

PONNI'S BELOVED

Volume 4 : The Crown



An English Translation of
Kalki Krishnamurthy's Ponnin Selvan by

SUMEETHA MANIKANDAN

Ponni's Beloved

**AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
KALKI KRISHNAMURTHY'S PONNIYIN
SELVAN**

by

Sumeetha Manikandan

Part 4 of 5 - The Crown

Version 2.0
Copyright © Sumeetha Manikandan 2020
Published in 2020 by
[V. Sumeetha](#)
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this book. This is a work of fiction and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The author owns the copyrights for all the images that are present in this book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sumeetha Manikandan is a top bestselling romance author whose novellas 'Perfect Groom' and 'These Lines of Mehendi' (which was published as a paperback novel called 'Love Again') have been on the top of Amazon India charts ever since their publication. A bookaholic, thinker, feminist and a daydreamer, she reads across genres and is a crazy fan of history, romance and science fiction novels.

An avid reader of historical novels, she has been translating Kalki Krishnamurthy's classic Tamil novel Ponnaiyin Selvan for the past ten years and hopes to translate more of his novels into English.

Sumeetha is married to filmmaker K.S. Manikandan and lives with her twelve-year-old daughter in Chennai.



Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my father, S. Vijayaraghavan who used to tell me the story of Ponniyin Selvan every evening and fuelled my interest to read the book.

My Aunt Ranganayaki who lent me her Ponniyin Selvan books. I treasure them to this day.

Navin and Vidya Sigamany for publishing the first drafts of Ponni's Beloved on their website Zine 5.com almost ten years ago. I would like to thank Inderpreet Kaur Uppal for her stellar efforts in editing the initial draft copy.

Author Venkatesh Ramakrishnan who encouraged me to resume the translation again. Writer and Journalist, Dhivakar Venkataraman for providing valuable historical guidance for the cover page artwork.

Meenakshi Devaraj, an avid fan of Ponniyin Selvan series and rendered great help in translating Poonguzhali's song and Devaram poems.

Friends like Raja King, Fowzia Iqbal, Abirami Baskaran, Sastha Prakash, Ramanujam Jaganathan, Thirukambigai Devi and countless others, who followed the translation avidly and promoted it among numerous groups.

I would also like to dedicate this book to all those fans who have been asking me for years to publish my translation and to my

husband who claims to be the first among them.

A special dedication is due to Abirami Baskaran whose encouraging words were invaluable. She was one of many who left us all too soon. May her soul rest in peace.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Kalki Krishnamurthy's *Ponniyin Selvan* was the first Tamil novel that I read. To tell you the truth, I learnt to read Tamil using elementary school books, just so that I could read this story.

They say that good books and great authors can transform lives. I have found it to be true in my case. I started translating this book ten years ago, as a hobby and realized that I could write. Today, I am a freelance writer who makes a living out of writing, and I owe my profession to this novel!

Many authors have written phenomenal books in Tamil literature after Kalki Krishnamurthy, but *Ponniyin Selvan* still remains the most popular book, widely read by many. *Ponniyin Selvan* has the right mixture of all things that makes an epic – political intrigue, conspiracy, betrayal, huge dollops of romance, infidelity, seduction, passion, alluring women, unrequited love, sacrifice and pure love.

Ponni's Beloved is an English translation, and as many readers have pointed out, no translation can do justice to the original. I have tried to capture the essence and soul of Kalki's writing in my translation.

I recently visited all the places (in India) that are mentioned in this novel. We started on Aadi 18 (Aug 3, 2019) for this trail trip almost on the footsteps of Vandiyā Devan and saw all the fascinating places that he mentions in the journey. I have included some of the photos in this volume.

Thank you,
Sumeetha Manikandan

PS. For those who wish to sign up for this tour trail, do contact Tour Bee (7299646588). The tour trail was well organized and at the curator had many interesting stories about each place that we visited.



FOREWORD

Kalki Krishnamurthy's *Ponniyin Selvan* was serialized in the post-independence era and it ran for four long years. Talking about a golden era in Tamil history, it ensnared the imagination of huge swathe of the Tamil population with people queuing in railway stations long before dawn to lay their hands on that week's edition of the Kalki magazine.

An entire generation dwelt upon the freshness of the novel and surprisingly it was not condemned to the recesses of the mind as a childhood fancy but continued to entice readers of subsequent generations as they were born and introduced to the Tamil language. The novel still has a colossal following but bounded by the hedges of a language that is not easy to learn, it strictly remained out of the mainstream and well within the realms of the Tamil speaking world.

Tamil people have been habitual migrants and the diaspora is spread over numerous countries. In today's generation, though many of them can speak fluent Tamil they lack the patience to read the Tamil script that is spread over 1000 pages of a novel. And that's when the need arises a need for a good translation.

When I read the novel late in my thirties, the social media was just picking up and I was introduced to the yahoo group of Ponniyin Selvan fans around the year 2001. For the first time, readers from different age groups, settled in different lands were congregating online.

It was there that I came across a translation of Ponniyin Selvan into English. (There had been one earlier in print but that left much to be desired for those who had read the original. In fact, at one point the earlier translator mentioned 'Maize' for the Tamil word Cholam. But it was pointed out in the group that Maize entered India 500 years after the storyline period.)

The online translation was a bold bid by a youngster. As much as the substance within, the attempt bedazzled a lot of us because for 40 years or more it was almost sacrilege to deal with Kalki's works. The one sequel in the market at that time had been mauled by the copyright owners!

Over the next decade many of the members of the Yahoo group became novelists, biographers, bloggers, heritage activists and a host of history and literature connected personalities. And I would like to list Sumeetha's translation of Kalki's work as a starting point for all this.

A translated work should remind us of the original and it should have the author's imprint on the words. I think Sumeetha comes out in flying colours on both fronts. I am sure her work would open up the genius of Kalki to many who were deprived of it all these days.

Biography of Venkatesh Ramakrishnan:

Author Venkatesh Ramakrishnan is a Chennai based bilingual novelist from India. South Indian historical fiction is his forte. He has published 3 novels in Tamil, 2 of them are sequels to the famous Kalki Krishnamurthy novels Ponniyin Selvan and Sivagamiyin Sabatham respectively, with the titles Kaviri Mainthan and Kanji Tharagai. One of his other fictional work in Tamil is Thillayil Oru Kollaikaran. Gods, Kings & Slaves. The Siege of Madurai is his first novel in English.

Character List

CHOLA ROYAL FAMILY

Emperor Sundara Chola – Originally named Paranthaka II, the Emperor was very handsome and was fondly called ‘Sundara’ Chola by his people. He is the reigning monarch of the Chola and Pandya Kingdom at the time of the story (957 – 970 AD).

Empress Vanamadevi – The Empress of the Chola Kingdom and the consort of Sundara Chola. She is the mother of Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan, Princess Kundavai and Prince Arulmozhiarman. Vanamadevi is the daughter of Nobleman Thirukkovalur Malayaman.

Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan – Eldest son of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi, Aditya Karikalan is a peerless warrior who beheaded the Pandya King and established suzerainty over their Kingdom.

Princess Kundavai – Younger sister of Aditya Karikalan and the daughter of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi. Kundavai is cherished all through the kingdom for her wit, wisdom, grace and intelligence. She lives in Pazhaiaarai along with her companions and friends.

Prince Arulmozhiarman – The youngest son of Sundara Chola and Vanamadevi, Arulmozhiarman is also known all through the Kingdom as ‘Ponniyin Selvan’. At the time of the story, the Prince is in Illangai (Sri Lanka) on a campaign against King Mahindan and had captured many parts of the Island. He later ascended the Chola throne as Raja Raja Cholan (985 AD – 1014 AD).

King Gandaradithan — Son of Paranthaka I and Sundara Chola’s uncle and former King who ruled from 950 AD to 957 AD. Gandaradithan is known for his piety and was a very devout King.

Dowager Queen Sembiyanmadevi – King Gandaradithan’s queen who was equally virtuous and spiritual. She belongs to the clan of Mazhavarayar and married the King despite his advanced age.

Prince Madhuranthakan – Son of King Gandaradhithar and Sembiyanmadevi and the first cousin of Sundara Chola.

King Aringhza Chola – Son of Parathaka I and the father of Sundara Chola. He reigned the Kingdom for a very short period from 956 AD – 957 AD.

Dowager Queen Kalyani – Wife of King Aringhza Chola and the mother Sundara Chola. She belongs to Vaithumbarayar clan and was a renowned beauty.

Prince Rajadhithan – Oldest son and heir apparent of Paranthaka I and the brother of Aringhza Chola and King Gandaradithan. Prince Rajadhithan died in the Thakollam war (950 AD) after which the crown passed onto his younger brother .

Emperor Paranthaka I – Grandfather of Sundara Chola, Paranthaka I ruled from 907 AD – 955 AD.

Noble Clans

PAZHUVUR CLAN

Periya Pazhuvetarayar – Lord Treasurer of the Chola Kingdom and a peerless warrior who bore 64 battle scars in his body. He is the patriarch and the king of the powerful Pazhuvur clan and is an influential courtier and nobleman at the Chola court.

Nandini Devi – Queen and wife of Periya Pazhuvetarayar, Nandini is a young woman who is known for her beauty. Nandini’s antecedents are a mystery and her past life is shrouded in secrets.

Chinna Pazhuvetarayar – He is also known as Kalanthaka Kanda, Chinna Pazhuvetarayar is the younger brother of Periya Pazhuvetarayar and is the Commander of the Thanjavur Fort. A powerful man with a strong physique, he is also the father-in-law of Prince Madhuranthakan.

KODUMBALUR CLAN

Budivikrama Kesari – The Commander of troops in Elangai, he is also known as Kodumbalur Periya Vellar. He is the patriarch of the Kodumbalur Clan.

Princess Vanathi – A Kodumbalur princess and the niece of Budivikrama Kesari, Vanathi is also the cherished companion and friend of Princess Kundavai who hopes to wed her to Prince Arulmozhivarman.

Kodumbalur Sิริya Vellar – Father of Vanathi and the younger brother of Budivikrama Kesari, he died valiantly in Illangai after leading a campaign across the sea.

SAMBUVERAYAR CLAN

Singannar Sambuverayar – A powerful lord who ruled over Kadambur.

Kandanmaran – Son of Sambuverayar who also fought along with Crown Prince Aditya Karikalan in many wars.

Manimegalai – Daughter of Sambuverayar and the sister of Kandanmaran.

MALAYAMAN CLAN

Thirukkovalur Malayaman – Patriarch of the Malayaman clan and the father-in-law of Sundara Chola. He is close to his oldest

Grandson Prince Aditya Karikalan.

VANAR CLAN

Vandiyā Devan – Vallavareyan Vandiyā Devan is Prince Aditya Karikalan's bodyguard, friend and confidante.

PANDYA KING'S BODYGUARDS

Ravidasan – The ringleader of the conspirators who wish to avenge the death of their king. He is also known as 'Mandiravadi'.

Soman Sambavan – One of the conspirators and a member of Ravidasan's gang.

Edupankari – One of the Pandya Conspirators who works in the Kadambur Palace and overhears the noblemen's plots about the Chola Succession.

Devaralan – One of the Pandya Conspirators who works at the Kadambur Palace.

OTHER IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

Azhwarkadiyan Nambi – A vaishnavite and a spy who is also known as Thirumalai or Thirumalaiappan. He also claims to be Nandini Devi's brother.

Parthibendra Pallavan – Close confidante and friend of Prince Aditya Karikalan and a scion of Pallava dynasty.

Kudanthai Jodhidhar – An astrologer in Kudanthai (present day Kumbakonam) who is patronized by Princess Kundavai.

Senthan Amuthan – A devout man who serves Thallikullathar Temple in Thanjavur. Vandiyā Devan stays in his house while visiting

Thanjavur.

Poonghuzhali – Senthana Amuthan's cousin who lives in Kodi Karai.

Glossary of Terms

Abathudavigal – The army of bodyguards that guarded the Pandya King

Adey – An expression used to refer someone with derision and disrespect

Adigaley – A respectful term used to address a monk

Amma – Mother

Amavasya – Dark Moon

Anna – Elder brother

Anni – Elder brother's wife

Anthapuram – Inner Chambers of women in a palace

Akka – Elder sister

Appa – Father

Ayya – A respectful term in Tamil used to address men

Ayyo / Ayyayo – An exclamation of distress

Battar – Term used to refer to the priest

Bikshu – A Buddhist Monk

Chi Chi – An expression of disgust

Dalapathy - Army Commander

Devi – Used to address women of higher social standard like royalty or the nobility

Dhanadhigari – Treasurer

Dhoomketu – A comet

Gurunatha – Teacher

Jodhithar – An Astrologer

Kalapathy – Ship's Captain or Commander

Maha Mandiri – Prime Minister

Maharaja – My King

Maha Guru – Chief among teachers

Mandapam – A structure built with four or more pillars.

Mandiravadi – Magician

Malai – A Mountain

Olai – Palm tree leaf which is used to write messages

Padai - Army

Pati – Grandmother

Pujari – A priest

Prabhu – A respectful term to address a lord, prince or the king

Rani – Queen

Raja Drogam – Treason against the King

Rakshashi - Demoness

Senthapathy – Army Commander

Samudra Rajan – The Sea God

Sangu Chakra – Conch and discus

Thambi – Younger brother

Thatha – Grandfather

Theevu – An Island

Vajrayudham – Thunderbolt

Vaikuntam – The abode of Lord Vishnu

Vihara – A Monastery

Contents

The story so far...

Chapter 1: Banks of Kedilam

Chapter 2: The Grandsire and the Grandson

Chapter 3: The Eagle and the Pigeon

Chapter 4: The Ayyanar Temple

Chapter 5: The Underground Passage

Chapter 6: Manimegalai

Chapter 7: The monkey without a tail

Chapter 8: Hands in the dark

Chapter 9: The dogs barked

Chapter 10: A manhunt

Chapter 11: Friend or traitor

Chapter 12: A spear broken

Chapter 13: Manimegalai's secret heart

Chapter 14: Will the dream come true?

Chapter 15: The royal welcome
Chapter 16: Malayaman's worry
Chapter 17: Poonguzhali's wishes
Chapter 18: Arrow aimed
Chapter 19: Laughter and anger
Chapter 20: Yet again... the physician's son
Chapter 21: To travel in a palanquin...
Chapter 22: Anirudhar's disappointment
Chapter 23: Can the mute speak?
Chapter 24: The Princess's haste
Chapter 25: Anirudhar's crime
Chapter 26: Confusion in the street
Chapter 27: The Treasury
Chapter 28: The underground path
Chapter 29: A royal meeting
Chapter 30: Complaints and charges
Chapter 31: Dreams of dusk
Chapter 32: Why do you torture me so?
Chapter 33: The Goddess of the Cholas
Chapter 34: Ravana is in danger
Chapter 35: The Emperor's wrath
Chapter 36: In the midnight...
Chapter 37: Turmoil in Kadambur
Chapter 38: Nandini's refusal
Chapter 39: Danger is coming!

Chapter 40: Water games
Chapter 41: Kariklan's mad hunt
Chapter 42: She is not a woman!
Chapter 43: Where is the tiger?
Chapter 44: Love and accusation
Chapter 45: You are my sister!
Chapter 46: And the boat moved....

An excerpt from The Sacrifice (Ponni's Beloved Volume 5)

The story so far...

In the 10th Century AD, the glorious Cholas ruled over the land of Tamil Nadu. Emperor Sundara Chola who is bedridden with paralysis reigns over the Kingdom and there is confusion as to who would ascend the throne after him. The Emperor had two sons and one daughter. The eldest, Aditya Karikalan was anointed the Crown Prince of the Kingdom but his uncle Madhuranthakan (whose father ruled prior to Sundara Chola) also wished to ascend the throne.

The story begins when Aditya Karikalan sent his trusted bodyguard and friend Vandiya Devan with two messages for his father, the Emperor and his sister Princess Kundavai. Vandiya Devan learns at Kadambur that all the important noblemen of the court led by the Pazhuvur brothers are conspiring to crown, Prince Madhuranthakan, as the next Emperor.

While on his journey, Vandiya Devan also meets the Vaishnavan Azhwarkadiyan Nambi (also known as Thirumalai) who wishes to meet Periya Pazhuvetarayar's wife (who he raised as his sister). Vandiya Devan uses his name to meet Nandini and she gives him a signet ring to enter the Thanjavur Fort.

Azhwarkadiyan, in the meanwhile, finds out that a gang of Pandya bodyguards are conspiring a murderous plan to kill Prince Aditya Karikalan, who had beheaded their King. He also learns that they were being aided with gold, stolen from the treasury of the Cholas, by Nandini.

Vandiya Devan goes to Thanjavur and successfully delivers his messages to the Emperor in private. Chinna Pazhuvetarayar suspects his intentions and tries to imprison him. He escapes from the soldiers and ends up at Nandini's palace, where she tries her best to allure him with her seductive beauty. He escapes from the

fort through the underground passage and also saves Kandanmaran's life.

He meets Princess Kundavai in Pazhaiaria and learns that she is the same woman whom he had fallen in love with at Kudanthai. She then writes a message to Arul Mozhi Varman, her younger brother who is warring in Illangai to come back as soon as possible and asks Vandiya Devan to bring him back home.

Vandiya Devan travels to Kodi Karai and with the help of Poonguzhali, he goes to Elangai.

In Kanchipuram, Aditya Karikalan's grandsire too advises him to bring his brother Arul Mozhi back from Illangai. His friend Parthibendran agrees to bring him back and before he left, Karikalan reveals that he was in love with Nandini and how she had betrayed him by trying to save the life of Pandya King who he beheads and then subsequently marrying the old man Periya Pazhuvetarayar.

Kundavai arrives in Thanjavur and the Emperor confesses to her that he had once loved a deaf and mute woman in Illangai, who later committed suicide. The emperor believes that he sees her ghost in the night but Kundavai suspects that Nandini is pretending to be her mother's ghost to frighten the Emperor and to learn the truth of her birth. This opens up possibilities that Nandini could be her own sister!

In Illangai, Vandiya Devan meets Azhwarkadiyan again and they both set out to meet Prince Arul Mozhi and they successfully give him the messages. They also meet a deaf and mute woman who loves the Prince as her own son and had saved his life many times. Vandiya Devan is astonished by her resemblance to Nandini and suspects that she might be her mother.

They also receive news that the Emperor has sent two ships to imprison the Prince on the charge that he tried to grab the throne of Illangai for his own. This news is brought to them by the boat girl

Poonguzhali. The Prince leaves his companions along with Poonguzhali to meet the ships. Vandiya Devan gets caught by an Arab pirate ship where he is imprisoned and kidnapped. He sets out in Parthibendran's ship to rescue Vandiya Devan. In the midst of a fierce storm, Vandiya Devan kills the Arab pirates with the help of the Pandya gang, who later abandon him in the ship. The Prince successfully rescues him from the ship but they both end up adrift in the sea. Poonguzhali rescues them in her boat.

The Prince contracts shivering fever and is incoherent. Vandiya Devan, Poonguzhali and Senthana Amuthan take him to Nagapattinam Choodamani Viharam to treat his illness. In the meanwhile, Periya Pazhuvetarayar and Nandini who are at Kodi Karai learn that the Prince is lost in sea. Parthibendran falls for the seductive allure of Nandini and is enamoured by her.

Vandiya Devan travels to Pazhalarai to give Kundavai the news that the Prince has arrived and is safe, though the rest of the Kingdom mourns his death. There are riots in Pazhalarai when the news arrives to the local populace. Kundavai meets Vandiya Devan and then sends him to Kanchi with a message for her brother asking him, not to meet with Nandini and tasks our hero to safeguard him from assassins.

Vandiya Devan and Nambi set out again to Kanchi. Kundavai meets Prince Arul Mozhi and asks him to wait in the Viharam for some time.



Chapter 1: Banks of Kedilam

Kedilam is one of the rivers that made the Kingdom of Thirumunaipadi fertile and green. Along the banks of this river is a Shiva Temple much celebrated by Appar Perumal. Further down this river is yet another temple of Lord Shiva where Sundaramurthy Nayar had composed many of his poems in Thirunavalur. Situated betwixt these two places was the king's road from Thondai Mandalam to the Chola Kingdom. The banks of Kedilam were always busy thanks to the many pilgrims who bathed in the river before visiting the temples.

That year, in the month of Aipasi^[1] there were many people gathered near the banks of the river and the flow of the water was high. A commotion on the king's road drowned the sounds that these pilgrims made. Startled by the noise, many climbed on trees to see what was happening. At first, they could only see the dust of the road and soon they could see an entourage of elephants, horses, royal chariots and palanquins, royal heralds, flag holders, drum beaters marched at the head of the procession.

The clear voice of the herald soon told them who was approaching.

“A warrior born and bred on the battle-field! A Prince who became a seasoned warrior at the tender age of 12 years! The lion from whose shadow the Rashtrakutas flee! Noble Lord of Erattai Mandalam! The Crown Prince of Chola Empire! The Eldest Son of Emperor Sundara Chola! Prince Aditya Karikalar arrives!”

The booming voice of the herald caused a busy flurry of activity at the banks of the river. Those who were halfway across the river came back to the banks to watch and cheer for the Prince. Those who were bathing hurriedly dressed themselves to watch and gawk at the royalty who would soon arrive.

After the herald and the flag holders, there came warhorses bearing three warriors. Even when they were at a distance, people pointed towards them and started talking.

“You see the one in the middle, that is Aditya Karikalar. Don’t you see the golden crown that he is wearing? See how it glows in the sun!”

“This crown is not as glorious as Karikala Valavan’s crown. You should see that. They say that it glows with the radiance of over thousands of suns.”

“The one that you are referring is not the crown of Karikala Valavan. Though they call it the same, for tradition’s sake, it was made during the time of Parthaka Chakravarthy. That’s the crown that was given to Sundara Cholar during his coronation. Though we don’t know how long he would wear it.”

“People have been saying that for a very long time... but the Emperor is still lingering.”

“I hope that he does. So long as he is alive, there won’t be any confusion or chaos in the Kingdom.”

“That too is not certain. Ever since the news about Ponniiyin Selvar came, there has been chaos in the Kingdom. Who knows when there will be a civil war?”

“Who is going to fight whom?”

“They are expecting conflict between Kodumbalur clan and the Pazhuvur clan. To avoid this, they have organized for peace talks at Kadambur Sambuverayar’s palace. Aditya Karikalar is on his way there.”

“The horses are coming near, talk softly...”

As the horses neared them, they said, “Why is Prince Aditya Karikalar looking so grim and upset?”

“Isn’t it natural? His brother is lost in the sea and no one has any news about him. Everyone knows how much he loved his brother and his father has become an invalid.”

“That’s not the reason why the Prince is looking grim. He is upset because his plans of invasion against the Eratai Mandalam have been foiled.”

“Who foiled his plans?”

“Who else but the Pazhuvur brothers. I heard that they refused to give the Prince the supplies that are needed for an invasion.”

“You people don’t know the truth, that’s why you are carrying on with such lies. The real reason as to why he is upset is not known to one and all...”

“Really! So it is you who knows everything. Why don’t you tell us then?”

“I have heard that the Prince was in love with some woman from the Pandya Kingdom. When the Prince was battling with the Pandya army, Periya Pazhuvetarayar swooped in and married her. Now she has become the Pazhuvur queen and is literally ruling over the Kingdom. Ever since the Prince heard about this, he has lost his mental balance.”

“It’s possible... our elders do say that women are the sole reason for most wars.”

“Who are these elders who say such absurd things? This is sheer madness and I haven’t heard a more malicious lie than what you just told. So what if the Prince had loved a woman? What possessed her to go and marry an old man? I can’t believe that people are peddling such lies...”

“If that is so, then why is the Prince still unmarried? Go on... tell us,”

“Be quiet! The horses are coming closer. The one on the right side of the Prince is Parthibendra Pallavan. Who is the warrior on the left? Is it Vallavareyan Vandiya Devan?”

“No! No! It is Kandanmaran, noble Sambuverayar’s son. Instead of sending a message, Sambuverayar sent his son to bring the Prince to Kadambur Palace.”

“That shows that something important is going to be decided at Kadambur Palace.”

“They probably want to decide who would succeed the throne next. And until Karikalan is unmarried, all these noblemen will try to get him as their groom. He is the heir apparent and the crown prince, after all. And the woman who marries him first will become the queen!”

Such was the conversation and conjectures that the people debated upon. The three horses went all the way to the banks of the river and stopped. Aditya Karikalan got down and went towards the chariot that had followed them behind.





Chapter 2: The grandsire and the grandson

The chariot stopped and Thirukkovalur Malayaman who was seated on it, said, “Child! Karikala! I will take your leave now and go to Thirukkovalur. Before I start my journey, I wish to speak to you. Will you sit with me for a while, under that tree?”

“Alright, Thatha!”

The Prince and his Grandsire then walked towards the tree and sat under it.

Watching them, Parthibendran looked at Kandanmaran and said, “Thank the Gods! I was worried that the old man would come with us all the way to Kadambur Palace.”

“If he did, I will drown him in the Kollidam River.”

Both men then laughed, mighty pleased with their own humour.

In the meanwhile, Thirukkovalur Malayaman looked at his grandson and said, “Aditha! You were born on this day, 24 years ago at Thirukkovalur in my palace. I remember the festivities like it happened yesterday. Many noblemen of your clan, my clan and that of Thondai Mandalam had gathered to celebrate the birth of the royal heir. Along with all these noblemen, over 30,000 soldiers had come as an entourage. The festive gaiety that followed your birth can’t be described in one day. Even your father’s coronation paled in

comparison to the celebration that we had after you were born. Whatever treasure my ancestors had hoarded in over a hundred years was spent on that one single day!

Did you know, your great grandfather Paranthaka came to Thirukkoyalur along with the King Gandarathidhar and your father? You can't imagine their happiness when they learned that a male heir has been born to the royal dynasty. Your great grandfather's sons died without siring an heir and of all the sons only Aringzha Chola had a child, your father. He was the most handsome prince to be born in your family. Poor man! He was subjected to many inconveniences because of that. When he was young, the palace womenfolk enjoyed dressing him up as a woman and engaged in games about how beautiful he would be, and would sigh over him saying 'if only he was a woman.' When he came of age, scores of noblemen fell over their feet trying to offer their daughters' hand in marriage to him. He was ripe for plucking indeed! He was not only handsome but also the heir to the Chola throne. I was fortunate when he accepted my daughter's hand in marriage and he became my son-in-law.

Our clan is well known for bravery and not for beauty, be it men or women. We consider battle scars to be symbols of beauty among the men. For women virtue, honour and duty are the qualities that make them truly beautiful. When it was decided that Sundara Chola would wed my daughter, the people of my kingdom rejoiced and I became the object of envy among the other noblemen who had been vying for the Emperor's hand in marriage. I didn't let it bother me. Their marriage was solemnized in Thanjavur and the celebrations that followed were in accordance with royal nuptials in any kingdom, yet they can't be compared to the celebrations that followed your birth.

There arose a huge argument about what name you should bear. Some of your relatives wanted you named after the most famous king born in your dynasty – Karikala Valavan while I wanted you to