1.1. The North Indian Skanda-Kumāra-Kārttikeya is very much a bachelor. In the South of India, there is only one form, albeit a very important one, of this deity presented as a chaste bachelor: the ascetic Pāḷiṇyāṇṭavan. Otherwise, the South Indian Skanda has two wives. The first, Devasena > Teyvāṇai (alias Tēvāṇai or Tēvāṇai) is known both in the North and in the South; the second, Vallī, is prominent only in the Tamil and Sinhalese-speaking areas of India and Ceylon. I have tried in an earlier paper (Zvelebil, 1977) to trace the possible origins of Vallī, and the early developments of the Vallī-Murugan myth which I consider as one of the few ‘purely’ South Indian (‘Dravidian’, Tamil) myths. In this paper, I shall discuss the medieval and early modern developments of the story, and a few of its reflections in folk-art.

1.2. In the South Indian temples, Skanda-Murugan is usually depicted standing between his two wives, with Tēvāṇai on his left and Vallī on his right side. In poster art the pattern is identical. I have in front of me a poster showing in glowing colours Śrī Tiruttanī Murukan. On his right side stands a woman of dark-green complexion dressed in red sari — Vallī; on his left a woman of fair complexion dressed in emerald-coloured sari — Devasena. Another poster (of Śrī Caṭṭaccarakākkara Murukan) shows the god upon his peacock mount, with his right arm around the shoulders of Vallī (purple sari, dark green complexion), his left arm around the shoulders of Devasena (red sari, rosy complexion). As Brenda E. F. Beck (1975) has observed, since the right side is generally more prestigious and more auspicious (a Hindu bride sits usually to the right of the bridegroom on the wedding day), we would expect Teyvāṇai, as the first wife of the god, to be placed on the right of her divine spouse. Though in status, origin, and time-sequence, Vallī is second to Teyvāṇai, as Rādhā is second to Rukmini (Beck, 1975, 95), it is Vallī, just like Rādhā, who has become the popular heroine of the Murugan story, and, as we have seen from my above-quoted earlier paper, it has always been Vallī and not Devasena who has been popularly and generally worshipped as Murugan’s sākti. As Brenda Beck says, the Tamil literature which has grown up around the Murugan-Vallī love-story “...can be thought of as the Tamil Saivite equivalent to the better-known Vaisnava literature treating Krishna’s romance with Radha” (Beck, 1975, 95).

1.3. The pattern of a ‘high’ god having two wives, of whom the first comes from the ‘Great Tradition’ (is ‘Sanskritized’, belongs to a high caste or stems directly from Indology, Indo-Iranian Journal 22 (1980) 113–135. 0019-7246/80/0222-0113 $02.30. Copyright © 1980 by D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordrecht, Holland, and Boston, U.S.A.
the Brahminical pantheon), whereas the second wife comes from the local ‘Little Tradition’, from a ‘low’ caste or even from a tribe – this pattern is well-spread in peninsular India, and certainly not limited only to the case of the ‘triangle’ Valli-Murugan-Devasenā. G. D. Sontheimer has devoted to this phenomenon quite a few interesting pages in his recent monography on Birobā, Mhaskobā and Khanḍobā (Sontheimer, 1976). Thus e.g. the marriage of Mhaskobā/Kālbhairav with Bālubā/ Bālurāṇi corresponds to the marriage of Khanḍobā with Bālī/Bāṇī, said to be a Dhangar or a Kuruba woman — a marriage ‘inferior’ according to Sanskritic-Brahminic notions, just as the marriage of Murugan with Valli, performed first in the kaḷavu-manner, was ‘inferior’ to the Vedic-type marriage of the god with Devasenā. It would certainly be worth while to investigate further such parallels. Sontheimer’s quoted monograph is the first step in this direction.¹ The god with two wives reappears again and again in South India, and we must — we indeed must — regard this pattern as archetype: Murugan with Teyvayāṇai and Valli; Aiyanār with the fair and the dark wives (Dumont, 1959); Khanḍobā with his two goddesses in Mahārāṣtra; and other instances may be quoted (Śrīśailam in Andhra-prades, Adimailār in Karnāṭak, Devaruṇḍa near Rānebennūr in Karnāṭak). “Der Gott verband auf diese Weise heterogene Stämme und Gruppen und ungleiche Kasten” (Sontheimer, 1976, 21).

2. There are two current versions of the myth of Skanda-Kumāra-Murugan in the Tamil South of India: one is the famous and very popular epic, kāvyā-like Tamil purāṇa of Kacciyappa Čivacāriyar of Kānci, the Kantapurāṇam (ca. 1350–1400 A.D.),² the other is the Sanskrit Southern version of the myth, Śrīśkanda mahā-purāṇam, of unknown date and authorship, published in grantha in 1893 and in nāgarāṇi in (probably) 1963. It looks like an abridged version of the Tamil text of Kacciyappa. However, it is probable that this printed version is, in fact, the Śivara-hasyakhandā (composed in the South of India sometime during the late medieval period), known from manuscript collections (e.g. nos San. IO 1431 and San. IO 238 of the India Office Library, London). It was edited by Anantarāma Tiksitar, Čelam.

The story of Valli and Murugan occurs in the very last canto of Kacciyappa’s purāṇa. In contrast, in the Sanskrit version, Skanda meets, woos and marries Valli (or rather Lavali) immediately after marrying Devasenā, in the Devakāṇḍam.

I give below a very detailed account of the story as it occurs in both these works, pointing out, in particular, some significant differences. On the whole, the Tamil version is more elaborate, poetically certainly more beautiful and much more in the Southern, Tamil tradition. The Sanskrit version, however, must have been composed, too, in the South. In following text, KP denotes Kacciyappa’s Tamil Kantapurāṇam, SMP the Sanskrit Skāndamahā-purāṇam.