

## **Karaikal Ammaiyar – Group 4**

Karaikal Ammaiyar is one of three women saints among the 63 Nayanmars and is considered to be one of the greatest figures of Tamil literature. She is thought to have lived during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Her father's name was Dhanadhathan and he was a wealthy and virtuous merchant. He and his dutiful wife prayed to the Lord for a child, and He blessed them with a baby girl, who they named Punithavathy. And right from childhood, she had great faith in Lord Shiva, worshipping Him daily.

She grew up and married Paramadhathan, a wealthy merchant, and both of them led their lives as ideal householders. One day, Paramadhathan sent two mangos to his house and Punithavathy kept them safely aside, so that she could serve them to him when he come home for his meal. In the meantime, a Sivayogi visited their house, who was hungry and completely exhausted. Punithavathy gave him all due respect and devotion, and wanted to offer him Biksha. As lunch was not yet ready, Punithavathy served him some curd rice and one of the mangoes.

Later, her husband came home and she served him the other mango. He liked it so much, he asked for the other to be served also! Upset that she could not fulfil her husband's wish, Punithavathy prayed to Lord Shiva and asked for His help. Suddenly a mango miraculously appeared in her hands! With great joy, she lovingly cut and served the mango to her husband. He found it so delicious, when compared to the previous one, that he asked her how this could be. When she explained what had happened, he found it so difficult to believe her and demanded that she produce another, in front of him! She prayed to the Lord, with tears in her eyes, and again, another mango miraculously appeared in her palm. She offered it to him with great humility but, when he touched it, the mango suddenly disappeared!

He was astounded and realised that his wife was not an ordinary woman, but a great divine soul. He felt that it was a great sin to live with her as husband and wife. So, on the pretext of going to a foreign country for trade, he sailed away with a ship full of goods. He established himself in a big city in the Pandiyan kingdom and married another woman called Chellam. He had a daughter by her and named her Punithavathy, in honour and respect of his first wife.

Punithavathy's relatives came to know of her husband's whereabouts and took her there in a palanquin, determined that he fulfilled his duty to her as her husband. When Paramadhathan heard that Punithavathy was coming to him, he came with his second wife and child and fell at Punithavathy's feet. When her relatives demanded an explanation, he revealed that he no longer regarded her as his wife, but as a divine goddess.

Punithavathy understood his dilemma and prayed to Lord Shiva, "Oh Lord, rid me of this physical charm and let me have a demoniacal form". Her prayers were immediately granted and her charming body was transformed into an elderly skeletal woman. Then she set out on a pilgrimage to holy Mount Kailash to see her beloved Lord.

Feeling that it would be a great sin to place her feet on these sacred grounds, she made the last part of her journey upside down, with her feet in the air, walking on her hands! Mother Parvathy was surprised to see such strange behaviour from a devotee. But Lord Shiva told her about Punithavathy's great devotion. When she came near Him, Lord Shiva welcomed her with extreme love, called her "Ammaiye" and granted her a boon. And from then onwards, she became known as Karaikal Ammaiyar. cont.....

She fell at Lord Shiva's feet and prayed:

“Iravaatha inba anbu vendi pin vendukinrar.  
Piravamai vendum, Meendum Pirappu undel, Unnai enrum  
Maravamai vendum. Innum vendum, naan maghizndu paadi,  
Aravaa nee aadumpothu un adiyin keezh irukka enraar.”

“Oh Lord of Mercy! Give me sincere, pure, eternal and overflowing devotion for You.  
I want no more births. However, if I have to take birth again, then grant me the boon that  
I should never forget You. In addition, I must always be at Your Feet,  
Joyfully singing Your praises, whenever You dance.”

Lord Shiva granted her wish and asked her to proceed to Thiruvallangadu to witness His  
divine dance. She went there and spent the rest of her life singing the praises of Lord Shiva.

And thus, a young woman gave up all her worldly attachments, and sacrificed even her  
beauty and charm, because of her complete devotion to Lord Shiva. Karaikal Ammaiyar  
spent the rest of her life composing songs of great poetry and spirituality. These devotional  
songs form part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Thirumurai and will continue to inspire and uplift generations of  
Tamil children to come, as they learn about their great spiritual and cultural heritage.