzy until after they have awoken and spoken, I must take cooked rice and water with me. Therefore, give me seven tiered pots all fitting together, please.

Hearing this, the potter answered:

POTTER: Oh, princess! I don't have any time now. If you want them in a hurry give me four annas and take a small pot.

PĀRVATI: Man, oh, potter! I have:

SONG:

*Not a single coin my hand, sir
No one to make me a loan
I have lost my country, my town, my home, sir!
Now I have come in need
In this unlucky condition, what shall I do?
Not a single coin in my hand
I have lost my jewels, I have lost my fame
I have lost my husband, I have lost my land, sir
In this unlucky condition, what shall I do?
Not a single coin in my hand, sir
No one to give me a loan.*

PĀRVATI: Oh, man, oh, potter! I am poor. I do not have a single coin. I come to you, begging. Make and give me a set of seven tiered pots, oh, man, please!

POTTER: Oh, woman. Without speaking, go! I have a great deal of work. I cannot do anything now. If you have cash, hand it over, take a small pot and go! If not, leave here without saying anything more.

Pārvati, hearing what the potter said, became angry. She went to the Pilliar temple and thought of the gods' council chamber, and of Vishnu. She began to cry.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Vishnu! If it is true that I was born in the gods' council chamber, let a needle of lightning descend and the clouds spread. Let a huge rain fall and turn to watery mud all the pots and images that the potter has laid out, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

Suddenly the sky was full of black clouds, and with big claps of thunder a huge rain fell. In a short time, all the pots, elephants, horses and images the potter had made and set out in his front yard had turned to watery mud. Seeing all of his pots destroyed, the potter's heart sank.

SONG:

*Good Lord, oh, my God
The potter is crying, crying and lamenting
To a land without trouble, oh, my to that land
Trouble has come,
Oh, my, it has come.*

POTTER: Oh my, oh, Shiva! To a land without disgrace, disgrace has come. Oh my! Some woman or other came and asked me to make a set of tiered pots and give them to her. I said I would not. I think this must be her curse.

Four potters then set out to look for Pārvati. Seeing Pārvati seated at the Pilliar temple, the four men worshipped her:

SONG:

*They are paying obeisance
They are paying obeisance there
They are offering their services to the chaste woman
They are offering them there
They are throwing themselves at her feet
They are offering their services to the chaste girl
They are offering them there.*

Circling around in place, they prostrated themselves before the sun.¹ Coming close, they then raised their hands and paid their respects to the goddess.²

POTTERS: Oh, lady! We did not know that you were holy, any of us! This is why we spoke as we did. It has rained on our countless pots and images and all have been turned to watery mud! You must forgive our mistake, oh, Mother!

PĀRVATI: Oh, men, oh, potters! What can I do about the rain that fell and all that has turned to mud?

A POTTER: Oh, lady! You can do whatever you want by your thoughts alone. You must, by your grace, turn all our pots and images back into what they were before! I will immediately make and give to you the seven tiered pots you asked for.

Having said this, the potters cried. Pārvati's heart softened and she stood facing north and thought of the gods' council chamber.

PĀRVATI: He who rescues those in trouble. Orphan-saver! Parantāmā. Ruler of the earth! This potter's earthen pots, elephants, horses and images, those that are now nothing but mud, you must now restore all these to their former condition, oh, Lord of Conjeevaram!

¹ Referring to Pārvati.

² Also referring to Pārvati.

LAND OF THE GOLDEN RIVER

As she said this and thought of Vishnu, the pots and statues all attained shape and stood as before. The potter became happy. He invited Pārvati to his house, made a set of seven tiered pots, gave them to her and sent her away.

Pārvati accepted the pots and set off.

SONG:

*Crossing Vīrappūr, crossing it
The chaste lady walked the path, walked the path
Leaving the thick forest, leaving the forest
Crossing the great wood of Kaṭṭapollī she is coming
Searching for the Nākamalai mountains, searching for them
The lady is coming, she is coming.*

Pārvati arrived at the place of the sun maiden's penance.

ARUKKAṆṬI: Oh, lady, Oh, Pārvati! Have you brought the tiered pots?

PĀRVATI: I have brought them, oh, maiden!

ARUKKAṆṬI: Good. What do you want? Speak up!

PĀRVATI: Oh, lady. I want cooked rice, water, cardamom fruits and tender coconut juice in my seven pots, oh, Mother!

ARUKKAṆṬI: Okay. Let it be. I shall transform the seven pots, creating all that. Furthermore, you don't know the place where your brothers died. I will send my bird vehicle to show you the place where your brothers speared the boar. You can proceed to look for you brothers from there.

Having spoken, she called her bird vehicle similar to a goose:

ARUKKAṆṬI: Take this woman, and having wrapped her up in your golden wings, take her to the place where her brothers speared the boar, and return.

THE GOOSE: Oh, Mother! Good.

The goose set Pārvati on the middle of her back, covered her with her golden wings, and set out.

SONG:

*The Nākamalai mountains, the Tōkamalai, Tōkamalai mountains
The mountain hollow on four sides, the hollow mountain
Crossing the Tōkamalai mountains, crossing them
Searching for the Vīramalai mountains, searching for them
See the bird vehicle, the bird vehicle coming.*

The goose arrived in the Vīramalai mountains and set Pārvati down at the place where the boar had been carved up.

GOOSE: Oh, princess! This is the place the boar was killed. Your dog Poṅṅācci is standing guard over the meat. She knows the place where your brothers are.

Having said this, the goose took its leave and returned to the Nākamalai mountains. After that, bird vehicle left. Pārvati approached Poṅṅācci.

PĀRVATI: Hey, you! Poṅṅācci! Where are my elder brothers? Where are my brothers, oh, lady?

PĀRVATI'S SONG:

*You, the original liar, Poṅṅācci
You are the one who killed my brother
You are here to announce the news
Having killed the lord
You, the liar, are here.*

POṆṆĀCCI: Oh, lady! They left me here to guard these portions of meat and went off. What shall I do?

PĀRVATI: Oh, Poṅṅācci, we are looking for the place of death.

SONG:

*Lady, show me the way
We are looking for the place of dignity
Go and return with me, the peacock one, oh, lady Poṅṅācci.*

POṆṆĀCCI: Oh, lady! Someone may come and eat this meat. They left me as a guard when they went. How can I leave this meat and come?

PĀRVATI: All right. I shall think of the gods' council chamber and request that until we have left and come back, no one shall come and eat this meat.

Having said this, Pārvati thought of Vishnu. He granted her wish. Then she took Poṅṅācci and set off to look for the place where her brothers had died.

SONG:

*Poṅṅācci is searching for the place of death
With honeyed words she brings her mistress
Poṅṅācci is searching for the place of dignity
Bringing the flower peacock with her, she comes.*

When the two arrived at the rocky hillock near the suma tree, and Pārvati saw her brothers hanging from their swords like tamarind fruits, she quivered and shook as if she had fallen into a flame. She ran forward, she circled, she whirled, she flew about.

SONG:

*With tears, tears like gold
The sunshine of the chaste lady flowed away, flowed away
Tears like pearls flowed down her nose
Tears like coral on that fine tender vine flowed down on all sides.*

Pārvati ran up crying, lifted Periyaṅṅacāmi and placed him in her lap.

SONG:

*Oh, Periyaṅṅacāmi, oh, Lord
Unspeakable sacred countenance, oh, my sacred countenance
Unspeakable mouth, divine one, oh, divine one
Oh, crushed Lord, you have died, oh, my, you have died
In the Vīramalai forest, Lord, in the forest
On the land of the evil ones, oh, brother, on that hand
The thieves' arrow, their discharged arrows
The black hunters¹ won against you, oh, brother, they won
The black hunters' arrows, their arrows there
The hunter's bow won against you, won against you here
The arrow on your breast, oh, brother, that arrow
Everything destroyed, there is red liquid, oh, my, red liquid
The arrow on your shoulder, oh, brother, that arrow
Brushed you, there is red liquid, oh, brother, red liquid.*

Pārvati set Periyaṅṅacāmi down and lifted Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi from his sword, placed him in her lap and cried.

SONG:

*The hand that held the sacrifice, oh, brother, that hand
The opposing, conquering hand, oh, brother, that hand
The hand that held the sword, oh, brother, that hand
The heavy, victorious hand, oh, brother, that hand
You with the strength of ten elephants, oh, brother, with that strength
Where is that great strength, oh, brother, where is it
You with the strength of eight elephants, oh, brother, with that strength
The younger prince, oh, brother, oh, younger prince
Tying rice in a cloth, oh, brother, oh, younger prince
Without forgetting you raised a girl, oh, brother, you raised a girl
Saying she was just right for a lap, oh, brother, saying she was just right
Wherever you wandered, oh, brother, you wandered
You tied rice in a palm leaf, oh, brother, you tied rice
Without wastage, you raised a girl, oh, brother, you raised a girl
Saying she was the size of a bird's feather, oh, brother saying she was just right
You prospered in the world, oh, brother, you prospered.*

¹ The Veṅṅuvās.

Pārvati placed Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi in her lap, weeping and lamenting. Then she laid both brothers on the rocky outcropping with their heads to the west and their feet stretching east. She took Cāmpukā and laid him out on the rock in the same way. The Pārvati went to the Vāṅi river, washed her head, returned to the hillock and sat down with her legs crossed, facing north.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Shiva! Your blessed arrow must come to me, so that I can revive my brothers and speak with them for a while.¹ I must have your boon to revive them. I must have the boon to use the golden thread with the golden needle.²

As Pārvati thought of Shiva and made these requests, Shiva saw her. He immediately took the golden wand and sent it off to go to Pārvati's hand. The golden wand arrived on earth and went and alighted in the hand of the chaste Pārvati in the Vīramalai mountains. Pārvati took the wand, brought a small pot of water and went to the suma tree. She sat down near her brothers and sprinkled them with the holy water. Then she sat near their heads, facing north, and thought of the gods' council chamber and of Vishnu.

SONG:

*Oh, elder brothers, for you
There is rice in a pot, brothers, in a pot
Water in a vessel, brothers, in a vessel
Cardamom fruits in a pot, brother, in a pot
Tender coconut juice in a vessel, brother, in a vessel
Oh, brother, I have whey for your thirst
I have water to cool your head
Oh, brother, to have someone reborn³ I have come
To the side of the divine one, oh, brother, to his side
To obtain a boon to awake one from death, I have come
Oh, brother, to obtain such a thing I have come
To Shiva's side, oh, brother, to Shiva's side.*

After crying like this, Pārvati got up and touched all three, her two brothers and Cāmpukā, with her golden wand. Then she thought to herself: "If Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi gets up, he will cut me up with his sword." So Pārvati ran and hid behind the suma tree. After a short while, the hands and feet of the two lords moved and life came to their eyes. Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi suddenly got up and

¹ Actually, three nāḷḷikais of twenty-four minutes each.

² The needle seems to be a metaphor for the body and the thread for its life.

³ During their short lives, these twin heroes have behaved more like Kshatriya warriors than farmers (who are Shudras), even putting on a chest thread before they enter into this story's closing sequence of major battles. Because of their likely aspiration to raise their Varna status, their sister may here possibly be bringing them back to life, if ever so briefly, as a means of marking their new status as "twice-born" men. The heroes' pride in their fine horses supports this idea. Their father and grandfather never raised, or rode, horses.

while looking around he saw a little of the hidden Pārvati showing from behind that suma tree.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Who is here? A girl has come!

SONG:
*The sword, the sword swings
See the lightning, lightning
Quickly, quickly it swings
See the lightning, the lightning in front, my Lord.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI swung his sword in anger. As he swung, Pārvati saw the speed of the approaching blade, thought of the gods' council chamber, and made sure it flew by a little high and without stopping. The speed of the sword broke open a stone and only then did it stop. Pārvati came running and joined her brother. The two lords took Pārvati's hand, and kissed her jewel-like face. They hugged her and covered her in kisses.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! Oh, Pārvati! Searching for us, how did you find the path and come to the Vīramalai mountains?

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! All the predictive signs you left when you came changed. Then because you had died in the Vīramalai mountains I went to my sisters-in-law and called them saying, "Let us go, see the brothers, take them, perform the rites and return." They said, "We cannot come. If you wish, you go and search for your brothers." They refused to come. Then I burnt them along with their palace and performed their funeral rites. As I came searching for you and entered the Matukkarai forest, I was found by the Cobra King. He held his hood over me so that the sun could not strike me. He brought me to the place in the Nākamalai mountains where the sun maiden does penance and left me there. Then Lord Vishnu arrived and told the sun maiden to let me use her pillar. Then he told me he would try help me obtain a boon from Shiva so that I could re-awaken you both and talk to you for a short while. I did penance at that time, obtained the boon, climbed down and asked the sun maiden for cooked rice and water for my hunger. The maiden gave that to me, called her bird vehicle and told it to take me to the Vīramalai mountains and leave me there. The bird vehicle immediately took me to the place where the boar had been speared. There I saw Poṅṅācci and brought her with me to search for the place where you died.

Oh, brothers! I have now given you life and re-awakened you, isn't it so? Now come. Let us go home together.

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, Taṅkā! It is said that when a hair falls from the coat of a certain type of deer¹ that it will not live any longer on earth. In the same

way my flawless body has been damaged, my unblemished body has been wounded, it has been struck. It was Vishnu, thinking that we were sixteen years old and that our allotted time was ninety percent finished, who sent the Veṭṭuvā fighters to challenge us. Then, when Cāmpukā came to the Vāṇi river with us and we were impaling ourselves on our swords, Vishnu said this to me:

SONG:
*Having bent the plantain stalk bow
Having fastened the jasmine flower arrow
Having bent the maize stalk bow
Having strung the flower arrow
I, the notorious Vishnu,
Shot the arrow
My arrow came to Ciṅṇa
And took away his sacred thread.*

CIṆṆAṆṆACĀMI: Oh, lady, oh, Taṅkā. After the sacred thread was removed, I thought I must not remain alive any longer. I sank the sword into the rock, fell on it, and gave up my life, oh, Taṅkā!

If a dead man re-awakens, he does not take a kingdom. If an honourable man awakens, he does not take the world. If I remain the ruler of this country, how will those who come afterwards rule? Therefore, from now on the Vīramalai mountains will be our funeral land. Oh, princess! Perform all the necessary rites for us right here.

PĀRVATI: Oh, elder brother! If you remain here in the Vīramalai mountains, no one will come to perform your pūjā because there are jungle elephants and other animals here. Therefore, I will build two pavilions for you in Vīrappūr and place you there. Come!¹

Pārvati took her two brothers, plus Cāmpukā and Poṅṅācci, and a funeral procession went to Vīrappūr. Arriving there, Pārvati thought of the gods' council chamber and of Vishnu.

PĀRVATI: Oh, Vishnu! With your grace two pavilions for my brothers must appear, oh, Lord of Conjeeपुरam!

Vishnu, in his grace, created two beautiful pavilions. Then Pārvati thought of Vishnu. "A funeral cart is needed for my brothers," she said. At that moment, a funeral chariot was created. Then Pārvati put her brothers on the cart and began a procession around the town. All of a sudden, a deadly clap fell, as if

¹ It seems that the two men are believed to have actually slipped back into death at this place of their deaths, as they had requested, and that their spirits collected by Vishnu at that point for return to Lord Shiva. The procession to Vīrappūr would then have been of their bodies lying on palanquins. Those would have been the same bodies that were then paraded around the streets there.

¹ The Kāveri deer, said to die when it loses even one hair from its lovely coat.

the whole of the heavens had shaken. At that very time, a Veṭṭuvā jumped, fell down there, and died.¹ Then the chariot returned from the procession around the town. After it stopped, Pārvati brought her two brothers, put Periyaṅṅacāmi in the pavilion on the right side, facing east, and Ciṅṅaṅṅacāmi, the angry one, in the southern pavilion, also facing east.² So that no one could perform pūjā while standing directly in front of him, a huge stone was placed there. Thus, the custom began that pūjā must be done for him while standing on the other side of that stone. Meanwhile, Cāmpukā and Poṅṅācci were placed in the same shrine facing west. Cāmpukā's drum and horn were put on his shoulder and also set to face west. Pārvati then thought of Yeman as she performed the first pūjā in her brothers' names.

SONG:

*The bell she rings goes "kiṇi, kiṇi"
She sprinkles water upwards from a pot below
There are offerings of milk, offerings of honey
There are offerings of rosewater, offerings of wood-apple
See her make the eighteen proper offerings
See her ring a bell that goes "kiṇi, kiṇi"
She sprinkles water upwards from a pot below.*

In this way, Pārvati finished the god's pūjā, the pūjā for the family deity, and the fifty-eight lingam pūjā for her brothers.

Then Shiva saw this and thought, "Oh, Pārvati! She has finished all the business matters for her brothers. Now she must be brought to the gods' council chamber." So he sent a flowered palanquin to earth. When the palanquin touched down, Pārvati climbed in and left for the abode of the gods.

(End of the Story)

The Concluding Blessing

Victory for Sri Rāmacantiran¹
Prosperity for Coman² of the sun dynasty
Victory for Sri Rāmacantiran
Prosperity and long life for Rāma
He who is favoured by the god of love³
He, the well-decorated Lord⁴
Long live Iraru Rāman⁵
Prosperity for Coman of the sun dynasty
Victory for Sri Rāmacantiran
Prosperity for Coman for the sun dynasty
Those who read the story of the farmer Kuṅṅuṭaiyā Kavunṭar,
Those who teach it, and those who hear it,
Let them be eternal, like the golden hall at Chidambaram, and
Like the gods' council chamber itself
Whatever the country and time, let them reign,
Like an undiminishing milk well,
Like a little river that never dries up,
Like a banyan tree that grows and multiplies itself
They shall be firm, like the well-rooted aruku grass,
While their relatives prosper and surround them,
Like clumps of bamboo.

1 There is a folk belief that one Veṭṭuvā must die each year when the chariot or cart of the brothers is pulled around the temple during the annual festival held there. There are many Veṭṭuvās in this area, however, and it is likely that they have a different set of beliefs regarding who should be honoured and what happens on this festival day.

2 Note that this ending is very reminiscent of the ascent to heaven of Kannaki, the heroine in South India's classic epic, the *Silappadikāram*. It is very unusual for a female to perform a funeral ceremony, but the Dharmashastras do sanction it when no close male relative exists.

1 Name for Rāma, hero of the *Rāmāyana*.

2 A name for Rāma, a form of Vishnu.

3 Kāma or Manmathan, the god of love.

4 Mannu Parantaram, another epithet for Rāma.

5 Rāma of the twelve? Another name for Rāma.

GLOSSARY

- Akālīkai** – A girl in the Rāmāyana who was turned into stone. This is a reference to Ahalyā, wife of the sage Gautama Maharishi.
- Akṣi** – The god of fire, spelled *Agni* in Sanskrit.
- Alamēlu** – A maid's name.
- Āḷattūrpaṭṭaṇam** – A hamlet in the heroes' area.
- Aṇiyappūr** – A town near the edge of the heroes' land area. Its residents are on good terms with the heroes' family.
- anna** – Monetary payment for work. Nearly always payment was in pearls, grain, or other commodities.
- Aṇṇaṇmār Cāmi Katai** – The name used by many speakers to refer to this story in Tamil. It is also called the Poṇṇar Caṅkar Katai.
- Appayyā** – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
- Ariyanācci** – Wife of Kōḷattā and leading lady of the first generation in this story.
- artisans** – An important group of local residents practising a variety of crafts. Not necessarily a single caste category.
- Arukkaṇṭi** – The sun maiden who obtains magical substances for the heroine Taṅkāḷ.
- ashes** – See sacred ash.
- assembly** – The council of the three Chola kings.
- Asvattāman** – The son of Drōṇā in the Mahābhārata.
- Asvins** – The twin brothers who pull the sun's chariot in very early Hindu texts.
- Āṭi** – The Tamil month of July-August).
- Āṭisēshan** – A huge mythical cobra, a serpent king, that lives deep under the earth.
- Bāla mountain** – Vishnu's heaven, a place where he likes to rest.
- barber** – A caste that has specialized ritual responsibilities at the time of a wedding.
- betel nut** – Also called areca nut, a popular post-meal chewing treat.
- Benares riverbank** – A reference to the Kāveri River, a southern river that is equivalent for ritual purposes to the Ganges in northern India. There is a folk belief that they are connected underground and are one. Benares is currently called Varanasi.

- black** – A colour representing power but also danger and the unknown.
- blessings** – Often the way a god greets a devotee.
- boar** – See Kompaṇ, the Veṭṭuvā princess's pet.
- boon** – A gift from a god.
- boundary** – A line separating parcels of land.
- Brahmin** – A caste term referencing a community of high-status priests.
- Brahma** – A great god, one of the famous trio of gods referred to as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.
- Būdevi** – Vishnu's second wife.
- calakai** – A measure of land (before the survey and settlement was introduced) based on the quantity of paddy seed required to sow it, which varied with the quality of the land. and the variations of local seed measure. See *also* vaḷḷam.
- Cāmpukā** – Also Cāmpukaṇ, the twin heroes' key assistant, sometimes addressed as their First Minister.
- Caṅkar** – A key hero in the third generation of the story. He is also known as Caṅka, Ciṅṅa, Ciṅṅāṇ, Ciṅṅacāmi, Ciṅṅaṇṇacāmi, and Ciṅṅayyā. He is almost always with his twin brother, Poṇṇar, and is a sister to his triplet Taṅkāḷ.
- Caṅkuvaṭam** – An imaginary place.
- caste** – A general term designating a social category of related individuals, usually linked to an occupation whose members generally marry within their social group (are endogamous). Caste often carries overtones referring to relative local rank or status.
- Cellāttā** – The goddess of Poṇṇivaḷa Nāḍu. She is a form of the great goddess Pārvati.
- Ceṅkamalam** – A common name for maid.
- Ceṭṭiyār** – The term used for a major merchant caste.
- Chera** – One of the famous lines of kings in medieval Tamil Nadu.
- Chola** – One of the famous lines of kings in medieval Tamil Nadu, the one featured in this story.
- Cilukkāmpuliyūr** – A large hamlet, referred to as a "town" located in the heroes' land area.
- Ciṅṅacāmi** – An alternate name for Caṅkar, the story's key hero in the third generation. See *also* Caṅkar. Also, the name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers who is a brother of Kōḷattā.
- Ciṅṅappaṇṇivaḷa Nāḍu** – A hamlet in the heroes' area.
- Civakkoḷuntā** – The name of one of Kuṇṇuṭaiyā's uncles, his mother's brother and at the same time, Tāmarai's much elder brother who serves as her "father".
- Cittirapputtirā** – Shiva's record-keeper.
- Civamaṇi** – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
- Conjeepuram** – a name for Vishnu.
- Cūḷuntamalai** – The name of a specific hilly area.

council chamber – Lord Shiva’s assembly hall located in Kailasa, high in the Himalayas, where he conducts all his official business.

conch – The shell of a large marine mollusk, used as a ritual horn and associated with several gods, especially with Vishnu. A right-spiralled conch is considered especially auspicious.

courtship – The courtship of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and Tāmarai.

crore – A number meaning ten million.

cross-cousins – The descendants of a brother and sister in the previous generation. They are potential marriage partners if they are of opposite gender. If the two are of the same gender, there is a bond of friendship and obligation to support. For example, the mother’s brother is especially supportive of the sister’s son.

curds – Unpasteurized country-style yogurt.

Drōṇāccāri – Sometimes called simply Drōṇā. A key figure in the Mahābhārata.

Erucaṅampālayam – The name of the village where the lead singer of this legend, E. C. Rāmacāmi, resided.

fly – An insect form sometimes used as a disguise by Vishnu.

Friday – An auspicious day for rituals and for worship of the gods.

Garuda – Vishnu’s flying vehicle or mount, a large, mythical, eagle-like bird.

generations – The epic is the story of three generations, which are indicated in the index.

1st (1G) – Kōḷattā and his wife Ariyanācci

2nd (2G) – Kuṅṅuṭaiyā and his wife Tāmarai

3rd (3G) – Poṅṅar and Caṅkar and their sister Taṅkāḷ

German iron – a type of iron deemed superior to Veṭṭuvā-made iron.

ghee – Clarified butter.

Gilgamesh – A famous epic from ancient Sumeria.

gong – A small, hand-held percussion instrument carried by religious mendicants.

Harirāmā – A name for Lord Vishnu in his reincarnation as Rāma.

Himalayas – Mountains located in India’s far north, associated with the gods, especially with Shiva.

Īswara – A name for Lord Shiva.

Īswari – A name for Lord Shiva’s wife, Pārvati.

Kāci – A name for Benares.

Kāci Poṅṅampalam – Name of a place in Benares where devotees do penance. Here the term refers to a place on Tāmarai’s path as she travels towards Shiva’s council chambers that bears the name of this original location.

Kailāsa – Shiva’s abode high in the Himalayas.

Kaikeyī – Dasaratha’s wife in the Mahābhārata.

Kāḷi – A great Hindu goddess, a fierce form of Pārvati. Her forest form in this story is named Karukāḷi, which means the black Kāḷi.

Kāma – Hindu god of human love or desire, known as Manmatan in Tamil.

kaṅṅi – A young unmarried woman.

Kaṅṅimār – A set of seven sister goddesses who are said to represent the Pleiades constellation, called the Krittika in Tamil. Taṅkāḷ is the youngest of the seven, sent to earth by Shiva, where she becomes the heroine of the story in the third generation.

Kanyākumari – The southernmost tip of India.

kārām pacu – A name for the cows that belong to the god Indra, said to have black teats and black ears.

karumāti – A ceremony performed on the sixteenth day of a funeral by members of the heroes’ community.

Kāveri – One of the great rivers of South India, the one that flows through the heroes’ territory, Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu.

Karukāḷiyammaṅ – Literally the “black Kāḷi,” an extra fierce form of Kāḷi.

kārttikai – The Tamil month of November – December.

Kaṭṭabomaṅ – Name of the hero in another important Tamil legend.

Kaṭṭapoli – The name of a particular forest.

kaṭuku – A specific type of paddy.

Kavuṅṅar – Name denoting the largest farming caste in the area, the caste to which the heroes’ lineage belongs. The female version of this noun is Kavuṅṅācci.

kiṅi – The sound of a small bell being rung during a ritual.

King – A term of respect used for several different characters at various points in the story.

kīrai – A small black seed.

kiṭu – The sound of a horse galloping.

Kōḷattā – Name of the clan founder and first ancestor of the heroes’ family lineage (first generation). The name may be linked to the word kōḷ, meaning strength or power, but this is just a guess.

Koḷḷiṭam – A tributary of the Kāveri River.

Kompaṅ – Also called Kompā, name of the wild boar who is a pet of the Veṭṭuvās.

Koṅku – The name for a specific region of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. This term is often spelled Kongu, especially by English writers, but the correct Tamil spelling is Koṅku and requires the extension “nāḍu” meaning area or region. The Kongu area is a larger geographic locale encompassing the specific region named in this story as Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu.

Kopāla – A name for Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna.

kōrai – A grass with white flowers.

Koraṅkāṭṭu – A dry, unirrigated, and unploughed area.

Koṅṅavai – An ancient Tamil goddess mentioned in the earliest body Tamil literature. Taṅkāḷ is compared to her near the end of the story.

Krittika – The name of the Pleiades star cluster, a key constellation that heads the Tamil list of named star groupings.

Krishna – A form of the great god Vishnu.

Kuṅṅuṭaiyā – Son of Kōḷattā and a key figure in the second generation.

Kūntappūr – An unidentified place, possibly fictitious.
Kūṇi – A nurse who advised Dasaratha's wife Kaikeyī.
Kuppi – The midwife. Also a general name for a maid or female servant.
Kuṛavar – The name of a community of small game hunters and basket weavers, usually itinerant, sometimes called gypsies.
Kuṭumpaṇ – Name of a local, non-Brahmin priest of the Paṇṭāram caste who serves the heroes' family. His first name is Tēvēntira.
Land of Abundance – In Tamil, Veḷḷivaḷa Nāḍu. The land in which the goddess Pārvati created the oringal nine brothers. The name translates as "land of silver."
Land of Prosperity – In Tamil, Taṅkavaḷa Nāḍu, the area where the eight younger brothers of Kōḷattā ended up. Taṅkam is an alternate term for gold, the implication being that this area is a part of the larger area known as Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, or "land of gold."
Land Where the Kāveri Flows – In Tamil, Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, or "land of gold," the area where the majority of the story takes place. It has two parts, Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu proper, where the eldest brother Kōḷattā lived, and Taṅkavaḷa Nāḍu, an area where the soil was less rich that was allocated to his eight younger siblings.
lineage brothers – Also known as cousin brothers. Descendants through the male line from a single male ancestor. They are often rivals. For contrast, see cross-cousins.
Lizard Stone Hill – Also called Calves' Teat Hill or Oñciṛukkanuvāy Hill.
Maccakkōr – The name of a shepherd.
Mahābhārata – The name of a very famous and ancient Indian epic. The introduction discusses some similarities between it and this epic.
māmaṇ – A term for a mother's brother.
Manmatan – The god of love, also known as Kāma elsewhere in India.
Māntappūr – An unidentified place, possible fictitious.
Marāṭta – A term referencing the Indian state of Maharashtra and the Marāṭṭi language spoken there.
marakkal – A small measure of land, measured by how much paddy seed that specific area requires.
margosa – An important tree often given a "marriage" ritual that by local custom unites it with an adjacent pēpal tree.
Marikkoḷūntā – The name of one of Kuṅṅuṭaiyā's uncles, his mother's brother and at the same time, one of Tāmari's two much elder brothers who serve as "fathers" to her.
Matukkarai forest – A forest area adjacent to the Veṭṭuvā forest area.
Maturavaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam – An area of the heroes' lands that is very productive and well irrigated.
Mayavar – Also known as Māyaṇ. Tamil names for the god Vishnu.
measure – A specific amount of grain calculated using a vessel of a specific size, normally a vaḷḷam.
midwife – Here called Kuppi, a broad term for a maid.

mendicant – A beggar, in this story a religious devotee asking for alms.
miḷaku – The name of a specific type of paddy.
milk sea – A mythical place, high in the sky, where Vishnu rests between his many journeys.
milk tree – See pāccāṇ.
mother's brother – A key relative who is supposed to be helpful to all his sisters' children.
Mūppi – A maid's name.
Muttucāmi – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
Nācci – A woman's name.
Nākamalai – The name of a mountain located in the Veṭṭuvā's area.
Nākēntiran – A king of the cobra world.
nāḷḷikai – A period of about twenty-four minutes, one-sixtieth of twenty-four hours.
naming ceremony – A ritual where a young child is given a name.
nāṇal – A grass-type of flower with a white tip.
Nārāyaṇa – A name for Vishnu.
Nattakkāḍu – A part of the heroes' land that contains their cattle fold.
neriñci – A type of large thorn.
Nilā – The name of Caṅkar's horse. The name means this horse is blue, or more likely blue-black.
omen – A sign that predicts a future event.
Oñciṛukkanuvāy – Calf Teat's Hill or Lizard Stone Hill.
Paccittā – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
pāccāṇ – A tree with a milky sap, *Wrightia tinctoria*, also known as the pālā or "milk" tree. Branches taken from this tree are used in various rituals.
Paḷanicāmi – The name of one of the nine pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
palanquin – A large, covered box, set atop two horizontal poles and carried by two or four bearers. In medieval India, a palanquin was a common way for important people to travel.
Pañcakalyāṇi – The name of Poṅṅar's horse. The name means that its feet and face are white.
Paṇḍava – Key lineage of heroes in the Mahābhārata.
pañkāḷi – A term meaning brother or clansman.
Paṇṭāram – The name of a caste of non-Brahmin priests who serve the heroes' family and perform rituals for them.
Paṇṭarīpuram – A place where Vishnu lives and rules.
Paṛaiyā – Also Paṛaiyaṇ. These two terms reference a low status caste group, previously classified as untouchable. This is, and has always been, a pejorative term. However, nowadays it has become a particularly offensive term and it should be avoided, whereas in the past it was tolerated, commonplace and a part of everyday discourse. This is also the caste name for Shankar and Poṅṅar's First Minister.

Parantāmā – A tekrm of praise used when referencing Vishnu.
parrot – A name or descriptor for the heroine. She is also nicknamed peahen or tender vine.
Pārvati – Goddess, wife of Shiva, sister of Vishnu. Also, a name of endearment used by the twin brothers for their sister Taṅkāḷ.
paṭi – A measure equal to about two heaping cupfuls.
Pattippaṭarntamalai – The name of a mountain.
Pavaḷattā – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
penance – Reparation or self-punishment.
pēpal – An important tree often given a “marriage” ritual that by local custom unites it with an adjacent margosa tree. It is known in Tamil as araca maram, and is the *Ficus religiosa* tree.
Periyaṅṅacāmi – Often known as Poṅṅar, he is one of the lead heroes in the third generation of the story. His other names include Poṅṅayyā, Poṅṅampalam, Periyacāmi, Periya, and Periyaṅṅaṅ. He is the twin brother of Caṅkar, and is a sister to his triplet Taṅkāḷ.
Perumāḷ – A name for Vishnu.
Pilliar – An important god, son of Shiva, who is worshipped everywhere in India, especially before one starts something new. Elsewhere, this god is known as Ganesh or Ganapati and Vinayakar.
Pongal – A special ritual involving the boiling of milk, performed on many occasions that celebrate the newness of something such as a harvest, the winter solstice, the blessing of a new house, or the advent of a new year. Spelled as Poṅkaḷ in Tamil.
Poṅṅar – An alternate name for Periyaṅṅacāmi, one of the twin heroes of the third generation. *See also* Periyaṅṅacāmi.
Poṅṅācci – This name translates as “little golden one.” Poṅṅācci is a tiny dog who is the pet of the heroine Taṅkāḷ, sister to the story’s twin brothers in the third generation.
Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu – In Tamil, “land of gold,” or more poetically, “land where the (golden river) Kāveri flows.
Poṅiyappūr – A hamlet in the heroes’ area.
pūjā – A set of ritual offerings presented to a god or, sometimes, a special object that is the focus of honour during a particular event.
puṅṅiyārccaṅai – A ritual of purification that is normally performed for a newborn child as well as on other occasions.
Rama – A reincarnation of Vishnu.
Rāmāyana – The name of a very famous and ancient Indian epic.
rāri, rāri, rārārō – Standard words used when singing a lullaby.
rāttal – A measurement of weight, roughly two pounds, but it varies from place to place.
Rāvana – The name of Lord Rāma’s adversary in the *Rāmāyana*.
red – A colour Vāḷavaṅḍi r associated with blood and with life itself.

revenue village – An administrative unit that normally contains several dozen hamlets.
rightful girl – Urimāy pen, a man’s cross cousin, usually his mother’s brother’s daughter; a woman he can claim he has a “right” to marry. From a woman’s perspective, the rightful groom is her father’s sister’s son.
ring – A signet ring, a special piece of jewellery worn by a king.
sampa paddy – Traditional rice variety, also known as samba. Other varieties include katuku sampa and milaku.
Shiva – A great god, husband of Pārvati and also immaculate “father” of the triplets Poṅṅar, Caṅkar and Taṅkāḷ.
Sun Maiden – *See* Arukkaṅṅi.
swan – A bird that can also be translated as goose.
swing – The favourite seat in the palace for the third child, born as a triplet-cum-sister to the story’s two key male heroes.
Tāmarai – The wife of Kuṅṅuṅaiyā in the second generation and the “mother” who immaculately conceived the twin heroes of the third generation and also their sister and triplet, Taṅkāḷ.
tank – An irrigation reservoir of any size.
Taṅkāḷ – Also known as Taṅkā. The sister of the twin heroes in the third generation. Taṅkāḷ is their “triplet” as all three were born from the same womb and of the same pregnancy. She is also addressed as Pārvati by her brothers towards the end of the story.
Taṅkavaḷa Nāḍu – In Tamil, “land of gold” (taṅkam), which is one part of the larger Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu, which can be translated as “land of gold,” a larger region referred to by using a different term for gold (poṅṅi). Translated as the Land of Prosperity, it includes the lands assigned to Kōḷattā’s eight brothers, men who eventually become the heroes’ lineage rivals.
taṅ nā nē – Also nan nā nē. The sound of a parrot singing.
Tāṅṅaci Kōmpai – The name of a place in Benares that perhaps means “ascetic’s pillar.”
Tiruvēḷāṅkāḍu – A sacred place not clearly identified.
Tōkamalai – The name of a mountain in the Veṅṅuvā area.
Toppayyā – The name of one of the nine original pioneer farmers, brother of Kōḷattā.
twins – The two male grandchildren, Poṅṅar and Caṅkar, plus their sister Taṅkāḷ, who are born as triplets to the queen of Poṅṅivaḷa Nāḍu. *See also* Vīrataṅkāḷ, the forest princess who mirrors Taṅkāḷ.
tūtuvilām – A plant with very white flowers.
uniting ritual, urimāy *cir* – *See* rightful girl.
Vaikunta – The celestial home of Vishnu.
Vāḷavaṅḍi Nāḍu – The land where the heroes’ in-laws live. It’s not translated, because no clear meaning could be determined for the term, though it might mean “prosperity” in a general agricultural sense. There is an actual place in the northern part of the Kongu region that bears this name.

- vaḷḷam** – A standardized vessel used for measuring grain. One vaḷḷam equals about ten cups. One hard-working man is judged to eat about ten vaḷḷams of grain a month.
- Vāṇi** – The name of a small stream, named after the goddess Saraswati, where the two heroes bathe and wash their swords before taking their own lives.
- Vāṇiyammā** – Name for the goddess Saraswati, married to Lord Brahma.
- Vaṇṭūrāṅkuḷam** – An irrigation reservoir on the heroes' lands, also called Vaṇṭūrāṅkuḷa tank or Vaṇṭūrāṅ tank. This tank lies right at the edge of Poṅṅivaḷa and touches the Veṭṭuvā area where the hunters live.
- vehicle** – An animal of some kind, ridden as a mount by one of the gods.
- Veḷḷāṅkuḷam** – An irrigation reservoir, called a tank, lying on the edge of the heroes' lands that has a sluice gate called the Veṅkala or Veṅkalamata sluice. Also called the Veḷḷāṅ tank.
- Veḷḷivaḷa Nāḍu** – In tamil, "Land of Silver," the forested locale where the goddess Pārvati created and placed nine farmer brothers at the very beginning of the story.
- Veḷḷiyaṅkiri** – An irrigation reservoir or tank.
- Veṭṭuvā** – The community name for indigenous hunters in the story. They live in a large, mountainous, heavily forested region.
- Vīnayaḱar** – A god who presides over the auspicious beginnings of all new ventures, and who acted as the scribe for the saint-ascetic Vyasa to write this epic. Also known as Pilliar, and elsewhere as Ganesh or Ganapati.
- vīraṇamataku** – A sluice gate through which water flows into the Veḷḷāṅ tank.
- Vīrappūr** – The largest town in the Veṭṭuvā area.
- Vīramalai** – The key mountain range where the Veṭṭuvā community lives.
- Vīrataṅkā** – Also called Vīrataṅkāḷ. She is the sister of one hundred (some-times said to be a thousand) Veṭṭuvā brothers.
- Vishnu** – Also known as Mayavar, Parantāmā, Harirāmā, Mayar, Conjeepuram. A major god, brother of Pārvati and her form as Cellāttā in this story. Because his sister is married to Shiva, he is Shiva's brother-in-law.
- white** – A very pure and auspicious colour.
- widow** – A term of derision used in anger by a man when addressing his wife.
- wild boar** – See Kompaṅ, the name of the wild boar in the story. Also called Kompā.
- yāḷi** – A mythical animal that looks something like a lion or tiger, but often has parts of an elephant or horse as well. It was often believed to be more powerful than these other animals.
- Yeman** – The god of death, whose vehicle is a buffalo.
- yuga** – A cosmic cycle of time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & RELATED WORKS

The intention of this book is to present a complete and accurate text, in translation, of the epic story as the lead bard told it to my local scribe and research assistant some sixty years ago (see the dedication). This book does not analyze that text or discuss any of the many broader issues pertaining to the study of epic literature. To provide some helpful framing, however, I present a few ideas about how one might approach or teach the story in the introduction. Readers who vary widely in age, specific interests and background cultural knowledge will now be introduced to this legend. Thus, I have decided to let the introduction speak for itself and not add a long list of teaching resources to the bibliography. The story text is already long, and it would be difficult to select just a few broader works to cite. Several resources are listed in footnotes to the introduction, and a small number of additional resources that may be helpful have been specifically listed in the bibliographies attached to Beck (1972, 1982, 2021). Many, but not all, of my own works discussing this story are listed below.

Next to no secondary literature that pertains directly to this story is available in print at this time. The internet is a vast and easily available resource for locating material that describes South India generally. It is also a good place to look for works pertaining to popular religious traditions or ritual practices found at the village level in this area, or about the specific history of the Kongu Nadu area. I am hopeful that others will add their own thoughts to the limited literature presently available about this epic in the years ahead. I anticipate that future thoughtful and perceptive contributions will help to deepen our collective understanding of this great legend. That process will surely accelerate as this epic story gradually becomes better known beyond its original homeland, the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu, India.

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Page numbers in **bold** indicate footnotes. Page numbers in *italic* are from the introduction. Page numbers indicate the beginning of a reference and the length or span of focus is not indicated.

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While studying for a doctoral degree in Anthropology, Brenda Beck lived for nearly two years in a local Indian village belonging to the Kongu region of Tamil Nadu. She spent her time there learning spoken Tamil and trying to expand her understanding of the people of this specific locale. She was especially interested in learning about this area's rich cultural traditions. Dr. Beck has returned to the same area to visit friends many times since then. Following the completion of her D.Phil. degree at Oxford University, she has dedicated the ensuing fifty-two years to further studying the rich folk heritage of the diverse peoples of South India. Reading and re-reading *The Land of the Golden River* has helped her discover many additional insights into the folk traditions and beliefs so well described in this unique folk text.

As a popular teacher, author and storyteller, Dr. Beck has taught at a number of Universities in North America and has twice been a formal guest of the Government of India. Many groups and organizations have recognized and honored her for her work. Brenda is the author of eight books and over fifty journal articles, and she still continues to lecture and write for a wide variety of audiences. Currently Dr. Beck is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus.

