

Padumai pithan's
god and kandasami pillai

melakaram me ka raa kandasami

Pillaiyavargal, otherwise known as Chellappa, only son of Melakaram Me Ka Ramasami Pillaiyavargal was standing at the junction of Broadway and Esplanade, in a relatively safe corner, thinking furiously. Were he to take the tram, it would cost one anna and a quarter, leaving him with a quarter anna. He could then buy betel leaves from the stall next to the bus stop, and walk home, chewing blissfully. If, on the other hand, he were to board the bus, avoid the bus conductor as far as Central, and then buy a ticket to Triplicane, he might drink half a cup of coffee and go home, but he would have to forego the betel leaves.

When the conductor virtually pleads with me to deceive

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him, it really goes against the grain of dharma to disappoint him. Now if only I had given him the fare, exactly as he asked, just from Central onwards, I might have enjoyed a cup of coffee.

A cup of coffee right now would certainly put life into me. It was while Pillaiyavargal of the above mentioned town was engaged in such serious philosophical matters that God manifested Himself to him.

He didn't appear all of a sudden and stun him into a state of ecstasy by insisting, "Here, take this boon."

He merely asked, "Ayya, how do I get to Triplicane?"

"You could take a tram, you could take a bus, or you could walk all the way by asking passers by – The way to Madurai lies in your mouth," answered Kandasami Pillai.

"I'm not going to Madurai, I only asked the way to Triplicane, so what is the shortest way?" asked God. Both of them doubled up with laughter.



They stepped away from the jostling, shoving, pushing animated crowds and stood to one side, near a cobbler offering shoe repairs.

Melakaram Ramasami Pillai's son and heir was forty five years old. His build was that of one deprived of food for forty five years, his head was covered in grey with a sprinkling of a few black hairs, his face had not been shaven for the past two weeks, his eyes were keen enough to swoop down on his friends, however distant they were

and in however dense a crowd, he wore a shirt of unbleached cotton and a veshti and angavastram of the same material.

Kandasami Pillai looked intently at the person who had asked the way. It was impossible to determine his age. He might have been sixty years old. But equally, he might have seen sixty thousand years. Anyway, he had a well setup, even opulent figure, as if he had never had to worry about his meals in all those years.

His hair, completely grey, without a single black strand in it, had not been combed nor tied back, but fell upon his neck like a lion's mane, spreading out on all sides. Right at the centre of his throat there was a big black swelling. His brilliant black eyes darted, in sharp movements, in all directions. Sometimes they drooped, as if they belonged to a madman. And his smile? At times it terrified Kandasami Pillai, at times it was like that of a fond child.

"I'm terribly thirsty," said God.

"You won't get any water-geeter here. If you want, you can have some coffee. There's a cafe over there, look," said Kandasami Pillai.

"Why don't you come with me, let's taste and see what it's like," said God. Now Kandasami Pillai was a great abedavadi. Not for him the fine distinctions between himself and the Supreme. He certainly didn't bother about the trivial differences between strangers and friends.

"Very well, come on, let's go," he said. A passing doubt went through his mind, supposing he were to be stuck with the bill? But then he resolved, Unless one dares, there's only torment.

They went into a spacious restaurant. God followed Kandasami Pillai, trailing close behind.

They sat down at a table. Without allowing the young waiter to reel off the cafe's menu, K. P. Shaking God and Kandasami Pillai

his head vigorously, "Two cup coffee, hot and strong."

"Don't forget your Tamil. Say Two coffees," reminded God.

"Not so, one ought really to say two cups of coffee," said Pillai, raising the flag for Tamil.

Outmanoeuvred, God now looked about him. "This is a fine, tall building, there's a lot of light," he observed.

"Well, did you expect a restaurant to be like a hen coop? I suppose you think it's as easy as building a temple? The Hygiene Inspectors these days won't let you do as you please, you know," said Pillai, following up his victory smartly.

As soon as the word Temple fell on his ear, God began to tremble all over.

"Meaning ... ?" he asked, not willing to let go, even when he had lost. "Please explain what you mean by hygiene."

"Oh, that? It means washing down the tables with antiseptic lotion so that the inspectors don't fine you. It's also a subject that children are taught at schools, in order to make them fail exams. According to it, flies and mosquitos are equal to the rakshasas of old. If such creatures enter restaurants such as this, it's an absolute disaster. They say you cannot hope to escape with your life," said Kandasami Pillai. He himself was astounded by the turn in the conversation. He began to wonder whether the Goddess Saraswati had suddenly graced his tongue.

God didn't take much notice of him, though. He was observing a fly that was caught in a puddle of coffee spilt by a previous customer. It was struggling, flailing about, straining to free itself from the sticky liquid.

"Here we are," said God. He stretched out a finger to aid the fly. It flew away. God's finger touched the spilt coffee.

what are you doing, ayya, you've gone and touched someone's leavings.

Here, take this water and wash your hands under the table

someone's leavings. Here, take this water and wash your hands under the table," said Pillai.

God muttered to himself, "Mustn't allow flies to come in. Hygiene means you must wash your hands under the table."

The boy brought the Two cup coffees and placed them on the table.

God picked up his cup and drank. A divine glow spread on his countenance, as if he had supped on soma, the heavenly drink.

"Our lila, the work of the gods," he said.

"Nothing of the sort. It's not your lila, it's the restaurateur's lila. He's made it with a good pinch of chicory. Your lila will be necessary in the final chapter of paying the bill," said Kandasami Pillai in God's ear. He was delighted with himself for clearing up the matter of the bill so subtly.

"And chicory powder means ...?" God asked, raising his head, full of doubt.

"Chicory powder looks exactly like coffee, but it isn't. It's like people deceiving the whole world in the name of the Deity," said Kandasami Pillai.

When he heard the word, Deity, God was startled.

When they went to the counter to pay the bill, Kandasami Pillai was shocked as God pulled out a new hundred rupee note.

The proprietor who was at the till said, "If it was change you wanted, wouldn't I have given it to you if you had asked? Why do I have to write out a bill for three annas? To wipe my eyes or salve your conscience?"

"We really did come here for the coffee," said God.

"Surely you would have thought to keep some change ready,

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in that case," said the manager. But because there was a long queue waiting, of people who had just finished their meal, and because he didn't want to make trouble, he counted out the change.

"There, that's ninety nine rupees and thirteen annas. Is that right? Please check it, saami."

"If you say so, I'm happy to agree; I was never good at sums," said God.

The manager congratulated himself on having passed off a counterfeit ten rupee note.

They came out together. There wasn't such a crowd now, at the entrance. They stopped there for a moment.

God pulled out the fifth note out of the stack in his hands, tore it into shreds and flung it down.

Kandasami Pillai wondered whether the person standing next to him had suddenly gone mad. He stood there aghast, his mouth wide open.

"A counterfeit note. He tried to deceive me, but I caught him out," said God. His smile was fearful.

"If you had given it to me, I'd have caught that Pappaan by his top knot and made him change it," said Kandasami Pillai.

"You consented to drink his chicory powder, didn't you? Let's say I agreed to this in the same way. Ten rupees is a big deal to him, that's why I allowed him his deception," said God.

Kandasami Pillai was now embarrassed to abandon this stranger who had gratuitously bought him a cup of coffee.

"You're bound for Triplicane, aren't you? Come on, let's get on the tram," he said.

Pappaan: Derogatory form of addressing or referring to a brahmin.

"Let's not," said God; "Those things make my head spin. We could walk there slowly, couldn't we?"

"Ayya, I've been on my feet all day. I can't manage a step further. Why don't we take a rickshaw instead," suggested Kandasami Pillai. He told himself in defence, After all I'm going to show him the way, why shouldn't he pay, if he can afford to tear up ten rupee notes?

"A vehicle pulled by man? Those are the best of all," said God. They climbed into a rickshaw. "Saami, wait a second, I'll light my lamp," said the rickshaw man.

Daylight dimmed, now there were only electric lights.

"How quickly we have struck up a friendship! I don't know who you are and you don't know who I am. That we should meet like this, right in the middle of the city's commotion ..."

God laughed. His teeth gleamed beautifully. "Never mind who I am for the moment. Tell me about yourself."

Kandasami Pillai always took a special delight in speaking about himself. Was he likely to miss an opportunity like this, when he had a captive audience within the rickshaw? He cleared his throat and began.

"Have you ever seen a medical journal known as the *Siddha Vaidya Dipika*?" he asked.

"No," said God.

"Then I take it you are not familiar with the *Vaidya Sastras*, the classical medical treatises," remarked Kandasami Pillai.

"I am familiar with them," said God.

This is really embarrassing, thought Kandasami Pillai to himself. Aloud he said, "Let us agree that you are familiar with the *Vaidya Sastras*, but that you don't know the *Siddha Vaidya Dipika*. If that's the case, your knowledge of the medical treatises

cannot be complete, it has to be said. I
God and Kandasami Pillai
have all the volumes of the

past seventeen years at home, in bound volumes. I have to insist that you come sometime and read the lot. Only then can you ..."

All the issues of seventeen years! Twelve times seventeen is two hundred and four. God quailed at the idea. A fond hope came to him. Perhaps it is a quarterly?

"The *Dipika* is a monthly magazine. The yearly subscription within the country is one rupee, two and three quarters for countries abroad. A life subscription will cost you twenty five rupees. If you become a life subscriber, you'll find it really handy. If you like, I can send it to you on trial for the first year. After that we'll consider a life subscription," said Kandasami Pillai, trying his best to persuade God.

Does he think he can force me to read all seventeen volumes, collect twenty five rupees on top of that and then drive me out? I shall never allow that, thought God. Then he asked, "Whose life, by the way?"

"Your life, of course. Not mine. Nor the journal's, it is indestructible. Even when I am gone, someone else will take it up and run it, all arrangements have been made for that," said Kandasami Pillai.

Just at that moment, the rickshaw puller slackened his pace and looked back over his shoulder.

Kandasami Pillai was afraid that if the rickshaw slowed down, the other passenger might jump down and run away.

"Why are you turning around, da? There's a car coming at you, don't crash into it. Go on, quickly," said Kandasami Pillai.

The rickshaw puller said, "What saami, are you both men or ghosts? The vehicle feels as light as the wind, as if there are no passengers in it."

we'll also give you a fare that's as light

as the wind, if you don't watch out!" Pillai scolded. "Besides, I'm also a

Pillai scolded. Then he went on, "Besides, I'm also a practitioner of medicines. I only deal in siddha medicines and methods. What I make out of it just barely covers the costs of running both the journal and my family. In the current issue, I've written an article about *rasakattu*, the use of mercury in medicine. You see, I came across an old palm leaf manuscript which explains many rare usages."

What's this, thought God, It doesn't look as if our friend is ever going to stop. Then he asked, "How many people do you treat on an average, each day?"

"Not so many that I can brag about it. Besides, keep in mind that I make my livelihood from medicine. The illness mustn't go away altogether, nor must the fellow be finished off. It's only in that way that the patient's illness can be maintained as a means of trade. If you go for an aggressive treatment thinking it's got to be either the patient or the disease, you won't have a viable employment. The illness must come down gradually and then be cured, and at the same time, the medicine mustn't cause any harm either to the man or to the disease. That's the way of commerce. Otherwise would I have been able to run the journal for these seventeen years?" asked Kandasami Pillai.

God nodded as if he understood all this.

"Come, let me check your pulse," Kandasami Pillai went on, taking hold of God's right hand.

"What, while this vehicle is actually moving?" God laughed.

"All that depends on the vaidyan's skill," explained Kandasami Pillai.

He listened carefully to the pulse for some time, and then

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remarked with some concern, "The pulse rate indicates a high bile content. Are you in the habit of taking poisonous substances?"

"You really are a clever fellow. Yes, you'll find all kinds of things there," laughed God.

"Well, I've been talking away about all sorts of things. Never mind all that, Where are you bound for, in Triplicane?"

"Number seven, Office Venkatachala Mudali Lane," said God.

"Adedé! But that's my address, who did you want to see there?"

"Kandasami Pillai."

"Here's a fine thing! I'm that very person. You see, it's the Deity who brought us together. And who are you, sir? I don't think I recognize you?" said Kandasami Pillai.

"Who, I? I am God," he said, casually, taking his time. He looked up at the sky and stroked his beard.

Kandasami Pillai was startled out of his wits. God? Here?

"I came to visit the earth, I'd like to be your guest for a few days."

Kandasami Pillai spoke with agitation. "Please stay as long as you wish, I have no objection at all. Only, please don't tell everyone that you are god. It doesn't matter if others take you for a madman. Only, my wife mustn't take me for one."

Then he said to the rickshaw puller, "Just stop by the streetlight, da."

The rickshaw stopped. They climbed down.

God took a crackling clean, shining, one rupee note and handed it to the rickshaw puller.

"May you be well, saami," said the man, with a satisfied heart.

He was blessing god! Really!

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"Watch it, da. Is it your business to bless a respected elder?" said Kandasami Pillai, speaking sharply.

"What if he does," God remarked. Then he said, "You speak well, appa. It's many days since I heard such words, words so comforting to my ear and heart."

"You might have heard different words if you had given him two annas less," said Kandasami Pillai.

"Yejaman, I only care about what is just. I don't bother about what's unfair. Saami, you'll always find me sitting at that particular spot. Look out for me if you are in that direction."

"You only care about what is just! I know all about it, da. Go away, you only care about the toddy shop."

"You'd know about it, if you had run about all day in the hot sun, pulling this rented vehicle. What can I say to you? God has no eyes, he allows you to speak such words, makes me listen to them."

God burst out into loud laughter. He laughed and laughed. He was happy, at ease.

"Well, well, such is this world," said Kandasami Pillai.

"Is that all it is?" asked God.

They walked on to the house.

As they came up to the lamppost just in front of the house, God stopped.

Kandasami Pillai too stopped, and waited.

"Bhakta!" said God.

There wasn't an old man standing there.

God revealed himself in his tiger skin, his matted locks, with his deer and his axe and his crescent moon. His eyes shone with ecstatic joy. There was a smile on his lips.

"Bhakta," he said once more.

Kandasami Pillai understood it all in an instant.

God and Kandasami Pillai

Tricks of

Oh God, I am not going to be taken in by you

“Oh, God, I’m not going to be taken in by your tricks of throwing boons at me. I know you, you’ll grant me a boon and push off on your business. After that another deity is likely to come along and demand my head. I’m not such an easily fooled simpleton as to accept a boon from you and voluntarily put my head in danger. All right, so you came down to have a look at the world, you wanted to be my guest. I don’t have any objection whatever, to any of that. But if you want to move around with me, then you must behave like a man, like me, in fact. You must stay within the limits of human behaviour. Now please come into my house properly, keeping in mind what I’ve just told you,” Kandasami Pillai said.

Silently, God followed him. He thought that Kandasami Pillai’s argument was fair enough. It also struck him that truly there was no answer to the question, Who on earth, in all this time, has received a divine boon and profited by it?

Kandasami Pillai stopped again at the threshold of the house. “Swami, what name should I give you? Paramasivan or Ammaiyappa Pillai?”

“Paramasivan would be right. Paramasivan the elder.”

“Well then, I shall call you Appa, as if you were in the position of a father to me, please agree to this, too.”

“Don’t do that, appa, call me Periappa, Uncle. My property won’t be in any danger then,” said God, laughing. Since he had decided to act according to the ways of the world, he thought he ought to be somewhat prudent.

“So what is this wonderful property of yours?” asked Kandasami Pillai.

“Only the entire universe,” said God.

“You needn’t worry. I am not as greedy as all that”. So saying K.P. climbed the front steps of his house.

Pudumaippittan

saying, Kandasami Pillai climbed the front steps of his house.

A single lamp burning in the front room made it the sanctum sanctorum of the house. Beyond that lay the long, darkened central hall. What lay further? A small child, about four years old perhaps, was playing in the front room. Her beauty was such that it filled the onlooker with joy. Her eyes seemed to sparkle with a perpetual happiness, and for no particular reason. She stood there, pulling at her hair which hung in two rats tails fore and aft, plaited from a crosswise parting, in the old fashioned way. The banana fibre which was supposed to have been tied around the front plait had slipped, it fell into her eyes, bothering her as she bent down. She had a piece of coal and a broken tile in her hands. A ragged skirt was about her waist, falling to the knees. She had been trying to draw lines upon the floor, but had straightened up to tug at the bothersome banana fibre with both hands, as hard as she could. She wasn’t successful. It hurt. As she was deciding whether she should cry or tug at it one more time, her father came in.

“Appa,” she shouted, flinging her arms round Kandasami Pillai’s knees. She looked up at him and asked, “What have you brought me?”

“I’ve only brought myself,” said Kandasami Pillai.

“What’s this, Appa, everyday you only bring yourself. Couldn’t you at least bring some fried gram?” the child pestered.

“Fried gram isn’t good for you. But look, I’ve brought you a thaatha.”

“Is this your daughter?” asked God. He simply couldn’t take his eyes off her.

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Kandasami Pillai hesitated.

"Say what's in your mind. 'These days I'm a complete vegetarian. I only like what is cooked in a mud pot. I don't even take milk or curd,'" smiled God.

Kandasami Pillai said, "She is like a curry leaf sprig that sprouted long past the season, just to give us joy." Then he disappeared into the darkness, saying, "Come and sit here. There won't be any water in the tap at this time, I'll go and fetch some in a water pot."

God took off his upper cloth, shook it, and laid it down on the floor of the front room and sat down. His mind was full of a certain liveliness, and a profound peace at the same time.

He held out his arms, saying, "Come here, little one, come here you little curry leaf sprig!"

In one leap she came and clambered into his lap.

"My name isn't Curry leaf sprig, it's Valli. Only Appa sometimes calls me Darkie. Why, do you think I'm so dark?"

She didn't expect an answer. Her eyes fell on the dark swelling on the thaatha's throat.

"What's that in your throat, Thaatha, black as anything, just like a naaval fruit? I want to eat it all up." Her eyes blinked as she spoke. And now she stood up in his lap and pressed her flower-like lips into his neck. Her tiny teeth tickled him. God shivered all over.

"I feel ticklish," said God, pulling away.

"What happened, Thaatha? Did some fire-gire touch you and burn you? Look it happened to me too." She held out her finger, with a darkened scab at its tip.

"Paappa, it is really a naaval fruit. Once long ago, because a lot of people gave it to me, I accepted it and put it in my mouth.

But some others came and grabbed me by the throat demanding their share. Since then, it just got stuck there. But never mind that. Don't you have any friends who will play with you?"

"But I have this tile, haven't I, and this piece of coal? Will you come and play hopscotch with me?"

The child and God began to play.

One leg bent right back, hopping on the other, God took a flying leap.

The child clapped her hands and laughed out loud.

"Thaatha, you've gone and lost!"

"How?" asked God.

She pointed out that his foot had touched a black line.

"Couldn't you have told me right at the start?" asked God.

The child asked, arms akimbo, "Should you say you'd play when you don't know the rules?"

At that moment, Sri and Srimati Kandasami Pillai emerged from the darkness, Srimati following Sri, the waterpot at her waist.

"This is my Periappa from Kailasavaram. You remember, the girl from Karisangkulam was given in marriage to the son of his first cousin once removed? Can you make out who it is?"

"Oh, it's that maama, isn't it, who became a sadhu and disappeared on his pilgrimages? Welcome Maama, let me greet you," she said, and setting down her water pot, she fell at his feet, making a full obeisance. The old fashioned heavy ear ornaments, the paampadam, swung against her cheeks.

God blessed her with the words, "May you and your children live long, in good health and prosperity."

Kantimatiammai – this was Kandasami Pillai's wife's name – felt a sense of total contentment such as she had never experienced before.

God asked, as if reminding K.P. discheerly, "Are you going to leave

the sack of rice right there, in front of the house?"

you going to leave the sack of rice right there, in front of the house?"

"I just can't tell you how forgetful he is," Kantimati exclaimed. "I asked him a moment ago whether he had bought the rice. He said he hadn't remembered to buy it. He dispenses medicines to the whole town, only he hasn't got a medicine for his own forgetfulness. The god who created him should stand next to him and look upon him."

"I am sure he is standing by him and looking upon him," said God, putting on a rural accent.

"Well then, perhaps he should look upon him and laugh. Perhaps he'll come to his senses then."

God laughed.

God and Kandasami Pillai went towards the entrance of the house.

"I told you I didn't want any conjuring tricks," Kandasami Pillai whispered.

"No more after this," said God.

Kandasami Pillai heaved and shoved as hard as he could, the sack wouldn't shift.

"A fine young man you are!" said God laughing, as he picked up the sack and tucked it against his waist.

"No, no, you mustn't pick it up," said Kantimati in some agitation. Then, "Look here, I'm talking to you, can't you at least give a hand with it. You're just looking on and doing nothing."

"You just leave me alone, amma," said God, "And tell me where I should put it."

"Just let it lie here in the front room. Just put it down," said Kantimati, intercepting him.

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returned to the stone ledge in the
front veranda, Pudumaippittan

returned to the stone ledge in the front veranda. It was eleven o'clock. *It was eleven o'clock.*

"What is your plan now?" asked God.

"Only to sleep," said Pillai, yawning.

The child came running up and said, "Thaatha, I'm going to lie down next to you."

"Go and ask your mother to spread out the mats and pillows," said Kandasami Pillai.

"Are you telling me to go to sleep too," asked God.

"If you are going to move around with human beings, then you must do as they do. If you don't like to sleep, just lie down quietly. Otherwise, you'll earn a bad reputation because of your goings on in the night," said Kandasami Pillai.

Kandasami Pillai sat on the floor of the *Siddhanta Dipika* office in Pavazhakkaara Street, writing out a detailed textual commentary. A commentary on *Boganathar's Treatise* was being serialized each month and published in Pillai's journal.

Kandasami Pillai wrote the final words. "And here is one final thing. To boiling water, add such medicinal plants as garudapicchu, kalluruvi, pulluruvi and umatthai which you might have to hand (garudapicchu can also be read as garudapacchai) ..." He watched the postman go past his door without coming in and muttered, "The journal won't go out today either," rolled up and put away what he had just written, and flexed his fingers.

A rickshaw came to a stop at his door. God and the little one got out. Valli was wearing a silk skirt, a paper package of sweets filled her hands.

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The child jumped up and down. "Thaatha and I have been all around the zoo and the natural history museum."

"Why do they build a mansion, oi, just to house bundles of skin and bone? Are they wanting to ridicule me or what?" asked God. There was a certain severity of tone in his voice.

"Do you think people have the wit to think it through like that? No, no, they've arranged things in that way because they imagine they are demonstrating the uniqueness of creation. Let that be. Just hand me twenty five rupees, will you? I'll make you a subscriber for life. The journal must go out today."

"Who do you think you are fooling? For whose good is it supposed to be?" laughed God, referring to the subscription.

"I don't wish to accept charity, and I certainly don't want to get into debt, that's why I'm saying, let it be a commercial deal. You talk big about Goodness. In this world everything – from ghee to sesame oil – is adulterated. Don't you know that much," Kandasami Pillai hit out.

God plunged into thought.

Kandasami Pillai went on, "Anyway, let that be. You know Bogar mentions a garudapacchai, is there a medicinal herb by that name, or is it meant to be garudapicchu?"

"My responsibility lies only in creating a thing, you seem to be charging me with naming it as well. Is that fair? What do I know about it? I created you, your father named you Kandasami Pillai. So am I to be blamed for that?" countered God sharply.

"You two have been wandering about in the heat of the day and that seems to have roused your temper. Don't reprimand me and put me down on account of that. My only concern is that if you go and curse me now on a sudden impulse, then

twenty five rupees might go down the drain unnecessarily."

The child meanwhile, had undone the packet and was eating the sweets. "Why are you talking to Appa, Thaatha? Just taste this and see, it's as sweet as anything."

Taking the pieces of laddu that she gave him and eating them, God said, "Paappa, the broken bits are for me, the whole laddus are for you."

The child took out a laddu, held it in her hand and thought for some time.

"Thaatha, the whole ones won't go into my mouth. But you say all the broken bits are for you. So is there nothing for me?"

God laughed and laughed. "It's all for you and only for you."

"All of it? For me?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. For you, and you alone."

"But then I won't be hungry later! Amma will beat me if I don't eat my dinner! Appa will give me lehiyam." The child was anxious.

"You are sure to be hungry. Don't worry," said God.

"It is true you bought it, all the same it is restaurant food. Bear that in mind," Kandasami Pillai cautioned.

"But I am here with you!" said God.

"Did I ever say you weren't?" replied Kandasami Pillai. A few minutes later, he asked, "How much is left of your hundred rupees, after your expenses of today?"

"Well, after I've given you twenty five, I shall have fifty rupees left," said God, smiling.

"So what do you plan to do, after that?"

"That's what I don't know, either."

"You could practise vaidyam, like me."

"I have no wish to enter into competition with you."
God and Kandasami Pillai

"I have no wish to enter into competition with you."
"Please don't think of it like that. You would not be in competition with me, but with the world's folly. Still if you don't care for that idea, you could give lectures in Siddhanta philosophy?"

"You are trying to counsel me on a means of livelihood. Would I really make any cash that way?" laughed God.

"So, what then?"

"You know, I can dance really well. What do you think? If necessary, I could contrive to have Devi with me as well."

Kandasami Pillai thought for a while. "Somehow, I don't care for the idea," he said.

"So, how else am I to survive? Come on. After all, the entire universe survives only through our dance."

"As you wish," said Kandasami Pillai. He thought for a little while longer. Then, "Come, let's go," he said, taking his upper cloth from the nail on which it was hung, shaking it out and putting it on.

"The little one," said God.

"She's fast asleep, let her be until we return," said Pillai.

A quarter of an hour later, three people entered the mansion belonging to Diwan Bahadur Brihadisvara Sastrigal. One was Kandasami Pillai, another was God. The third was a female, Devi.

"I make thangapaspam for him, medicine of gold turned into ash, on a regular basis. He'll certainly listen to me if I ask for a favour." Pillai was explaining all this at length as he climbed up the steps to the front veranda. The other two followed him. There was a small bundle in Devi's hands.

Kandasami Pillai spoke with authority to the servant. "Is saami at home? Tell him I've come to visit him."

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shriveled body, fine cotton veshti and
upper cloth, with gold rimmed spectacles*
Pudumaippittan

veshti and upper cloth, and gold rimmed spectacles was
hastening towards them. "Oh, is it Pillaiyavargal? Please come in, come in. The powder was finished with yesterday's dose. I was getting really anxious because you hadn't turned up." The apparition greeted everybody effusively, and seated itself in an easy chair.

"Please sit down, do sit down," invited the Diwan Bahadur.

Kandasami Pillai felt his pulse and said, "Not bad, I'll have the medicine sent round this evening. But the reason for my visit is actually to introduce these two to you. Between them they are an absolute ocean of knowledge concerning the Natya Sastra. If you could arrange for them to dance in your Nritya Kalamandali, it would suit them very well."

All Diwan Bahadur's enthusiasm suddenly withdrew like a tortoise's head and feet. He joined his hands together, placed forefingers and thumbs against his nose and chin respectively and nodded his head, muttering, "Mm, mm."

"This gentleman's name is Kuthanaar, the lady's name is Parvati. They are a married couple." Kandasami Pillai explained the relationship.

"I don't recognize the names. Have you given any performances before this?" Diwan Bahadur addressed the question to Kuthanaar, but kept his gaze on Devi.

Devi answered, without giving God an opportunity to open his mouth, "There isn't a place where we haven't danced."

"Somehow it hasn't come to my notice. Never mind. But the lady appears to be very dark, it seems to me she may not show up very well to the audience," remarked the colour conscious Diwan Bahadur.

God and Kandasami Pillai

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"Are you interested in looking for a bride, or did you want to see us dance?" asked Devi.

"Amma, don't be annoyed. But listen, let me tell you something. It is true there is no correspondence at all between culture and colour, except that the two words begin with the same sound. But I've been president of the Kalamandali for thirty years. I know when the eyes of the spectators darken with displeasure."

Devi made as if to go, saying, "You are welcome to keep your mandali and your sundeli."

"Please don't get angry," cried Kandasami Pillai and the Diwan Bahadur, rising to their feet together.

Once again Kandasami Pillai spoke up in their favour. "These two can dance in completely new modes. It's impossible to see such virtuosity in these parts. The Sastras themselves are put to shame by them. Why don't you see them perform, just once?"

"Very well, I'll see them perform. What objection can there be to that," and the Diwan Bahadur lay back in his chair. "Well, all right then, let them do it," he said, and shut his eyes.

Devi stood up and said, "Where's a good, wide space?"

"Why not go into the central hall?" asked God. They agreed to this, went in, and shut the doors. Within a few minutes a melody sounded, sung in a majestic voice, clear as a bell,

*He is Rudra of the cremation ground
He is Rudra ...*

The doors opened.

God stood there, still as a statue, eyes closed, clad in tiger skin, the trident in his hand, his locks of hair entwined with snakes, Ganga tumbling through them.

Once again, that music. As he turned his neck sharply, in a swift movement as if the tangles in a bolt of lightning were being shaken out, the trident in God's hand sparkled and leapt, with his eyes full of frenzy, a smile tumbling upon his lips, he raised his foot.

Kandasami Pillai was extremely uneasy at heart. Thinking that God had surely forgotten the promise he had made, he came to his feet in his anxiety.

"Oi, Kuthanaar, stop your dance for a while."

Then the Diwan Bahadur began to remonstrate. "Chut! this is nothing more than a street performance. What's this? What sort of ridiculous costume is this, you look like the Wild Man of Borneo."

God stopped in the very pose that he had assumed, and stood leaning against his trident.

The Diwan Bahadur said, "Oi, do you know anything at all about Art? You've gone and tied a real tiger skin about yourself. Does anyone go and bring a real snake on to the stage? You should wear a snake ornament, for goodness sake! You need a piece of silk that looks like a tiger skin. The first thing you should know about Art is that it should look pleasant to the eye. Even if Parvati and Parameswaran themselves were to carry on like this, it won't be in accordance with Natya Sastra rules. This is not what the Sastras tell you to do. First take off all those snakes and put them away carefully in their basket, and then get rid of your costumes. Watch out now, this is a place where little children play."

He didn't let Kandasami Pillai get away lightly either. "Look Pillaivaal, just because you prepare certain medicines for me, it doesn't mean that I'm obliged to watch this stuff, and you certainly

may not book a performance.

I have to maintain a position in

public, haven't I?"

Yet another quarter of an hour later, two people were sitting together at the *Siddha Vaidya Dipika* office, without Devi. The child was still asleep on her mat.

Both were silent for a while. Then, God said, "It looks as if it is impossible to survive in this world by doing the work one truly knows."

"You didn't appreciate what I told you, neither did the world appreciate what is dear to you. Well, why don't you try your hand at running Tevaram classes?"

God made a sound of repugnance, "Chut!"

"Has the world gone sour on you already?"

"Having seen you is like having seen the world," said God.

"And what of my having seen you," laughed Kandasami Pillai.

"It's all very well to grant you people boons from a distance. It's impossible to live amongst you," declared God.

"True, your sort are fit only for that," said Kandasami Pillai.

There was nobody to reply to that.

On the table lay twenty five single rupce notes, a life subscription.

Kandasami Pillai wrote in his account, "Income, Rupees twenty five, a life subscription in the name of Paramasivan Pillai the elder, of Kailasavaram."

The child sat up, asking, "Has Thaatha gone back to his hometown, Appa?"