

next life, and married to the heroic Skanda in the traditionally prescribed manner. Valli, known as Sundaravalli, the younger sister of Amirtavalli, was more frivolous and fun-loving. Hence, her marriage to Murukan came about more circuitously. In her rebirth she was found as a baby under a creeper by a hunter chieftain known as Nambarājan, purportedly at a place known as Vallimalai near Chittoor in Tamil country.<sup>1</sup> She was brought up by the hunter, and like all daughters of hunters spent most of her adolescent hours protecting the millet fields from birds. Told by a wandering fortune-teller that she would be married to Murukan, she longed for him, determining to love no other. Meanwhile, Murukan, somewhat settled with Devasenā at his hill retreat in Tiruttani--to this day one of the six sacred sites of Murukan in Tamil Nadu--was informed of the beauty of Valli, the daughter of the hunter chief. When he went to see her for himself, Murukan was immediately struck by her innocent beauty and charm. He appeared before Valli as a handsome young hunter and sought to win her through amorous advances. She resisted. Hearing the girl's father and brothers returning to the field, he became a vēṅkai tree, hoping thereby to remain near the girl without being detected. Noticing the tree, the men decided to cut it down, only to have Murukan, at the next opportunity, become an old ascetic.

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<sup>1</sup>In the original text, called the Sthānava Vaibhava Kāṇḍa, Jayantipura Māhātmya, Chapters VI-VIII of the latter part of the Skanda Purana, the story differs from the way it is popularly told. In that context, Valli and Devasenā were married to Saṅmukha in primordial time, but Valli, somewhat vain, derided her co-wife Devasenā. Saṅmukha himself told her she must be born of an animal and brought up by hunters. She is therewith born of a doe, the celestial damsel Kanchara. She is brought up by the Pulkasās, celestial damsels cursed by the sage Hema to be children of the hunt. The locale of the event is the Himalayas, rather than in Tamil country.

As an ascetic, Murukan received the hunter's permission to have Valli remain with him as his handmaiden.<sup>1</sup> However, even as an ascetic, Murukan could not resist making amorous suggestions to the girl. She became suspicious and remained at a distance. Then Murukan remembered he had neglected to ask the aid of his brother Gaṇapati in this enterprise, and realized, it was for that reason the obstacles had not been removed. At Murukan's request, then, Gaṇapati appeared as an elephant and frightened Valli nearly out of her wits. In desperate need of protection, Valli ran to the old ascetic, embraced him, and at his insistence, agreed to marry him. Then Murukan revealed his true self to her and married her clandestinely. When Valli's family found the young lovers they insisted on an orthodox wedding. This was duly held in Nambirājan's hut. Murukan took Valli to Tiruttani, and then to his abode on Kanta Mātaṇam (the celestial mountain of Skanda) where, with Valli on his right side, and Devasenā on his left, he is believed to protect the universe.<sup>2</sup>

This charming myth has several implications which have become the basis of various philosophical discussions and interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup>Here again, the Jayantipura version of the Skanda-Purāṇa accounts differs from the popular variation in which it is the girl who is willing to marry Kumāra, but her father who resists, insisting she is intended only for Śanmukha. Kumāra decides to have some fun, thus changing himself into the form of a tree. No mention is made of his becoming an old ascetic, however. Nor is Tiruttani mentioned.

<sup>2</sup>Reconstructed from V. S. Chengalvaraya Pillai, "Murugan Tradition," pp. 3-5; an unpublished translation of the appropriate portion of the Skanda Purāṇa text rendered by V. Raghavan; Embar Vijayaragavachariar's Hārikathā; and the film "Kantaṇ Karuṇai." It should be noted that the basic story is told with variations and embellishments by each individual story-teller.