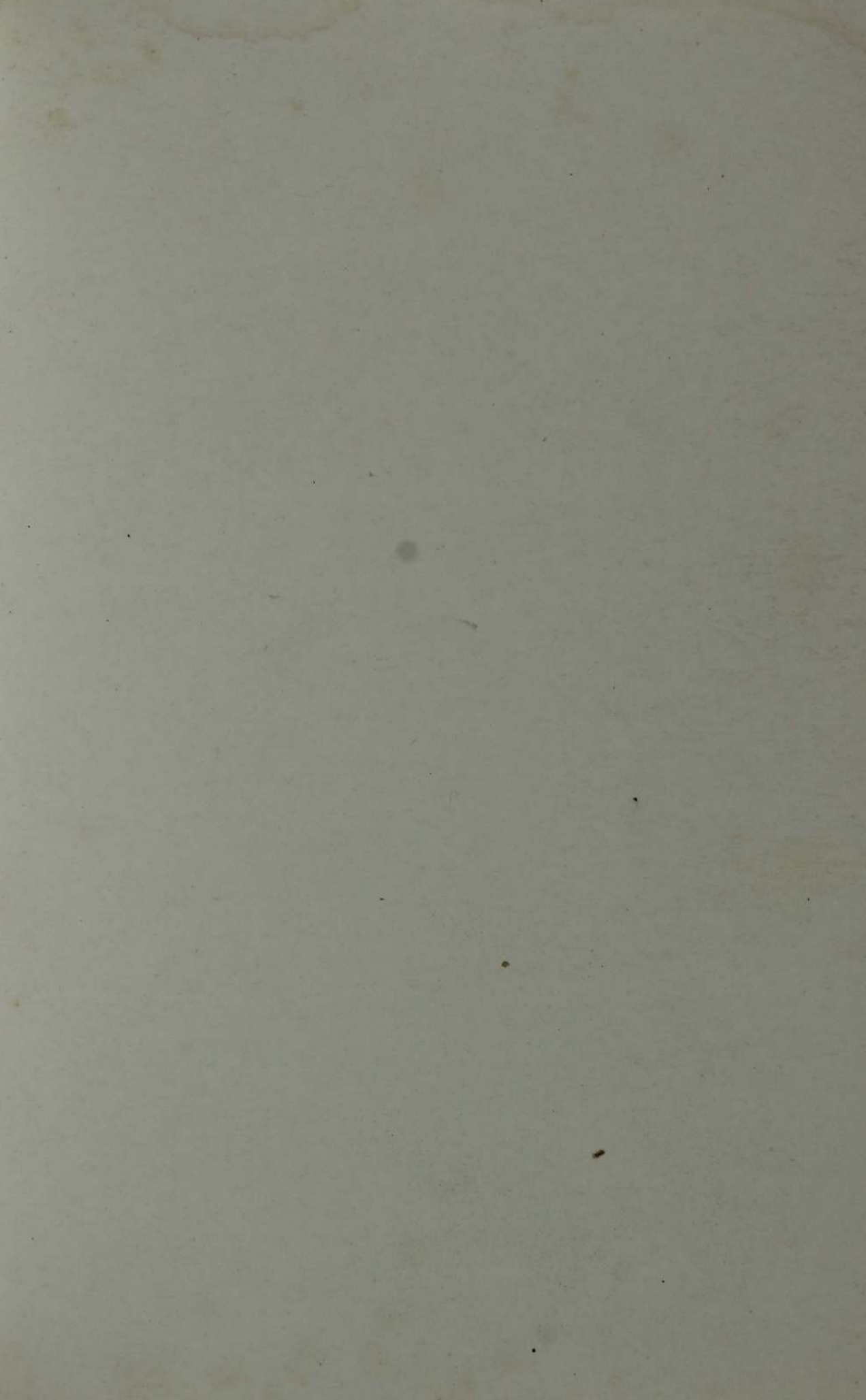


THE DIVINE EXPLOITS OF SKANDAKUMARA





The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Title	:	The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara
Author	:	Mr. V. Sivarajasingam BA(Hons)
First Edition	:	2009
Published By	:	Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs. No. 248 - 1/1, Galle Road, Colombo - 04.
Printed at	:	Thinakkural Publications. 68, Ellie House Road, Colombo - 15.
Pages	:	I-II + 118
No. of. Copies	:	1000
Size	:	1/8
Paper	:	80 GSM Imported White Printing
Price	:	Rs. 150/=
Printing	:	Offset
Cover	:	230GSM Art Board
I.S.B.N. No	:	978-955-9233-16-9

PREFACE

The Publication of the book “The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara” may be said to be a significant landmark in the publication activity of the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, since the book happens to be an epitome in English one of the greatest books in Tamil. Skandapurānam a grand epic describes inter alia the noble deeds of Lord Skanda. by way of bestowing grace to humanity Though the book is a synopsis, the author has attempted to include in his work, the very important ideas found in the original.

The author Mr. Sivarajasingam is an erudite scholar with a high command in both English and Tamil Languages. While serving as an Assistant Commissioner in the Department of Official Languages, he contributed considerably to the promotion of Tamil through the art of Translation. He has often helped the the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs in the preparation of articles for The Hindu Encyclopedia, and teaching contents for the Sunday school. He is a talented speaker and an ardent puranic commentator. Mr. Sivarajasingam is also a poet of fair standing, having written various types of poems of literary conventions, like ‘Kovai’ and ‘Pillai Thamil’.

Skandapurānam is a very popular and favourite book among Hindu Tamils. The author’s aim in rendering it in English is perhaps to provide an opportunity for those interested in the book, who are well versed in English but not proficient in Tamil. Providing an English version would not only popularize the book among religious aspirants, but promote cross-cultural relations. as well It is hoped that the authors aim and Labour would bear fruits.

Mrs. Shanthi Navukkarasan

Director

Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs

FOREWORD

I feel greatly honoured to write a foreword to the book 'The Divine Exploits of 'Skandakumara' written by Mr. V. Sivarajasingam, retired visiting English lecturer, University of Jaffna.

The great epic Kanthapuram is revered by the Saivites as the reservoir of divine poetry in Tamil and fountain of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. The great Saiva scholar – reformer of the 19th century, Arumuga Navalar himself has stated that the classical use of Tamil language, the firm observance of Saiva religious traditions and the knowledge of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy found in our country, then were entirely due to the constant reciting of Kanthapurana and the interpretations given by scholars based on the epic in our temples. Lord Murugan is revered by the Saivites as their savior and refuge during the Kaliyuga (the present period of time) and hence his title "Kaliyuga Varathan".

In this book the author has given an outline of the great epic aimed at providing a general view of the contents to those who are not familiar with Tamil. The author is eminently qualified to undertake such a venture. He himself is an accomplished Tamil poet, a greatly respected speaker and an interpreter of Kanthapuram in solemn traditional manner in our temples. In fact he has written an interpretation of one section of the great epic, "Soorapanman Vathaipadalam (the subduing of Sooran the head of Asura) which was published in 1992 for the benefit of devotees who recite it during the Kanthashasti fasting period.

The book makes a good reading as the story is told in a language and style appropriate to the religious significance of the subject. Even the sequential order of the great Kachchiyappa Sivachchariar's work is followed from the beginning to the end. The great story is mostly

symbolic in meaning as held by the students of the Saiva Siddhantha philosophy and hence the author's attempt to explain some of its sections, as seen in his mentioning Lord Murugan's consorts, Theivayani and Vallinayaki as energy of action and energy of volition respectively.

I am of the humble opinion that the author has succeeded in his attempt. I am certain that this book will reach the 'Non Tamil World' and more particularly the section of Tamil Saiva society which finds itself more proficient in English than its mother tongue due to various reasons. May the ever – merciful lord almighty Murugan shower his divine blessings on the author so that the Saiva world will benefit further.

S. Vinayakamoorthy

(Retired Senior Instructor,

UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA)

R. T. Vigna Raja

High Court Judge

Jaffna

MOUNASHRAM AN APPRECIATION

Pandithamani Kanapathipillai a great savant and reputed Tamil scholar would hardly speak for a few minutes without mentioning, quoting or referring to "Kanthapuram" He would often say Jaffna culture has had its roots in Kanthapuram. I used to wonder and ponder what is so great about that book? Little by little with my father's instructing me and Pandithamani's association later I came to know of the book. The book captivated me more than anything else.

It was by a heaven-sent chance that I came across Mr. V. Sivarajasingam, whose association took me a long way in the understanding of the great poet Kachiappar. Later I learnt that Mr. Sivarajasingam had written a commentary on a portion of Kanthapuram. Lost in the hum-drum life of the work a day world, we lost contact for long. However I came to know of his production of the book, "The Divine Exploits of Skanthakumara". I find it a real epitome of the grand epic Kanthapuram written in select readable language. It is replete with a variety of academic tracts all extracted from the original. From other merits apart, the book hopefully provides good reading. The reading public should be thankful to the author for his meritorious work. for whose continued service and long life, I earnestly pray.

07/03/2009

Munashakar

MESSAGE

It is refreshing to find a scholar of the calibre of Mr. V. Sivarajasingam producing a work of excellence on the 'Leelas' of Lord Murugan under the title "The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara" His work appears at the opportune moment when the "Avatar" of Lord Murugan, is expected to be the source of grace and benediction in the Kaliyuga. The fact that all the details regarding the Divine Exploits of Lord Murugan are condensed and are written in simple straight forward but elegant English makes it all the more useful. Numerous and diverse sources included in the chapters are of inestimable value.

Hindu social reformers turned to religious texts with different purposes in mind. Some sought inspiration from them; some simply wanted to highlight the golden moments in Hindu philosophy, but the author of this book wanted to bring to light the nuances of ancient 'Puranic' thoughts. The Hindu world should be deeply indebted to Mr. Sivarajasingam for bringing out an exemplary book of this nature at a time when commercialism has virtually crippled religious thoughts.

This very readable and deeply philosophic book should be of absorbing interest specially to those wanting a better understanding of the deeper aspects of 'Kandapuranam' Writing Hindu religious 'Puranic' thoughts in English without discolouring its spiritual truth is not an easy task. This book is not only useful for the Tamil speaking community but also for those who can understand English all over the World. It offers a great opportunity for the generation of Tamil Expatriates. I wish him all success.

R. T. Vigna Raja

High Court Judge

Jaffna

PROLEGOMENON

Kanthapuram is one of the greatest works in Tamil. It was written by Kachiappa Sivachariar, the chief priest of Kanchipuram Murugan Temple called Kumarakoddam. He rendered into Tamil from Sanskrit Skandapuram a portion called Sivarakasya. The work by the Tamil poet is better termed a transmogrification rather than translation, for he has made many changes structurally and substantially. Kanthapuram among many other things, speaks, predominantly of the glory, grace and prowess of Skandakumaran.

Few epics in Tamil can claim parity with Kanthapuram in poetic excellence, depth of knowledge, beauty of language and above all the depiction of divine grace of Lord Skantha and of God's ways of effusing it to those who seek it. Though it is pre-eminently considered a religious epic, it deals with all kinds of thoughts, philosophies and metaphysical concepts necessary for spiritual and material lives. It deals with the four cardinal values Dharma Artha Kama and Moksha (virtue, pelf, pleasure and salvation) and expounds ways and means of attaining them. It upholds the greatness of Saiva Saints and Devotees and the profuseness of Siva's grace. The book is interspersed with hymn – like verses, that are suitable for reciting during daily prayers. In Kasipamuni's sermon to his sons are encapsulated the tenets of Saiva Sidhanta. Maya's advice to her son Soorapadma has its base in charavaka philosophy. In this manner the book abounds with information pertaining to every aspect of life, knowledge and values. Even from my school days I developed profound interest for Kanthapuram, for the promoting factor of which an uncle of mine was instrumental. He spent the most part of his life in interpreting the puranic verses in temples. The custom of interpreting the verses in temples has been a long – standing one, prevailing even today, wherein one devotee would recite the verses one by one and another would expatiate on the meaning and

significance of the verses, in the presence of an audience. Accompanying my uncle to the temple during school holidays, I gradually picked up the art of reciting and interpreting the verses.

Attracted by the contents of the book in the delineation of the exploits of Skandakumaran. I long cherished the desire, that I should render in to English at least the story of Kanthapuram, the reading of which, I fervently believed would enrich the mind and ennoble the soul of the devotees.

I am happy that my desire has now been realized, for the fulfillment of which the Ministry of Hindu affairs has been instrumental, by shouldering the onus of publishing my book.

To the Hon. Minister of Moral up – liftment and Hindu cultural affairs, for his munificence I owe a debt a gratitude and I am most thankful to the Director, and other colleagues of the Department associated with the publication, for their assistance and co-operation.

My genuine thanks are due to Hon. R.T. Vignarajah High court judge, Jaffna, who in the amidst of heavy judicial responsibilities found time to send his learned message providing moral stamina for my undertaking. My sincere thanks are also due to Mr. S. Vinayakamoorthy retired senior English instructor, University of Jaffna, for his valuable foreword.

I am gratefully indebted to Swamin Umasankar, Head, Shelter of Silence Colombo for his message of appreciation. Finally I convey my sincere thanks to the potential readers who, I hope, would enjoy my humble production.

V. Sivarajasingam

The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara

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The Divine Exploits of Skandakumara

Introduction

Kanthapurānam, a religious epic, is one of the greatest literary epics in Tamil. It mainly describes the story of the rescue and redemption of the celestials from the cruel subjugation and atrocities committed on them by the Asuras whose indomitable leader Surapathma is eventually defeated and slain by Lord Skanda.

The epic sings of the glory, grace and beatitude of Lord Skanda in rich melodious language.

The author of this immortal epic is Kachiappa Sivachariar who functioned as the priest of Sri Muruga's shrine in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu. It is believed that Lord Skanda himself initiated the task of composing the epic, on the author's behalf.

The epic (or purana as it is usually called) consists of six cantos, comprising 10,345 stanzas in all.

Apart from the chief episode of the fight between Lord Skanda and Surapathma and consequent redemption of the celestials the epic contains several other episodes such as the wedding of Siva and Uma and the nuptial tie of Lord Skanda with Theivayanai and Valliammah (the adopted daughter of the Veddha Chief.)

The book teems with several sorts of sermons, epigrams and anecdotes. It is a treasure trove of diverse religious and philosophical ideas exposed in clear terms.

The present attempt to give an outline of the magnum opus is aimed at providing a general view of the contents to those who are not very familiar with Tamil, but who may be interested in knowing something about the work. With Lord Skanda's blessing, let us hope it will make interesting reading .

விநாயகர் காப்பு
திகட சக்கரச் செம்முக மைந்துளான்
சகட சக்கரத் தாமரை நாயகன்
அகட சக்கர வின்மணி யாவுறை
விகட சக்கரன் மெய்ப்பதம் போற்றுவாம். - 1

Adoration to Vinayaga
Adoration to the holy feet of the lord
With ten arms and five faces
Adoration To Him in whose waist band
The sun-god rests as diamond stud
Adoration To him who bears the name of Vikatachakra - 1

சுப்பிரமணியர் காப்பு
மூவிரு முகங்கள் போற்றி முகம்பொழி கருணை போற்றி
ஏவருந் துதிக்க நின்ற விராறுதோள் போற்றி காஞ்சி
மாவடி வைகுஞ் செவ்வேள் மலரடி போற்றி யன்னான்
சேவலு மயிலும் போற்றி திருக்கைவேல் போற்றி போற்றி - 2

OBEISANCE TO SUBRAMANIA
Obeisance to the Twice Three faces of Kumara.
Obeisance to the grace flowing from the Six faces.
Obeisance to the shoulders held in admiration by all.
Obeisance to the shining spear resting in His hand.
Obeisance to the Lord residing at Kanchimango grove.
Obeisance to the cock banner and the peacock vehicle. - 2

CANTO - I

01. SIVA AND UMA ON MOUNT KAILAS

Mount Kailas stands majestically- aloft licking the sky with its snow capped peaks. It is the abode of Siva the omnipotent Lord. It abounds with innumerable Rishis and Devas. Around it are the cities of Indira and other regents of the spheres. Seated with her Lord in the shrine on top of the mount, consort Uma one day addressed Him thus. "Almighty Lord I had been living with Dhaksha who had the audacity to abuse you, in his house eating the food provided by him. I feel contaminated by his evil thoughts and ways. I deem it a calumny to be considered his daughter. Wherefore I earnestly pray that you help me to get rid of this stigma. "You are right in your thought, fair one", replied Siva with a gentle smile. "The king of the Himalayas is doing great penance in order to have you as his daughter. If you so desire, you grow up in his mansion as his daughter, you may engage yourself in penance with a view to reaching me. I will come to you at the proper hour, wed you and take you back to Kailas". Uma received these words with mixed feelings. She was sad to be parted from her Lord, but was happy to be got rid of the blemish of being the daughter of Dhaksha.

02. UMADEVI'S PENANCE

Instilled by the love for her Lord and compassion for the inhabitants of the world at large Umadevi left Mount Kailas and proceeded to the Himalayas. The snow-clad Himalaya Mountain with blue clouds floating constantly over its peaks resembled the serpent abode of Lord Vishnu and Luckshumi encircled by the milky ocean.

The King of Himalayas was engaged in doing penance in a beautiful pond on a slope of the mountain with the view to be blessed with the boon of having Umadevi as his daughter and then getting her

wedded to Lord Siva. In front of him, on a lotus flower appeared the Goddess mother of the whole world, as a lovely child. The thought that Uma had deserted Siva to be his child was painful to the King. He even blamed himself for having performed such severe penance that had resulted in separation of the Supreme Lord and Lady. However he comforted himself with the belief that it's all God's design with the common weal in mind and salvaged from grief thus, he floated on bliss. He lifted the child that lay in the flower bed carried it home and gave it unto his Queen who found no words to express her joy.

It is indeed in materialistic parlance we say that the Royal couple brought up the child; for it is mother Uma's grace that protects and looks after us.

As soon as the child Uma reached five years of age she told her adopted parents of her desire to perform penance with a view to attaining Lord Siva's favour. "It does not behove you my child to set your mind on such severe and enormous task at such a tender age" said the King to Uma. "Therefore give up the idea of penance for the time being". Umadevi smiled at these words and said "It is Eswara who protects us all. One cannot guard oneself without the benign grace of the Universal Guardian. The idea of penance was indeed induced by the Lord's grace. Hence let there be no objection to my plan". The Himalayan King spoke no further but made the necessary arrangements for his daughter to perform the penance. He put up an enclosed stall and sent a bevy of maidens as companions. Umadevi took leave of her parents, entered the penance hall accompanied by a group of ladies and started praying.

03. LORD SIVA AS GURU

Meanwhile at Mount Kailas the four sages Sanaka, Sanathana, Sananthara, and Sanathkumara fell prostrate at the feet of Lord Siva

and said, "Lord Almighty we have gone through the whole gamut of the entire sacred works, the four scriptures the twenty-eight agamas and the related works'. We have been tossed about on the sea of scriptures by the storms of delusion, caught in the darkness of ignorance, feel blind-folded and placed in a confounded state, and we earnestly entreat you to enlighten us on the ultimate truth". The Lord acceding to the request of these ascetics with spotless penance, sat himself under a pippal tree, bidding them to be seated before Him. In an atmosphere of perfect serenity, ordering Nandhi Deva not to allow anyone except Manmatha the god of love into the enclosure, Siva started expounding the intricate and mysterious realities encapsulated in the sivagamas. On completion of the exposition of the three paths of attainment viz Charia, Kriya and Yoga, the ascetics requested the Lord to make clear to them the Gnana Marga. Siva without replying closed his eyes, kept a hand against his heart and sat like a yogi in perfect composure for a few moments, signifying to them the esoteric implication of gnanamuthra. When the Lord represented through muthra the nature of gnanam, the ascetics realized that such supreme mystic knowledge could not be attained through book learning.

04. MANMATHA'S RUIN

While the Lord was engaged thus in enlightening the sages about the device of concentration and spiritual meditation the whole world was rendered desireless, bereft of carnal yearnings. On the extreme Siva sat motionless, an embodiment of impassivity. In Himalayas Umadevi too sat motionless mentally chanting Siva's various names intermittently repeating Panchaksara.

"In such a situation, how can we expect a son from Siva" thought Indira, the chief of the celestials

Along with Brahma, he approached Vishnu and complained of

his grievance. Lord Vishnu listened patiently and said "If Siva our over Lord as well as the cause of all creations were to remain immersed in profound contemplation, oblivious of the world's happenings with all his activity inward turned, there is no possibility of his turning towards love. I will tell you of a plan. Send Manmatha the god of love to Siva to induce him and awaken his feelings by shooting flower shafts that would kindle his passion for Uma". This appeared to be a good suggestion to Indira. Together with Brahma the Lord of the clouds (Indira) approached Manmatha and broached the subject of their plan. Though the God of desire first protested, he finally yielded to the coaxings and wheedlings of Indira. Manmatha set out with his wife Rathy to the mountain where Siva dwelt. It was spring and the trees were putting forth new colourful flowers, birds and beasts were mating. Only Siva remained unmoved in his mystic silence.

Even Manmatha was daunted at the sight of Siva's graceful appearance; however he took courage. He chose a moment when Siva seemed to relax his concentration. He stringed his bow and was about to shoot. Lord Siva saw him and darted a flash of fire from his third eye that burnt his body to ashes, Rathi, Kamadeva's consort fell unconscious, but regaining senses soon, she entreated Siva to give back her husband's life. Siva granted her request with some limitation. "His life will be given back to you on the day when Uma becomes my lady. From that time he will be unseen by others though he shall be visible to you". So saying, He again sank into repose.

Indira, Brahma and the other gods who had been watching all these from a distance, were utterly struck with grief and remorse. "We sent Kamadeva with the intention of distracting the Lord from his yogic involvement. Not only has our plan misfired but it has cost the life of our cherished Kamadeva. It is unfortunate that God Siva has not renounced his yogic state". Then they came to the conclusion that the only way of redemption was to appeal to Lord Siva with the permis-

sion of Nandhideva. They approached the Lord and making a submission of their grievances begged him not to make any further delay in saving them from the Asura. They particularly reminded Lord Siva of the promise He earlier made to beget a son in His own form and stature. "Be merciful O Lord! Will you not consider the pathetic plight we are in ? How long can we bear the atrocities of the Asuras? We are daily dying inch by inch by the inhuman, ill-treatment of Surapathma. Deign to drive our sorrows, O Lord" they pleaded Siva glanced at them with grace shedding eyes and spoke thus "Your request will be granted and your sorrows will cease with the appearance of Skanda".

The devas felt happy and took leave of the Lord and retired to their respective abodes.

05. SIVA WEDS UMA

Finding it an opportune moment Rathi approached Siva and begged him to give back the life of Cupid. "He will come into life on the day when I wed Umadevy. His appearance will be visible to you but invisible to others" Lord Siva promised.

Then He addressed the four ascetic disciples "Listen O sages. Sivagnanam which is Divine knowledge is beyond expression and book learning. It can be attained only through deep meditation which should focus on my name" The four disciples fell at His feet saying "we are now embued and enlightened with real knowledge", and left for their places to resume their penance Now Lord Siva bethought Himself of his promise to the Devas and it came upon his gracious mind that for the promise to be fulfilled, he should wed Umadevi He felt inclined on a sportive way to show to the world Umadevi's devotion to Him. He took the form of an old sanyasi and suddenly appeared at the entrance of Uma's penance grove. The bevy of girls in attendance on Umadevi became alert and questioned him about the cause of his visit. "The

lovely daughter of Himalayan King, I am told, is engaged in vigorous penance. I would like to have a glimpse of the nature and style of her performance" said the hermit, The girls took him to Umadevi. On seeing him, Umadevi got up from her seat and paid obeisance due to a revered sanyasi. Casting a benign glance on the young damsel, He said, "you appear to be the most lovely maiden on earth, but why torture yourself thus in the name of penance? Your body does not deserve such suffering". Uma kept silent. "Venerable Sir, she is engaged in this ascetic exercise with the noble intention of attaining Lord Siva's lotus feet and making him her consort" said, the chief chaperon. On hearing these words the venerable sage laughed aloud and said, "It is the height of folly on the part of your mistress to aspire for the unattainable. The whole world knows that Lord Siva is beyond reach of even Brahma and Vishnu."

The enraged Umadevi broke her silence and replied vehemently, "I will not be deterred from my pursuit by such words. Even if the immortal Lord does not condescend to appear and fulfill my ambition, I will continue my penance in more severe and painful way till the very end of my life."

"Young maiden, you are not perhaps aware of the nature of your so called God of gods," the hermit went on unmindful of Umadevi's wrath. "He wears poisonous snakes for ornaments and has elephant's hide and bloody tiger's skin for dress and resides in cremation grounds. He is so poor that he has a bull for his vehicle and goes begging from Rishi's wives. Besides he is of unknown birth". Biting her lip to control her rising rage Parvathy vehemently defended her Lord, finally declaring that her love could never be altered whatever was said of Him, true or false. Then the hermit threw off his disguise and revealed himself as no other than Siva. Parvathy was taken aback with pleasant surprise. At the same time she shuddered with fear at the thought of her disrespectful talk she had had with him. She fell at his feet and craved his

indulgence. "Forgive me O Lord for my insufferable rudeness in addressing you in the most improper way". The Lord lifted her and cuddling her with his chest said. "Devi don't be agitated. It's only to show to the world the depth of love you have towards me, I indulged in this sport. Now that your love is proven, we shall be wedded soon." Then releasing her from His embrace, Lord Siva went to Kailas where he summoned the seven sages and ordered them to go to the king of Himalayas and express his desire to wed Umadevi. The King was immensely pleased to hear of his proposal. Mean-while Parvathy returned home to tell her father of her happy fortune. The Himalayan King was busy engaging himself in making arrangements for his daughter's wedding. He summoned Viswakarma the celestial architect and instructed him to construct a wedding hall using his divine skill and architectonics. Viswakarma put up a magnificent hall embellishing it with artistic tapestries.

At that moment the Queen-wife felt a little sad and reluctantly spoke to her husband, "Forgive me my Lord if my words sound out of tune. I have been told that Lord Siva after marrying the daughter of Daksha, Brahma's son decapitated his head. My body shivers with fear at the very thought of this incident." How can we give away our daughter to such a character? "Don't be disturbed my love" returned the king. You have not been properly told of the actions of our Lord. Indeed it is hard to comprehend the why and the wherefore of His actions. Daksha was given due punishment for his misdeeds. He performed a Yaga in which he ignored Lord Siva to whom the offering ought to be provided. Besides he abused the Lord in the most ignoble and irreverent terms. That was why Daksha suffered the loss of his head" On hearing these words the Queen felt relieved.

When the celestial architect informed that the task had been completed, the king felt pleased and sent messages of invitation to all the celestials. Beginning with Brahma, Vishnu and Indira, and then to the

rishis such as Narada, Agastia and Vasistha.

On the appointed day, the celestial damsels with great eagerness gathered round Parvathy and displayed their skill and adroitness in adorning the bride. Her ascetic appearance was done away with. Now Parvathy glowed with scintillating beauty, her companions now having given the final touch of embellishment. Luxmi, Saraswathy, Menaka and other chosen chaperons took Uma who appeared an embodiment of modesty to the nuptial dais. Meanwhile the Himalayan king proceeded with his retinue to mount Kailas. With the permission of Nandideva, the guardian of the sanctorum, the king entered the shrine and making obeisance with all humility requested the Lord that He be graciously pleased to set out to the Himalayan abode to accept the hand of the divine maiden, Parvathy. The Lord of Kailas acceded the king's request. Then summoning Nandhi, Lord Siva bid him inform all celestials, Rishis and dwarf demons to accompany Him to the place of wedding. The Celestials were highly pleased. Brahma and Vishnu came forward with a golden plate filled with dazzling jewels and paying homage to the Lord said, "we are not unaware Oh Lord of the fact that you are devoid of likes and dislikes. You consented to marry only to promote our welfare. It is our earnest wish that you put on these ornaments and appear in the true form of a royal bride- groom" Touching the jewels Lord Siva said with gentle smile. "I am pleased at your request. It is as good as wearing them. Then he thought for a moment that the snakes on his body be turned into ornaments and the celestials were overjoyed to find the jewels twinkling on his body.

When Lord Siva appeared, attired and adorned as bridegroom in the Himalayan Palace, all the Ladies in and around the city were enthralled by his astounding beauty and different thoughts and feelings ran amok in their swelling hearts. "Who has done this foolish thing to our beloved Lord? In the name of adornment some thoughtless fools have heaped upon him numerous ornaments that have hidden his natu-

ral radiant, beauty”, murmured some maidens. Some stood with melting hearts unaware of their clothes slipping down. “We have only one pair of eyes that is hardly enough to drink deep the ambrosia of his beauty”, moaned some. “We have not done sufficient penance as Umadevy to win Him” wailed some wanton women.

As the Lord moved on in procession, the inhabitants of different worlds flocked the city to have a glimpse of the bridegroom. Mount Himalaya’s quaked and shook in consequence of over-crowding inordinate weight. The northern hemisphere sank while the southern part went up. People panicked with fear imagining a deluge to be in the offing. Even the rishis were alarmed “Save us, O Lord from the catastrophe” cried all in one voice. The great god, as the protector of living beings he was, signalled to Nanthideva to beckon sage Agasthya. The sage came and fell at the feet of Siva and stood up with great anxiety. “Listen my devout Ascetic” said the Lord, “people from all parts of the globe have thronged here and the northern side of the mountain has sunk low while the southern side of the mountain has shot up. I request you to go to the south and settle on the slope of mount Pothikai. This will help to set the globe on proper footing.” Agastya was saddened by the proposal “Forgive me my merciful Lord. I don’t remember to have committed any crime to be punished like this. I have been most eagerly awaiting to witness your Lord’s wedding. Will I not be deprived of the rarest opportunity if I am sent away?” So saying the sage again fell prostrate before Lord Shiva. “We are not unmindful of your desire. But there is not any other person, not even Brahma, so powerful and capable as you are to perform this feat. Proceed to the South, therefore, without protest. We will provide you with the vision of our wedding in mount Pothikai itself”. Now the sage readily agreed and making obeisance set out on his errand.

At the appointed hour Parvathy Devi surrounded by the goddesses, Indrani bearing the betel box, Saraswathi rendering solicitous

encomiums Ganga and Yamuna waving the wisks and Luxmi chaperoning, set foot on the ground and tracing her steps gently like a swan reached the wedding hall. With due respect, love and modesty battling in her heart the bride fell at the Lord's feet. Eswara with a gentle smile signalled to her to sit beside Him on the bridal pedestal. She bowed with curtsy and throwing a quick glance at her Lord, sat as directed.

The Himalayan King coming forward took the left hand of the bride and delivered it into the right hand of the bridegroom. "It is with all humility and great pleasure I give unto thee Oh Lord my most cherished and beloved daughter, whom you be graciously pleased to accept as thy consort". So saying he poured a little perfumed water into the hand of the Lord, signifying his gift.

Meanwhile the Gantharvas (the Celestial Musicians) played music to whose tunes the dancers, Ramba, Menaka, Urvasi and Thilothama danced like plumed peacocks. As soon as the ceremony was over Brahma made his obeisance to the divine couple. Vishnu and Indira then paid their respects to Lord Siva and consort Parvathy Devi. Taking leave of the Himalayan King the couple set off to Mount Kailas accompanied by the celestials, the goblins and devotees.

06. THE AVATAR OF SKANDKUMARA

Indira and the gods were happy, hopeful of the prospect of the birth of a son to Siva and Parwathy which event they believed would bring an end to their sufferings. But the prospect remained an empty dream. They felt Siva had ignored their earlier request or was indifferent to their sufferings. They however decided to approach Eswara once again and renew their appeal led by Vishnu. They reached Kailas and with the kind permission of Nandhi Deva gained admission to the Lord's presence. "What amount of apology is needed to atone for the disturbance we know not, Oh Lord" they moaned. "We were fervently

hoping you would beget us a son to end our endless suffering at the hands of the Asuras. Delay not any more, our Lord, in granting our request,” they pleaded.

Easwara cast a benign look over the celestials and said “Your request shall be granted forthwith”. As the Devas sat watching spell-bound, he took a new appearance with six faces. Now from each eye on the forehead of each of the faces there emanated a fire spark. Since those sparks were produced to bring good to the lives, they did no harm to the devas. However their dazzling brightness and fierce heat made Umadevi tremble with fear. She was so scared that she withdrew from the spot. Meanwhile the sparks flew on all directions vomiting out great mass of heat. The celestials in great fear implored the Lord to call them back to His presence. Then he called upon the gods of fire and wind and bid them to carry the sparks and put them in river Ganga which would then take them to Saravana Pond. On hearing these words the two gods were panic-stricken. They fell at Siva’s feet and with great trepidation said. ‘Forgive us O Lord for daring to speak. The fire born of the sparks that spread far and wide with great vehemence threatening to consume the entire earth a few seconds before, now lies inactive because of your grace and power. How can we bear such deadly sparks? Even the very thought of approaching them seems to scorch our hearts”. Lord Siva graciously smiled and told them, he would give them enough strength enabling them to carry the sparks till they were deposited in the river. The gods agreed. Meanwhile Lord Siva told the celestials. “Once the sparks reach the Saravana pond, they will together burgeon as a child who will grow up as Muruka and destroy the entire Asura clan. Now bury your worries in meditation and return to your respective places.”

Gangadevi received the sparks with care and regard and delivered them unto Saravana pond as Siva willed it. There the sparks glowed like radiant lotus flowers. The flowers transformed themselves

into six beautiful faces bearing which appeared a child glowing with divine effulgence.

It was indeed the Absolute, the Supreme one without beginning or end, the one that is at once formless and manifesting in form, the true Brahma that came into being as Sri Muruka possessing six beautiful faces and twelve arms and eternal light for the body.

அருவமு முருவு மாகி அநாதியாய்ப் பலவா யொன்றாய்ப்
பிரமமாய் நின்ற சோதிப் பிழம்பதோர் மேனி யாகக்
கருணைகூர் முகங்க ளாறுங் கரங்கள்பன் னிரண்டுங் கொண்டே
ஓரிதிரு முருகன் வந்தாங் குதித்தனன் உலக முய்ய

The omnipresent Lord who is beyond the reach of words, the mind and the scriptures, appeared as six-faced Kumara (The eternal child) resting on a sweet smelling lotus flower in the Saravana pond.

The celestials were overwhelmed with joy. Brahma, Vishnu and Indira summoned the pleiad sisters and said "The six-headed Lord Muruga is staying in the form of a child in Saravana Pond. It is our request that you suckle and bring him up". They gladly consented and approaching the pond they stood amazed losing them selves in admiration of the ineffable beauty of the child. Aware of the intention of the celestial sisters he abandoned his present form with the view to granting their yearning and appeared before them as six different children, one gently crawling, another toddling, yet another swimming in the pond, the fourth resting on the flower, the fifth one leaping to reach them and the sixth falling in its attempt to leap.

When Umadevi ran in fear, unable to bear the heat of the sparks that appeared from Lord Siva's eyes the nine precious stones fell from her anklets. Finding in them the beautiful reflection of Umadevy the Lord cast his gracious look upon them and they stood transformed into nine maidens, who got their names after the stones. With Umadevi's

magnanimity they became pregnant and each of them gave birth to a child. Manicka Valli bore a son called Veerabahu and each of the sisters produced a son named Verakesari, Veeramahendra, Veeramaheswara, Veerapuranthara, Veeraraksatha, Veeramarthanda, Veeranthaka and Veeratheera respectively. The young knights, who appeared thus, fell at the feet of Siva and Umadevi who bestowed their blessings on them all.

Siva then invited his consort Uma to go with him to Saravana pond to take Balakumara to Mount Kailas. Uma consenting, they left Kailas, reached mount Himalayas and approached the Saravana pond where in they found their darling child appearing in six different forms. Mother Uma was so enchanted by the charming and resplendent appearance of the six forms that she got down into the pond and embraced with delight all the six tiny tots with her tender hands, thereby transforming them into one lovely child bearing six faces and twelve arms. Just as all the sakits (energies) are combined into one, so also the six forms became united into one. Thereby Kumara obtained the name Skanda. After being brought to mount Kailas, Kumara was found to loiter about the slopes of the mountain to play in groves and gardens, trot along riversides and bathe in water-falls. He would sometimes appear one- faced, sometimes as a six faced child. He would sometimes appear, a lad, a bowman and a brahmin. Watching the frolicsome gambols of his son, Siva spoke of the prowess of his son to Uma; "Since Ganga carried our son born of my eyes, he is known as Gangeya, as he grew up in the Saravana pond, he has got the name Saravana bava; because of his being breastfed by the pleiade sisters, he is called Karthikeya. Consequent on you're uniting of his six forms into one, he has received the appellation Skanda. It is from my six faces representing Pranava (The primeval sound) and Panchakchara (the five letters) that he got his six countenances. The Sadakshara (six letters in his name, are but the combination of pranava and panchakshara sa ra va na ba va)

ஆதலின் நமது சத்தி அறுமுகன் அவனும் யாமும்
பேதக மன்றால் நம்போற் பிரிவிலன் யாண்டும் நின்றான்
ஏதமில் குழவி போல்வான் யாவையு முணர்ந்தான் சீரும்
போதமும் அழிவில் வீடும் போற்றினர்க் கருள வல்லாள்

Hence Shanmuga is the embodiment of my sakti. There is no distinction between myself and him. He and I are one entity. He is omnipresent like me. He is omniscient though he appears a child. He is capable of bestowing wealth, knowledge and grace on those who worship him. There will be an occasion when Skanda would question Brahma to explain the meaning of pranava, the source of scriptures. Brahma would blink with ignorance.

“Our son would then strike him on the head, put him in prison and would himself undertake the function of creation for a considerable period. He would then defeat and destroy, Tharakasura (the elephant headed) Sinhamukasura (the lion faced) and Sura-Pathma the Lord of the Asuras and redeem the celestials from thralldom restoring to them their heavenly pelf and positions.”

Umadevi was highly pleased to hear of the prowess of her son, eulogized by the father.

07. THE PLAYFUL LEELAS OF SKANDAKUMARA

Meanwhile Skandakumara engaged himself in performing what were pranks to him, but in reality actions that made the world go topsyturvy. He would uproot the mountains on the eight directions and put them together in one place. He would gather the seven seas into one. He would stop the flow of the Ganges. He would push into Hades the Chakravala Mountain that girdled the earth. Though these playful actions caused great panic and fear to the inhabitants of heaven and earth, none suffered any loss or harm.

The celestials that saw this scene of pandemonium created over the world stage, were highly disturbed imagining that there was going to be universal destruction. They saw the child that was creating this maelstrom, but they never knew that it was Sivakumara. They believed the child to be some cruel Asura who had assumed this form with a view to bringing forth doom and destruction over them. So they decided to fight and destroy him before he proved to be invincibly dangerous.

Indira the king of the Devas arming himself with various weapons and mounting on his white elephant began his attack, while a few of his phalanxes surrounded Sivakumara. The child god playfully sent a few shafts on those who gathered around him. The unfailing darts struck them with such vehemence that Indira's army fled for their lives, most of them succumbing to the wounds while retreating. Skandakumara stood resembling Rudhra, the god of destruction. The shafts went round the field cutting the throats of the opposing men and finally Indira fell victim to the onslaught of the ferocious weapon. Succumbing to the fierce attack of the weapon sent by Skandakumara, Indira his elephant, the sun god the moon god and the Regional Heads of the eight directions all fell dead. Pragaspaty (Jupiter) the Advisor of the celestials saw this pathetic sight. He bowed down to the lord and said, "These celestials in spite of their knowledge didn't realise that you were our Xaviour and mistook you for an Asura who with his magical powers was destroying the world. That was why they took to fighting. It is your noble task to punish the Asuras and rescue the celestials from bondage. The devas are really innocent." Skandakumara smiled gently and blessed them to become alive. The devas who rose from the ground, as if awakening from a dream fell at his feet and pleaded for mercy mumbling all the time to forgive them for their foolhardiness. "Pardon us, Oh lord", they craved. "It was due to our incapability to realize your true greatness that we took the hatchet; extend unto us your grace forgetting and forgiving our misdeeds", they entreated.

At the moment Muruka assumed a macrocosmic form including in it the sun and the moon, the earth and the sky, the stars and the planets and the eight directions and their lords. It contained in it all the world and the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra appeared in the new form. The celestials stood dumbfounded. They were awe-struck at this grand glorious and resplendent form that stood before them with the sky. "Omnipresence of you lord, we have heard of, but we stand blessed to see with our naked eyes the actual meaning and import of the term. We see nothing more elsewhere other than what is found here. We are now endowed with the faculty to realize the greatness of your form. It is said the Brahma and Vishnu failed in their attempt to discover the Head and the feet of the effulgent flame of light that appeared before them. We are indeed more fortunate than those two gods. It is self-evident that you are the Absolute, the Supreme, and the Almighty. We fully realize that you are the Xaviour who will rescue us from the atrocities of the Asuras." With such encomiums and adoration they fell prostrate in prayer.

The Lord gave up His macrocosmic form and assumed his usual form appearing with six faces and twelve arms. Indira was delighted to witness Muruka's Vishwa Rupa. Feeling grateful for the lord's assurance to destroy the Asuras, he invited the gracious lord to become the ruler of the celestial world, declaring he would be satisfied to remain a vassal under Him. Poet Kachchiapar remarks that Indira's offering of the celestial rulership to lord Kumara is like presenting a spark to Agni the God of fire.

With a gentle smile Kumara answered, "We return to you the self you gave us. All of you turn yourselves into soldiers to fight against the Asuras. We will lead the army and destroy them, Fear not anymore." The celestials felt extremely glad to hear these words of encouragement. Blessing them thus the Lord left for Kailas.

08. GOAT BECOMES KUMARA'S VEHICLE

Meantime sage Naratha performed a yaga in honour of Lord Siva. The celestials including Brahma and several other sages of great penance and high repute participated in it. Now out of the sacrificial fire pit emerged a male goat as red as the evening horizon. Its appearance was so fierce that it appeared as if the vehicle of the God of fire had come out determined to take revenge on all those who had been putting goats to death in the name of sacrifice. As it came out of the fire with sleek trinklets a twinkling and anklets ajingling, those who were sitting around the fire chanting mantras ran helter-skelter for their lives. It skipped, hopped, jumped and ran amock the slopes killing several and scaring many out of their wits. The sages, celestials and the Brahmin priests all ran to Kailas seeking safety. They were greatly relieved to find Skandakumara there who observing their agitation asked whether anything was the matter.

“A billy goat that appeared from sage Naratha’s sacrificial fire is roaming about the place causing great destruction and killing people”, complained the celestials. “We appeal to you merciful lord to curb its valour, dispel our fear, help fulfill the sacrifice and save us from impending danger,” they implored. Lord Muruga consoled them with soothing words and then turning to Veerabahu the Head of the legion of one hundred thousand and eight knights said, “It is reported that a billy goat born of the sacrificial fire of Naratha, is doing great damage by killing the inhabitants of both the celestial and terrestrial worlds. Bring it immediately”.

Veerabahu at once set out in search of the animal and speeding like an arrow reached the slopes of the Himalayas where he found it trotting and jumping and chasing people in and around the place. Veerabahu, undaunted and fearless approached it, suddenly took it by the horns twisted and twirled it until its ferocity became curbed and

then dragged it to the presence of Lord Kumara at whose look the goat stood quite tamed. The Lord then mounted on and bade it carry him round the Himalayas and thus made the goat his vehicle. The celestials hailing and adoring the Lord returned to their places peacefully while sage Naratha resumed the performance of the Yaga.

09. LORD BRAHMA IS IMPRISONED

While Lord Skanda was thus mercily engaged in his leelas on Mount Kailas, Brahma and several other Gods went there to pay homage and adoration to Lord Muruga. All except Brahma bowed low and paid their obeisance.

Noticing the nonchalance of the creator, God Sivakumara beckoned him. Responding to the Lord's call Brahma went near but without offering any adoration stood mute. "What position do you hold? And what is your function?" the Lord asked him. "Lord Siva has commissioned me to perform the task of creation" returned Brahma.

"If creation of lives is your profession, presumably you must be well-versed in the Vedhas".

"I am, my Lord".

"Would you chant a few verses?"

Ready to deliver a few stanzas, Brahma began with the primordial word OM. The Lord stopped him and asked him to interpret the meaning of OM. Ignorant of the import of it, Brahma stood shocked, ashamed and blinking, without answering. He had learnt the Vedhas chapter and verse but he had hardly realized the esoteric significance of the term. To him it was murky, even though he bore the name Vedha (meaning the authoritative interpreter of the scriptures.) "If Brahma,

renowned as one of the Trinity found himself befuddled and unable to interpret the significance of the primordial term isn't it ridiculous to consider ourselves learned" says Kachiappasivasariar. Turning to Brahma the Lord said "You have not realized the significance of OM. How then can you call yourself the creator? You are not worthy of the profession, utterly ignorant as you are of the import of OM. You deserve only to be imprisoned for the crime of performing the function of creation which does not befit you". So saying Lord Skanda struck Brahma's head with his knuckle and ordered him to be put in prison and took upon himself the responsibility of Brahma's task of creation.

The Celestials were terribly frightened. They felt sad for Brahma's plight. They did not have the courage to approach Sivakumara and plead on Brahma's behalf. They made their way to Kailas and falling at Lord Siva's feet narrated to him of what had befallen Brahma. They implored the Lord to relieve Brahma from prison and give him back his profession. Calmly listening to the complaints of the gods, Lord Siva summoned Nandhi Deva and instructed him to approach Muruga, appease his anger and obtain the release of Brahma. Lord Kumara flew into a rage, on hearing Nandh's mission and drove him away from his presence. Undeterred by his child's refusal, Siva himself approached him to have the God of creation released. When his father broached the subject Skanda Kumara was firm in his stand. "How can one who is ignorant of the Vedic mantra be entrusted with, and expected to carry out the task of creation efficaciously," he asked his father "Besides he is utterly vain of his state and utterly impudent". His release is therefore not possible my Lord". Muruga concluded.

10. BRAHMA IS RELEASED

Now Siva putting on pretence of anger, said in a rather unpleasant tone. "This is unbecoming on you part child. You drove away Nandhi who approached you with my request. Does it behove you to

render the same reply in the context of my own presence”. “If that be your will, I shall release him, my Lord” replied Kumara, and signalled to a few Boothas at his command to bring Brahma to his presence, Running to the cell where Brahma was, they broke his shackles and led him near Siva and Kumara. Brahma recoiled at the sight of the Supreme Lord fell at his feet and stood up, feeling diminished in stature. Lord Siva balmed his pain with the words “Brahma you must have been suffering while in prison. Now that you are free, you may resume your work”. Worshipping with awe and fear, Brahma took leave of the father and son and joined the gods who had been eagerly awaiting his release.

When the celestials had left, Lord Siva asked his son whether he actually knew the meaning of the primordial word and if he did He should chant it to Him (Siva).

“My Lord of Lords I am not unaware of the significance of OM which you once chanted to Umadevi the mother of all creatures, unheard of by any other soul. Will it be proper to pronounce it openly to be heard by all?” When Murugavel spoke thus Siva asked him whether it was possible for him to pronounce the mantra OM to him, and leaned his head so as to facilitate Muruga to whisper it into his ear. As his son uttered the esoteric meaning of the primordial word Lord Siva listened with great solemnity, felt pleased and bestowing his blessings, left for mount Kailas.

11. SIVA SENDS SKANDA TO DESTROY ASURAS

Abiding thus for a few days, served and adored by Boothas and Devas, Murugavel decided to visit his parents at Kailas. Meanwhile Theivendra the chief of the celestials, too approached Lord Siva, to remind him of his promise to eradicate the long standing sorrow,

apparently never-ending suffering at the hands of Soora - Pathma. "Oh Lord of Lords". Indira began his entreaty. "As you are aware we have been subject to untold hardship suffering and torture at the hands of the ruthless Asura emperor. Numerous times have we complained to you of his inhuman acts of violence and cruelty. Listening to our entreaties, and to console us, you promised to beget a son who would put an end to all of our miseries. Accordingly the long - desired son has made his appearance. But there seems to be no end to our sufferings. My son Sayantha and a good number of Devas are nailed down to prison in Soora - Pathma's fortress. who else except your Lordship can end our sorrows? It is only to the father can the children complain of their difficulties and it is only the father who is capable of removing all ills, looking to their needs and blessing them with happiness. It is only to you we can turn for succour. Delay not any more, Lord Almighty, to save us from the cruel Titan".

Lord Siva now decided to terminate the sufferings of the celestials perhaps because their karmas were waning and approaching an end. Turning to Skandakumara seated near him the Lord said "The celestials have been experiencing great suffering and trouble perhaps as a result of their own making. But they have been repeatedly and incessantly requesting us to destroy the Asuras, and put an end to their sufferings. Now I direct you, and lay the responsibility on your shoulders to defeat the Asuras, kill their invincible rulers, Soorapathma and his brothers and restore Amaravathi to Indira the celestial monarch and return with flying colours." Lord Siva then gave over to his son the most powerful indestructible weapon capable of destroying the valour and rendering ineffective even the boons granted by gods. Umadevi embracing her son said, "With the support of the one hundred thousand and eight knights headed by Veerabahu you shall return with triumph vanquishing the villainous Soora - pathma and demolishing his despotic reign". On hearing these words Brahma, Vishnu and Indira fell at the feet of Lord Siva and Parvathy and expressed their delight

saying, “we are saved. We have no more worries in our hearts”. Making their obeisance again the celestials left Kailas for their abodes, satisfied with Lord Siva’s promise and ensured of their freedom and happiness.

12. THE DEFEAT OF THARAKASURA

Skandakumara as instructed by Lord Siva set off on the mission of exterminating the Asura tribe with their indomitable ruler, Surapathma, surrounded by dwarf demons, one lakh and eight heroes, and flanked by the ironbrowed invincible Veerabahu. Even sages joined in the sea of crowd amidst whom the Lord appeared like the Rising Sun, on the eastern sky. Making his way from Mount Kailas, he came across a mountain called ‘Kravuncha that seemed to block his path. The celestials stood shivering with fear at the sight of the tall mountain and the sages too were disheartened. At that instance Sage Naratha came forward and paying his homage to Muruga said, “My Lord, This is known as Kravuncha Mountain. In close proximity to this is the fortress called Mayapuri wherein stays Tharakasura the youngest brother of Surapathma the Asura Lord. He is so valorous and endowed with such divine boons, that when once Lord Vishnu, sent his wheel, to destroy him in a fight, it fell a golden necklace. So invincible is he that the Devas are terribly afraid of him. Once Tharakasura is defeated and demolished it would not be a difficult task to subdue Surapathma,” Listening to these words of the sage the Lord said, “We will vanquish him here and now”.

This decision of the Lord pleased the Devas. Meanwhile the Lord informed Veerabahu, the valiant shouldered, of the deceptive and labyrinthine nature of the mountain, and of Tharaka residing nearby in a fortress heavily equipped with and guarded by forces. The Lord instructed his aide to launch an attack on him, initially besieging his citadel, thus drawing him out to fight. “If you find him indestructible,” the Lord concluded “We would come to put an end to him”.

Veerabahu immediately set out, with a large retinue of heroic gargantuans, who with cyclonic vehemence broke through the ramparts and began to demolish the outskirts of the city. Panic-stricken, some messenger swiftly approaching Tharakasura related, in shivering tone, the catastrophic ruin caused by the invading army headed by one Veerabahu. They added that they had overheard some devas talking of the arrival of Skandakumara, with the view to redeeming the imprisoned devas. Tharakasura shot up from his seat, as if the fire of Universal deluge flared up, his crown touching the very crest of the globe. On his orders war drums beat and conches sounded. Troops of soldiers, cavalry and elephants assembled within minutes at the gates of the town. The asura jumping into a monumental chariot led the forces to the battle field. At the sight of the advance of the Asura body of infantry the bhutas swept forth and confronting the enemy legions, began the attack. They hurled massive stones and gigantic trees, pounded them with legs, smote them with weapons and tore off their limbs and thus destroyed a great number of the Asura soldiers in the front phalanx. Tharakasura swept over them like a whirl - wind and devastated their weapons and arrows. Unable to stand against his valorous onslaught, the bhuta leaders retreated.

Watching the development in the battlefield and the retreat of his men Virabahu, with unsurpassed valour, bent and strung his bow and before shooting the arrows addressed the enemy thus. "Perhaps you are proud that you have defeated the bhutas and a few of my younger brothers. In an instant you shall yourself realize what defeat is and how bitter it would be". In reply Tharaka mockingly said "If a fox could defeat a lion, then would I indeed suffer defeat in your hands" Scarcely had he finished his words, when shot forth towards him a torrent of arrows issuing from "Virabahus bow"

Tharakasura found himself late in sending darts to waylay the oncoming arrows and within a split second the horses harnessed to his

chariot and the charioteer fell dead. The Asura realized with reluctance, that his apponent was a man of invincible mettle and could be defeated only by some deceptive or supernatural means. Chanting a mayamantra he assumed innumerable forms and pronouncing another produced darkness that enveloped the battle field, and directed diverse kinds of weapons towards the one hundred thousand and eight younger brothers of Veerabahu. The bhuta troops unable to bear the sudden incursion and on slaught of weapons penetrating their bodies took to flight. Veerabahu realizing the tricky manoeuvres of the opponent, sent an arrow that shot through the sky, emitting eye-blinding effulgence. The darkness engulfing the region and the innumerable forms Tharaka had taken upon evaporated into nothingness and Tharaka found himself standing alone. The Asura King then thought of another plan. Pretending to be crestfallen and defeated, he retreated from the battle-front and retraced his steps towards his fortress Virabahu followed him determined to destroy him, without allowing the slightest chance of escape. Tharaka entered a cave in Mount Kiravuncha (which was his fortress) and hid himself. Approaching the entrance of the fortress Virabahu stood dumb founded at the sight of a labrynth. He could not decide which side the actual gateway lay for there seemed to be entrances on all sides. However he decided to enter by a particular route. His brothers also followed his steps. And as he proceeded he realized that darkness was enveloping him and he was feeling giddy. Suddenly he felt unconscious. The Asura king now came out of his hiding place, observed with pride the plight of his apponents, concluded that he had sealed their fate and finally decided to go to the battle field and drive the celestials to defeat and destruction.

Skandakumara, meanwhile learnt all what happened at the battlefield through Sage Naratha, and assuring the devas of their protection, the redemption of Veerabahu and his brothers and defeat of Tharakasura, instructed Vayudeva (God of Wind) his charioteer, to bring His golden mind - spinning vehicle (known as Manovehather).

Attended by lord Vishuu, Brahma and Indira, surrounded by bhutas and amidst the sounding of drums and blowing of trumpets and salvo of salutations. Lord Skandakumara set out to face the Asura Lord.

Inestimable in extent and greatness the penance of Tharaka should be. for he has had the rarest of the boons, not attainable even by the gods, of seeing before him the appearance of Lord Skanda manifesting six-moon lit faces, twelve eyes showering grace, twelve beautiful hands bearing the Sakthivel and other weapons of victory and the lotus feet.

The ignorance Incarnate Tharaka was awe-struck at the gorgeous and enthralling appearance of the Lord. He stood gazing at the effulgent Phantom that was perfect knowledge personified. He stood pondering "Could it be the Almighty and Supreme God who has come to fight with me" Then he thought of his invincible and prestigious position; he thought of the boons he had received from lord Siva and of his invulnerable might and spake thus to Sivakumara. "There is reason for fighting between Narayana, the four-headed Brahma and the white elephant-vehicle Indira and ourselves. But I hardly see any cause for fighting between the crescent crested Lord and ourselves; ergo, how would you account for your bellicose bearing?"

The Lord in reply, answered. "You have put the celestials in prison. In order to protect the wronged and punish the wicked, by way of meting out justice the Supreme Lord has sent me to annihilate your atrocious ascendencey". Tharaka replied "Haven't you heard of the popular episode bespeaking my indomitable valour as to how I wore as a pendant., Lord Vishnu's discus which he hurled at me in a fight of yore. Those who dared to encounter us in fighting till this day, either kissed the ground in defeat or kissed our feet in surrender. But there was none who overpowered us. The General whom you sent earlier to fight, I have defeated and incarcerated in the mountain. Your troops that came against us have been demolished and blown to bits. Aren't

you aware of the ruins perpetrated on your side? Small child as you are. I take pity on you. Avoid unnecessary suffering and return to your father.”

“Accursed thou art, anon. See for yourself thy doom!” So saying Lord Skanda bent his bow and rained poison tipped shafts in torrents and within a split of a second destroyed the entire battalions of the Asura forces thus rendering the battlefield a barren heath.

Tharaka now realized that only he was spared but he stood naked bereft of his crown and all his weapons. “Am I to believe”, thought he, “that this child enemy has overpowered me, putting me to this shameful plight? Nothing is left on me with which to attack him. I will send upon him the all-destructive and invincible weapon given to me by Lord Siva.” Summoning fresh energy, he cast what is known as the Parameswara Trident, upon Kumaravel.

As it sped towards the lord shedding light and thunder, the celestials stood aghast incapable of imagining the impending holocaust. Meanwhile, as the weapon approached him Murugavel reached out a hand and got hold of it as if he were the owner. Tharaka stood dumbfounded. He realized that Skanadakumara could never be defeated in fair fighting. He therefore decided to resort to wizardry. Chanting a mantra he assumed several forms and sustaining at different places of the battle-field, began to attack the devas. The devas entreated the Lord to save them from being devoured and devastated by the Asura. Murugavel felt that no more should he spare the Titans life and instructing the divine javelin in hand to instantly de-story Tharaka and Mount Kravuncha, sped it across the sky.

The weapon sped forth belching out fire and venom and reaching Tharaka plunged into his granite body, and came out of it drenched with blood. The invincible Tharaka plummeted to the earth like a huge

rock falling from a mountaintop. Yelling out a thunderous roar that cleft the sky, Tharaka fell dead. Realizing the downfall and the death of their leader, the defeated army scattered and fled berserk on all sides. Meanwhile the vel-(javelin) bringing back the knights to consciousness hitherto lying under the influence of the black magic of the Krowuncha mountain, bathed in the Ganges to purify itself from the sinful taints and returned to the hand of Skanda kumara. Virabahu and the knights now free from the swoon assembled before the Lord and said.

“We have been subject to untold suffering and misery under the cruel hand of Tharakasura. Now that you have defeated and destroyed him we are greatly relieved. As a humble mark of our gratitude to your inestimable succour, we are desirous of offering our modest oblations, which we pray you shall be pleased to accept”, As Lord Skanda conceded to their request, the hundred thousand and nine knights, the celestials and the dwarf demons then got together and set everything ready for the poojah. They bathed the Lord in scented water chanting the six lettered mantra. They attired him in dazzling clothes, bedecked him with jewels, and garlanded him with wreaths of Kadamba and Katpaka flowers. They eulogized his prowess and feats in garlanded verse.

While the celestials were thus celebrating the victory, Tharaka's queen Sowri, on hearing the death of her Lord, mourned aloud, tears streaming down in torrents, recalling his acts of valour and overwhelming victories, “Am I, Oh Lord, to believe the words that strike my ears?. Can it be true that my invincible Lord had been vanquished and killed by an imp of a God? Never did it occur even in the wildest of my dreams that you would be cowed down by any human being, celestial or a Titan. You only thought of the boons Lord Siva granted you; but little did you ponder over his dubious words while bestowing the boons. It is useless blaming any one if it has been destined for you to die and for me to be a widow”.

When Asurendran, Tharaka's son learnt of his father's death and saw his majestic body lying mangled and motionless he yelled with grief and growled with anger. He sighed, groaned and fell senseless as if struck by a thunderbolt. Regaining his consciousness, a little later, he considered for a while about his future plans and decided it proper to inform his uncle Soorapathma of his father's demise and instantly set off to Mahendrapuri, the Asura Monarch's capital city. The Asuras of the city who saw him coming with a face distraught with distress, and grief and a dishevelled appearance, talked among themselves thus; "He is a sober and unquarrelsome person. He would not have endorsed his father's actions. Therefore the latter might have become angry and chased his son out of the city and he having no place to go may be coming to seek refuge and protection under his uncle." "Perhaps he could not bear the atrocities committed by his father and therefore might have come to be away from him" opined some. "When once a celestial severed the hand of our king's sister, this prince inflicted heavy torture on some celestials and put them in prison. Now it is the same prince who has come with equal sorrow and pain. It's perhaps Fate's tit-for-tat", commented another group. Amidst such conjectural talk, Asurenthra approached his uncle and broke the news of his father's defeat and demise. The news struck the king like a bolt from the blue.

Recovering from the shock and agitation caused by the bad news, Soorapathma thundered with anger at the very thought of his younger brother's defeat at the hands of Kumara, whom he considered a mere child with some miraculous power. "Not even a moment should be lost in waging battle with that child of Siva and vanquishing him" Determined thus he ordered his messengers to inform the army chief to collect the necessary army and proceed to the battlefield.

Meanwhile one of his ministers, named Amohan approached the king with tremor of fear and pleading the attention of the king for a while, said to him, "Long live our ruler with health and happiness. Par-

don me your worship for venturing to speak. But I must express my thought. I beseech you most humbly to lend me your ears for a while.” Prefacing his thoughts thus he began. “A king who wages war against his foe, must take into consideration beforehand his enemy’s strength. The king should consider several questions such as whether he is strong in his boons, in his wizardry, in his arms, in infantry and cavalry, and whether he is well versed in the mechanisms of war. Are you aware of the strength of your enemy’s army; Are you aware of your status and position in comparison to his! Without taking these aspects into consideration, it does not behove you, an invincible and indomitable leader, to give vent to anger. It is but common knowledge that the mighty become meek sometimes and the weak become strong. It is prudent My Lord, to obtain thorough information pertaining to the enemy’s martial strategies and strength.” The king Soorapathma listened to these words, with patience, then called a few messengers and instructed them to collect all details about Skandakumara’s plans of war and his military strength.

CANTO II

13. THE RISE OF ASURAS

After the war, Lord Skanda returned to Thiruchenthoor and settled there for sometime to rest. The celestials found the temporary abode of the Lord a haven of peace blessed with serenity and harmony which to them was conducive to prayer and service. Skanda Kumara one day asked Indira to relate to him the cause for the decline and fall of the celestials and how the asuras gained ascendancy and supremacy over the former. Indira feeling incompetent to the task, requested Prakaspathi their Guru to narrate the background history of their agonies and undoings. Prakaspathy with all modesty and reverence spoke thus to Skanda. “Lord and Saviour of our lives; though you appear before us in the form of a child, we are not unaware that you are omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The reason for your request is

not that you are unaware of it but to make us realize the mistakes we made in the past and to free us from the untold miseries we are experiencing in the hands of Asura Lords. With this brief introduction, Prakaspathy proceeded with the narration of the history of the Asuras from its very inception.

14. THE STORY OF MAYA

Sage Kasipa was the source of the generation of Asuras numbering sixty-six crores. Their king was Asurendra who married a damsel of his choice by the name of Mangalakesi who gave birth to a child named Surasa. Sukradeva the Guru of the Asuras found Surasa a promising young lass, taught her all the arts including the black ones and also of alluring young men and making love. Finding herself an adept in the skills he taught, the Guru renamed her as Maya. He induced her to use all her skills and histrionics to increase and propagate the progeny and prowess of the Asura clan. She appeared as the very embodiment of beauty displaying in her the charm, comeliness and attraction of Luxmi, Tilothama, Radidevi and Mohini - all put together. Silently and intently listening to the words of the Guru she set out in search of adventure directed towards the attainment of her goal.

She arrived at the spot where sage Kasipa was seated, engaged in performing penance. With the help of her black art she created a park studded with beautiful fragrant flowers, a lake beside a pavilion with beds strewn with scented flowers, and a golden hillock within the vicinity of the park. The sweet odour emanating from the flowers must have disturbed the nostrils of the sage, for the sage opened his eyes for a moment and looked with surprise at the strange sight but soon closed his eyes and sank into meditation. Maya now came and stood on the golden hillock and made a gentle rustling sound with her dress. The sage opened his eyes again but not to close this time for there stood before him Maya the very incarnation of beauty whose

scintillating form dazzled his eyes. A few moments slipped past as he sat admiring her indescribable charm. Then he spoke softly to her “Young maiden, what brought you here? What is that you need? What ever you ask shall be granted. If you desire a child that too shall be given; speak without reticence”. “Venture you to speak thus because I am alone “replied Maya in return. Does it behove a sage like you to address a maiden in such unbecoming words. “Pardon me if I have disturbed your penance. Allow me to go my way”, So saying, she pretended to leave the place, and walked fast towards the Gangetic shore. Sage Kasipa followed. Using her black art Maya hid herself from his sight.

15. THE BIRTH OF SOORAPATHMA AND HIS BROTHERS

Maya's sudden disappearance distressed Kasipa Muni. He ran hither and thither in search of her. “Whither have you gone sweet maiden? Is it to enthrall my soul you appeared like a phantom” he wailed. Oh princess of pristine Beauty, Oh Phantom of Delight. pining over you I will certainly end my life, unless you appear again to appease my yearning. Fairest Damsel, saviour of my life, where have you gone? Are you secretly watching the agony I am experiencing? Perhaps it is a treat for you to do so”. Lamenting thus the sage Kasipa was wallowing in despondency, when smiling gleefully Maya appeared before him with an alluring form and captivating charm. The sage felt dazzled for a moment, then sprang with joy and embraced the maiden with insatiate voluptuousness. Maya most heartily submitted herself to his lustful sports. As a result of their union a son was born to them and they called him Soorapathma. And then on the suggestion of Maya the couple took the form of a lion and a lioness and made love resulting in the birth of Sinhamuka (the lion faced and thousand headed). Maya desired to have more children and Kasipa Muni, readily granting her desire fathered Tharakasura and a female child who was named Asamuki.

The children of Kasipa and Maya, Soorapathma, Sinhamuha, Tharaka and Asamuki fell at the feet of Kasipa Muni and sought his blessings. Showering his benisons upon them he addressed them thus. "Listen to me well .I will tell you a few words about the nature of this world and the way of life we should lead in it. You are my children. I wish that you lead a life of piety, devotion and morality.

தருமமென் றொருபொருள் உளது தாவிலா
இருமையின் இன்பமும் எளிதின் ஆக்குமால்
அருமையில் வரும்பொரு ளாகும் அன்னதும்
ஒருமையி னோர்க்கலால் உணர்தற் கொண்ணுமோ.

Above all there is a thing called charity. For him who adopts charity as the chief virtue in life heaven is ensured after his happy and prosperous life in this world. Indeed charity is the spring of all other virtues. Charity begets love which brings forth compassion. This leads one to penance from which spring forth enlightenment or pure knowledge through which one realizes the existence of God with whom the soul combines into one. Therefore children; engage yourself in charity and penance. Avoid sinful mundane life, meditate on Gnana (pure knowledge) and seek through penance the attainment of Lord Siva's feet. Indulge not in worldly pleasures. Control your senses and lead a virtuous life which will win the respect of all and eventually bring you immortal bliss. I will now tell you a story that illustrates the glory of penance". So saying Kasipa Muni began to narrate the story of sage Markandeya.

16. THE STORY OF MARKANDEYA

There lived in the suburbs of Benares a sage called Mirukandu. He was unhappy because he was not blessed with a child for long after his marriage. The sage was confident of God's grace. So he installed

himself at a lonely place near the temple of Benares and started performing penance, imploring Lord Siva to bless him with a child. Pleased with the dogged devotion and asceticism Lord Siva appeared before him and addressed him thus. "Blessed you will be, Oh sage with a child. But you will have to make the choice between one of the two offered to you; a child of 100 years of life but who is sickly, evil natured and foolish; the other who is an embodiment of virtue and knowledge, handsome and graceful but only of 16 years of life; choose as you desire", concluded the Lord. The sage opted for the second child. Consequent on the granting of his wish the sage's wife conceived and brought forth a beautiful male child, who as he grew, proved precocious, noble in thought and charitable in deed. The parents were immensely happy and the sage's relatives, friends and neighbours all had a liking for the boy. Markandeya grew fast amidst showers of parental love and neighbourly regard until the age of sixteen when the parents began to feel worried about the impending loss of their child for the Lord had said while granting the boon that the child's lifespan would be sixteen years. The parents spent every minute with fear, agony and grief. Noticing the parents in a depressed and sad state, Markandeya was eager to learn the cause of their gloom and they had to come out with the truth. Markandeya consoled his parents that he would seek the grace of Siva to escape death and win over his fate. With these words he comforted his parents and set out to worship Lord Siva at the temple of Manikarnika in Benares. Reaching the shrine he fell prostrate at the feet of Lord Siva's image and lay still for some time while tears swelled from his eyes. Seeking a solitary spot on the southern side of the temple he enshrined the image of Siva and engaged himself in performing penance praying intermittently, while his mouth incessantly pronounced the thousand and odd names. "Save me from the swooping strings of Yama, Oh Lord" was the keynote of his prayer and the Lord Almighty assured him of succour at the appropriate time and disappeared. Markandeya with closed eyes and fearless heart sank into the ocean of blissful meditation.

Meanwhile Yama the god of Death instructed Kala his minister to go and fetch the life of Markandeya since his period of existence on the earth was over. Kala at once reached Benares and stood before Markandeya. Undaunted by the fearful form of Kala, Markandeya asked him who he was and the mission of his visit. Kala declared in reply his identity and the purpose of his visit. "I am a votary and devotee of Lord Siva, the Supreme Lord. None can order me and I will not follow you to Yamaloka. Tell your Lord of my decision and position" Markandeya told. Kala returned to his Lord and expressed the indomitability of Markandeya resulting from his attachment to Siva. Yama felt furious at the words of his deputy. Vehemently vexed and wrathful he exploded with rage at the very thought that his order was defied and uncarried. Mounting his vehicle the buffalo he reached the temple of Manikarnika where Markandeya was immersed in penance and prayer. Presenting himself before the youth in most fearful form with, dark complexion, unruffled red hair, the canine teeth projecting like tusks and eyes burning like carbuncles and twisting and twirling the trident in his left hand and holding the swoop-strings on the right, he thundered, 'Urchin as you are, you may be ignorant of the gravity of my job. I am empowered to take the life of all humans on the expiry of the term of existence. None can therefore prevent me from performing my task. Even the Trinity of Gods will not interfere in my dutybound activity". So saying and imagining that the youth would not be coerced into submission he threw the strings in his hand round Markandeya's neck and pulled him towards him. Markandeya held steadfastly the image of Siva while his mouth uttered prayers of surrender. Unsuccessful in his attempt Yama fell aside like a rock pushed by the foot of Lord Siva who appeared through the image.

While Markandeya stood enthralled in surprise Lord Siva spoke thus: "With your immaculate penance and endless devotion you have proved to be a selfless adherent. As a reward for your incomparable penance and devotion I give you ageless life".

The story of Markadeya illustrates the greatness of penance with which he was able to surpass fate and triumph over the unflinching Yama. There is nothing unattainable for a man endowed with the strength of penance. Therefore my dear children, engage yourself in penance with the ultimate aim of achieving godhead". Thus concluded Kasipa his sermon to his sons.

17. MAYA'S ADVICE

As the sage closed his speech Mayadevi laughed gently and said, "Well, learned sage, that was indeed a fine piece of moral discourse. It is indeed an ideal advice for people of your calibre who are ascetical and unworldly and who are bent on attaining salvation. Our children are to become unrivalled rulers on earth, achieving greatness in every aspect of life.

அளப்பருங் கல்வியும் ஆக்கம் யாவையுங்
கொளப்படு தன்மையிற் குறைவு றாதவை
வளர்த்தலின் மேதக வனப்புச் செய்தலிற்
கிளத்திடின் மேலது கேடில் செல்வமே

Greatness of life depends mainly on two glorious things namely learning and wealth. Considered deeply wealth is more important than learning. Through wealth one can achieve prominence, fame, respect and honour. It brings you triumph and domination . Hence wealth is preeminent and therefore the most desirable object on earth!" Then turning to her children she said, "Having listened to my words you would have realized what is really great and what is worth achieving. Seek you the position that is unconquerable and non-pareil. Only Lord Siva the mightiest of the might is capable of granting such great boons. Meditate on Him, performing a massive Yaga (godward sacrifice) hitherto undone by any mortal or celestial, to invoke his blessing. Let you be blessed, my sons, in such a way that none shall harm you, none shall

vanquish you, none shall surpass you in valour, victory and wealth” concluded Maya. The three sons Soorapathma, Sinhamuga and Tharaha fell prostrate at the feet of their parents and received their blessings.

18. SOORAPATHMA'S YAGNA

“We will aspire to achieve what you desire for us and promise to live up to your expectations” declared Soorapathma, with the two young brothers avowing the same. They took leave forthwith determined to follow the course directed by Maya. Kasipa Muni still appeared to be under the spell of Maya and expressed reluctance to leave her. Maya told him that she was to watch the interests of the children and beseeched him to go his own way to resume penance.

Without loss of time Soorapathma drew a massive plan for Yaga. With his brothers he set out to the Northern region of Barath and selected a spot in the midst of a Banian grove. The spot consisted of an area of 10,000 yochanas (yochana is about 5 miles) around which he constructed a massive wall. In the midst of the encircled area he built a huge sacrificial pit, thousand yochanas in extent and depth and hundred and eight pits girdling the central pit. In the middle of the central pit he installed a stake. All the things required for the performance of the sacrificial offering were brought in with the help of the mother. The various items of sacrificial objects included the flesh of animals like lion, tiger, elephant, horse, buffalo and ram, ghee, various kinds of cereals, oils, perfumery like insence, and barks and sticks of poisonous plants and herbs and flowers of all sorts. After offering the preliminary poojas to all major gods and minor ones to appease them he started the real performance of the sacrifice. In the already burning fire of the pit he threw masses of flesh intermittently pouring jars of ghee and blood. At intervals he put different cereals and flowers into the fire, off and on chanting various formulas of incantations untiringly and unswervingly. Soorapathma went on performing this ceremony in-

voking the appearance of Lord Siva. Yet Siva made no appearance. Dissappointed, yet undaunted he rose high above and suspending himself in the air began to cut slices of flesh from his body and threw them into the sacrificial fire. Yet Siva appeared not. The desperate Asura then ran his body through the impaling stake and fell into the pit. Soorapathma's brothers watching this horrendous sight decided that he had given up his life as a part of the sacrifice and roared in lamentation at the supposed loss of their brother. And all the men attending on Soorapathma joined in the wail. Sinhamuka feeling that his life was meaningless without his elder brother decided to jump into the fire and offer himself up in sacrifice.

19. THE GRANT OF BOONS

Meanwhile Siva appearing in the form of an old decrepit sage accosted Sinhamuka and inquired the cause of his mad decision. Sinhamuka in the midst of tears told him the woeful tale of his brother. "Console yourself; I will bring back your brother to life". So saying Siva (in sage's disguise thought of Ganga the river goddess for a while, at which instance she came surging and foaming, washed the feet of the Lord in obeisance and entered the sacrificial pit. Instantly Soorapathma arose appearing in his natural form unhurt and unharmed by the fire. At that instance Lord Siva gave up his disguise and appeared in his true form. Soorapathma expressed his boundless joy in terms of praise and prayer. Then Lord Siva spoke to him thus: "you have been performing this yaga with the intent of seeking my grace. What is it that you desire? Speak out. What you wish shall be granted". As Brahma Vishnu and other celestials shook with fear at the prospect of the Asura Lord's indomitablity and supremacy, Soorapathma addressed Lord Siva giving vent to his aspirations thus:

"Oh Lord of Lords! I should be the invincible ruler of all the

worlds in the Universe with unquestionable authority to promote or punish my vassals including the celestials as I desire. I should be endowed with unperishable body. I should be provided with weapons and valour that cannot be surpassed even by the Lords of creation and protection. My another request is I should have a vehicle that would travel faster than the mind”.

In response to the Asura's requests the Lord said, “Of the thousand crores of orbs in the Universe, You shall be the ruler of one thousand and eight worlds for a period of one hundred and eight yugas”. The Lord gave as Vehicle a chariot called ‘Indiragnala’ for him to visit as and when he liked the worlds under his survey, in an instant. In addition he gave him a lion along with several mighty weapons, The Lord gave him a discus that was far more ferocious and powerful than that of Lord Vishnu. Soorapathma was posited in the Supreme status of being the over Lord of the celestials not to mention the inhabitants of the other worlds. Then addressing the brothers the Lord said, “There is none in the whole universe expect my power that can defeat you”. The brothers of Soorapathma also were granted several boons and supremacy over the celestials and in addition Siva gave them weapons bearing his name. Wishing them an indomitable and prestigious life the Lord disappeared.

20. ASURAGURU'S ADVICE

Sukkirachariar the counselor of the Asura clan came to know of Soorapathma's newly acquired power and prestige. He was happy to imagine that under the leadership of the three brothers the Asura clan would emerge victorious and powerful. Along with his disciples he met Soorapathma who at the very sight of his Guru fell prostrate at his feet and made obeisance.

‘Triumphant Prince’ the Asura Guru began addressing

Soorapathma, "you deserve high praise and felicitation for your immense achievement in obtaining such incredible boons from Lord Siva. As I understand you now are entitled to a supreme position even above Brahma and Vishnu. The celestials are the deadly enemies of your once prosperous clan and their king Theivendra has been instrumental for the long distress and persecution of the Asuras. Your first task is to dispossess him of his kingly status and put him in prison; Let the Lords of the directions too be deprived of their prestigious posts. Command them at the same time to personally appear in your court daily acknowledging their submission to your lordship. You are now the paramount head of one thousand and eight worlds and to maintain your supreme power and discipline over all the states and to achieve your desired objectives, you adopt any means unhindered by the consideration of its righteousness or otherwise. Let "end justifies the means". be your dictum in your political activities. Firstly, call on Vishnumoorthy and reminding of the boons you have obtained from Lord Siva make him recognize your over lordship. Then make a stately tour round all the regions under your authority. Thus, carry on your rule triumphantly doing as much good to your clan and proportionate evil to the celestials" Soorapathma was pleased with the sermon of his Guru, paid his homage to him and left the place.

On their way to their home town their mother Maya met them. They fell at her feet. Maya blessed them and said, "I heard of the grand performance of the yaga and the boons you obtained thereby from Siva the Supreme Lord. I am aware of your plans. If you hope to achieve anything by way of black art think of me; I shall be at your disposal immediately. I cannot afford to be away from you for long. I shall often call on you. My earnest desire is you three should always live, act and prosper in unison. May your rule flourish for the prosperity of the Asuras and the adversity of the celestials." Blessing the trio thus, Maya vanished into thin air.

21. SOORAPATHMA ESTABLISHES HIS SUPREMACY

Determined to regenerate the clan, build up his empire and establish his paramountcy Soorapathma summoned some of the leading members for a council meeting and told them of his intended expedition of touring round the regions under his hegemony. He collected a massive troop of soldiers and a chain of chariots and set off. His first target of attack was directed against the Lord of wealth, whose city was situated in the north. When the army approached the precincts of Alagapuri the messengers conveyed the news of the arrival to Kupera. He was fear-struck and shuddered. "It is beyond our capacity to fight and overcome the Asuras; their leader has obtained limitless boons from Siva. To be on the safe side we will make peace with them." With these thoughts Kupera met Soorapathma, wished him prosperous governance of the region accepted his over Lordship and thus made peace. The army then entered the city, collected a rich booty along with weapons and vehicles and proceeded towards the next point of attack which was the principality of Indira. News of the expedition had reached Indira before the arrival of the Asura army. He fled to Amaravati his celestial abode. The army set the city on fire. The next point of offensive was the domain of the God of fire that lay in the south east. When Agnideva saw the approaching sea of fleet he thought he could drain it with his flames. As he surrounded the army with blazing conflagration, Tharakasura got on his chariot stringed his bow and set on it Pasupathstra (Siva's weapon) to be flung at Agni. He saw this terror striker and immediately gave up his idea of offensive, for he knew well that once the weapon is sent it would destroy the whole world. He accepted Soorapathma's authority and made peace with Tharaka. Tharaka allowed him to continue his rule of the region paying homage to the Asura Lord. Soorapathma then directed his forces to attack Yama's city. Yama realizing the indomitable valour and prowess of the Asura Lord came forward, received him with pomp and ceremony and expressed his

submission and compliance. Varunadeva, the sea-god and Vayudeva, the air- god alike surrendered without resistance. Soorapathma then went to the infernal region, the inhabitants of which were Asura who instantly submitted without defiance. Approaching the suspension region, Soorapathma forcibly seized the Jar of Nectar which the celestials had entrusted for protection. The Asura Lord gleefully partook of it with his brothers and gave the rest to his retinue.

Soorapathma thought that his triumph of subjugation and conquest of his adversaries would not be complete without overpowering Vishnumoorthy. He therefore moved his forces to the abode of the Lord of protection. Vishnu was resting on the serpent couch with his two consorts on either side amidst the milky ocean when, a messenger broke the news of the Asura Lord's design Vishnu reckoned the situation and beckoned the eagle his vehicle. Mounting on it like a lion, and armed with the five weapons of discus, conch, bludgeon, sword and bow, he accosted the army and rained arrows on the Asura troops. The celestials roared with joy when the Asura soldiers ran helter-skelter.

Tharaka, Soorapathma's youngest brother leaped forward, cleared the enemy's arrows and showered darts on the celestials. Vishnu hurled his chakra aiming Tharaka's head. The weapon approaching Tharaka's head instead of beheading Tharaka fell on his neck like a gold necklace. Vishnu realized this miracle was the result of the boon granted by Lord Siva to Tharaka. Vishnu drew near the young Asura Lord, expressed his felicitations and made overtures for peace. "You are invincible, you are peerless; and your victory is priceless" he said. Wishing him a prosperous reign, Vishnu left for his abode. Soorapathma embraced his brother with ecstasy and praised him high for his valour and victory. The army then proceeded to Amaravathy, the celestial city of Indira. As soon as the news reached him, he trembled with fear. "To face the enemy is to face death or defeat which would be disgraceful; the best thing is to escape", he thought and assuming the form of a

cuckoo he with his consort vanished from the place. Then the Asura army entered the city and started looting. Some of them got hold of the celestials harassed them with torture and put them to excruciating affliction. They wound the shawls round the necks of the suras, made the grip tight and subjected them to suffocation. The Asuras then led the celestials to the presence of Soorapathma. The victims begged for mercy declaring, "Lord of Lords, henceforth you are our own god and to you shall we ever pray. We are your vassals always at your service". Sooraoathma was pleased with their words. He ordered his attendants to remove their shackles "Your life is spared; be always at the service of my people; now you are free to go" he said and dismissed them.

Soorapathma decided to visit Brahmas' world and directed his troops to invade the city. Learning of the approach of Soorapathma, Brahma went in advance, welcomed Soorapathma, conveyed his felicitations and declared that he was closely related to the Asura Lord. "Your father Kasipan is my son," he said and added that he was honoured by his visit. Soorapathma appeared pleased with Brahma's claim of kinship. Expressing good will and congenial relationship Soorapathma bade farewell and left for Sivaloka to Lord Siva's domain. Instructing his retinue to wait outside, Soorapathma with his two brothers approached the entrance of the temple. Nandideva the temple guardian allowed him to go in. Soorapathma approached Lord Siva seated with his consort Uma, made his obeisance with reverence and stood still.

The Supreme Lord set his graceful eyes on him and said, "It is by your hard penance and sacred yagna you achieved your present position. You have been endowed with sovereign power over one thousand and eight worlds. Your righteous rule will keep you in good stead. Fare you well!"

Soorapathma then visited every territory under his sovereignty.

He replaced most of the rulers of these territories with his own men. He then returned to the earth and reached his traditional homeland, where he was welcomed by the old and retiring ruler Asurendra who showered on his grandson encomiums of praise and felicitations.

22. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CAPITAL CITY

Soorapathma summoned the royal architect Viswakarma and instructed him to construct a new city with the royal residence in the middle of it. The architect designed a magnificent city with four gateways on each of the directions, several rows of palatial houses and mansions for the state officers to reside, various networks of roads of the city. In the middle of the metropolis he erected a grand gorgeous palace for the emperor to reside. He beautified the city with parks and lakes, esplanades and rest houses. Soorapathma crowned the city with the name Veera Mahendra. The architect set up another beautiful city in the middle of the northern sea, called Asura for Sinhamukasura. He set up another city in Navalantheevu near mount Mehru for Tharakasura and called it Mayapura.

Soorapathma inaugurated his rule with the coronation ceremony, attended by Lord Vishnu, Brahmadeva and other chief celestials, including the Lords of the eight directions. At the auspicious hour Brahma set the golden crown on Soorapathma's head as the rishis chanted the mantras of incantation appropriate for the occasion. The chief celestials and the prominent personages of the Asura clan showered flowers and blessings on the Asura Lord. As a crowning of the festivity the four famous dancers Ramba, Menaka, Tilotama and Urvashi feasted the audience with their graceful performances set to the music rendered by the minstrels. Soorapathma was glad to notice that all the celestials were present on the occasion, contributing their share for the successful celebration of his assumption of the imperial office.

23. THE ILLTREATMENT OF THE CELESTIALS

Soorapathma now directed his attention to his personal matters. He needed a partner to share his joys and sorrows, and to care for his general welfare. He chose the gazelle-eyed fair and modest daughter of the Royal architect, Pathumakomala in name as his queen. Sinhamukasura married Viputha, the daughter of Yamadarma and Tharakasura took for his queen Souri the daughter of Niruti. Sinhamuka and Tharaka went to live in their respective cities with their queens. The Asura Lord appointed Tharmakopan, Thurkkunan, Thunmukan, Sankapalan, Vakrabalan and Mahishan as his ministers and carried on his administration efficiently and dexterously and was well disposed towards his kith and kin but always ill-disposed towards the celestials. The celestials well-aware of the cruel disposition of Soorapathma, went to the palace on their own and performed all kinds of service. One day the Asura Lord summoned all of them and said, "You are a part of our kith and kin. In fact you are our cousins. In times of necessity, you are actually bound to help us. Your daily duty is to go to the sea and fetch fish and supply to our women." The sky dwellers were horrified to hear these words. The very thought of such a base task was nauseating to them. It was degrading and sinful. They dared not refuse to oblige. They blamed their own destiny and decided to carry out the order. When they reached the sea, Indira told Varuna (the sea-god) of their pathetic plight and begged him to convey, to the shore huge fishes like the whale and the shark. Varuna consented and brought to the shore by the waves massive shoals of fish. Indira then said to the celestials "It is now your responsibility to take this stuff to Mahendrapura. The celestials felt mortified, shame-faced and humiliated. Incapable of defying the order they moaned, "What a cruel fate we are destined to! We, who have been reputed to be enjoying serene life under the canopy of the celestial tree, are now doomed to do this debasing, degrading and disgraceful job of carrying fish for food to our mortal enemies, the Asuras." Lamenting thus and groaning with grief they lifted on to their

heads what they considered to be the burden of sin and shame. Amidst various insulting and slanderous remarks of the on-lookers, they carried the fish to the presence of Soorapathma. The Asura Lord appeared highly pleased with the hunt. He instructed the celestials to attend to the same task everyday. They spoke not a word but bowed down and left.

Soorapathma's wedded life was one of great conjugal happiness and he was blessed with four sons. The first one was Banukopan. One day while he was lying in his cot in his infancy the sun's rays fell upon him. Infuriated, the child got up, caught the sun and put him in prison. It was as a result of this incident he came to be known as Banukopan. The other sons were Agnimukasura, Hiranya and Vajirabahu. Apart from these sons, he had one thousand children born to his several mistresses. Sinhamuka had one son called Athisura by his wife and several children by his mistresses. Tharaka had a son called Asurendra.

24. SOORAPATHMA'S EVIL PLANS

While Soorapathma carried on his administration efficiently he had a mind to put Indira in prison and capture Indirani for his lustful cravings. He sent an army chief to arrest the celestial king and dispatched a group of women to seize the celestial queen. Coming to know of the malicious plans of the Asura Lord, Indira with his queen, disappeared from the celestial region and reached the earth.

The Soldiers who went to Swaragaloka to capture Indira found to their dismay, he was missing. Similarly the Asura women who went to seize Indirani were also disappointed. They came back with distress and told the Asura lord of their unsuccessful mission. Soorapathma burnt with anger and for the first time he experienced the canker of frustration.

Meanwhile Sayantha son of Indira who was at that time sojourning in Vaikunthaloka came to know of his parents' disappearance, of the search and the unsuccessful attempt of the Asura army in seizing them and of the suffering of the celestials. He felt it was unethical for him to stay away while the country was suffering without the ruler and therefore he decided to go there. He saw the moaning celestials. He was very much grieved. He was afflicted and felt desperate that he could not decide what he should do to control the situation. At that time sage Naratha went there to console him. He explained to the young prince about the instability of material prosperity, of the transient nature of happiness and sorrow. The sage told him of the whereabouts of his parents. "Even the greatest monarchies have their decline and downfall. The Asura Lord who is now in the height of his power will soon face defeat and destruction. Your parents have sought shelter in the terrestrial world to avoid the harassment of Soorapathma. By Siva's grace, a time will come for you to regain your lost prestige and prosperity". These words of consolation were of great comfort to Jayanathakumaran.

25. INDIRA IN CONCEALMENT

Indira who left his celestial kingdom arrived in the southern part of India, proceeded to Seekaly and found it a suitable place for rest and prayer. With a view to conducting poojas for the Lord of Seekali temple he set up a park. In the meantime the messengers sent by Soorapathma were in the look out for Indira's hiding place. Indira and Indirani hid themselves assuming the form of bamboo trees. In consequence of the cruel rule of Soorapathma, there was no rainfall and the trees planted in the park by Indira bore no flowers, and began to fade and die. The celestial ruler was deeply grieved. He appealed to Lord Siva to show grace and save the trees. A voice from heaven then fell on the ears of Indira, to the effect that very soon there would flow a river to provide water for the plants.

26. SAGE AGASTHIA'S EXPEDITION

In the meantime there arose a tussle between Mount Mehru and Mount Vindhya. Sage Agasthia who was on his way to the south, found the Vindhya mountain had grown up immensely tall and blocked the aerial path. Sage Agasthia begged Lord Siva to curtail the arrogance of the Vindhya mountain. Siva empowered the sage to destroy the mountain and proceed on his journey to the south. Agasthia stood thoughtful for a moment. He needed water to perform pooja during his journey. Lord Siva beckoned 'Kaveri' one of the seven rivers in Kailas and directed her to fulfill the sage's need. Agasthia compressed the river into his water pot.

The sage started his journey from the golden mount and set off to the South. On his way he came across an Asura called 'Kravunja' an ally of Tharakasura, the brother of Soorapathma. He was an adept in the art of sorcery. He could turn a mole-hill into a mountain and vice versa. He could transform the land into sea and vice versa. This sorcerous Asura stood like a tall mountain blocking the sage's path. But Agasthia found a narrow passage on the mountain through which he decided to continue his journey. Scarcely had he passed a few yards, when he found fire arising around him and there blew a big hurricane, simultaneously. Then followed torrential rains and the place was soon enveloped in darkness. The sage realized that the Asura was instrumental for all the catastrophic phenomena. He struck the head of the mountain with his bludgeon and pronounced a curse, saying, "This Mountain shall remain the seat of evils and sorcery until it faces doom and destruction by the lance of Lord Subramanya".

Proceeding further, the sage reached the temple of Varanasi, on the banks of the sacred river Ganges. Entering the temple he circumambulated the shrine thrice, fell prostrate at the feet of Lord Vaitheeswara and made his obeisance. He then made his way to the

Vindhya Mountain which in rivalry with Mount. Mehru stood preposterously tall, blocking the air passage. The sage starting a conversation with the mountain said, "Oh Vindhya How tall you have grown . It appears you will defeat the golden Mount by your height. I am on my way to the southern region. Will you allow me a small passage to pass through." The mountain swelled with pride and refused to allow him to go further. The sage stretched his hand and placing it on the top of the mountain pressed it hard. The mountain then to the amazement of the sky-dwellers sank low and got submerged into the earth. Highly pleased with the sage's act, the sun, the moon and other planetary gods approached the sage and expressed their gratitude for removing the obstruction that had been hampering the aerial route.

27. THE DEATH OF VILVALAN AND VADABI

Agasthiar's progress was again impeded by the interference of two Asuras called Vilvala and Vadabi, the sons Asanmuki, the sister of Soorapathma. Asanmuki was never married but by her contrived union with sage Thurvasa had-begotten these two children. They led a wild life always bent on doing harm especially to the rishis. They trapped the passers by-by means of a wicked design. As soon as they observed the approach of a traveller, the elder brother would assume the form of holy ascetic. He would welcome the way-farer to their cottage and request him to have lunch with them. The younger brother would then be turned into a goat, chopped and cooked to furnish a delicious dish for the visitor by means of a boon obtained from Brahma. Vadabi was endowed with the capacity to regain his life and form after being killed. Thus a sumptuous meal would be provided to the guest. Allowing the guest to rest, the elder brother would make a loud call "Come soon, Vadabi" Vathabi would rip open the stomach and emerge thus ruthlessly killing the guest.

The evil brothers tried the same trick on sage Agasthia. He

was duly invited to the cottage and requested to partake of the lunch. The meal was prepared in the usual manner. Agasthia took it without demur. When Vilvalan called out his brother the sage felt some uneasy movement in his stomach. He guessed the evil design of the Asura and gently massaged his abdomen and pronounced the lad's death by a curse. Vadabi was burnt to ashes within the sage's stomach. Vilvalan, infuriated by his brother's death tried to attack Agasthia. The sage by the strenght of his penance put an end to the Asura's life and proceeded on his way.

28. KAVERI FLOWS INTO TAMIL NADU

Sage Naradha met Indira in Seerkaly and informed him of Agasthia's accomplishments. "He has brought Kauveri with him in his Kamandala" he added "It is possible to bring the river into Tamil Nadu, if you seek ways and means for it". Indira beseeched Naradha to tell him of any possible design to accomplish the task. "Perform a grand pooja in honour of Lord Vinayaka and gratify him. He will topple the sage's pot and make way for the river to flow into the Tamil territory", suggested Naradha. Indira was overjoyed. The celestial ruler conducted a splendid poojah with reverence and devotion, invoking the benison of Lord Ganesh. The Lord appeared before him and promised help. Taking the form of a crow Lord Ganesh sat on Agasthia's water pot. The sage raised his hand to scare the crow. Lord Ganesh toppled the pot and released the river to flow. Abandoning the appearance of the crow, Vinayaka took the form of an urchin and walked within sight of Agasthia. The sage was enraged by the mischievous feat of the strange intruder. He might be a celestial, an Asura or an inhabitant of the earth. thought Agasthia His activities were equally mystifying, Suddenly he ran after the boy intending to strike his head with the fists. As the sage drew near and was about to hit him Lord Vinayaka stood in his own form. The sage stood overwhelmed with astonishment, fear and disbelief. He cursed himself for having dared to strike the Lord. As repara-

tion for his foolish thought he knocked his own head several times with his knuckles. "I took you for a Brahmin boy and attempted to strike. Forgive me Lord for my indiscretion" implored Agasthia "Grieve not sage", replied Lord Ganesh "You are an ardent devotee of Lord Siva, my father and so are you to me. Now state what boon you desire. It shall be granted", Gracious Lord, I don't desire anything for myself" the sage said. "My only wish is you should do away with the dsitress and sufferings of those devotees who in like manner strike their foreheads and workship" Lord Ganesh granted the sage's request and disappeared with his retinue.

River Cavery flowed majestically hauling from either side gems pearls sandalwood and several other precious objects. It flowed through the park devised by Indira and to his heart's content. The flowers plants in the park grew luxuriantly. Blossoms of various hues and scents danced with splendour and glee. Indira now engaged himself in daily poojas, adorning the image of Lord Siva with flower garlands and chanting prayers. The celestials in the meantime were weary and sick of the menial service they rendered to Soorapathma and of the inhuman treatment meted out to them. They resolved to meet their king and seek remedy. They came down to the earth reached Tamil Nadu and found Indira engaged in penance in the town of Seerkaly. Indira realized the precarious plight of his subjects and decided to go to Mount Kailas and plead Siva to secure release for them. Indira went to meet Indirani to inform her of their proposed trek. She would by no means allow her husband to go, she said leaving her in loneliness. He explained to her the agonizing plight of the devas. On Indira's request Iyanar the guardian deity accepted the responsibility of her custody and guardianship. Indira and a few select celestials reached Kailas and as they approached the entrance of Siva's temple Nandhi the guardian of the shrine inquired Indira of the purpose of their visit. Vasava told him of their, untold misery they were experiencing under the cruel yoke of Soorapathma. Nandhi expressed his sympathy but told Indira that Lord

Siva being engaged in illustrating yoga to the four rishis would not be available to receive Indira. So he stayed in Kailas waiting for an opportunity to see the Lord.

29. ASAMUKI'S ATTEMPT TO KIDNAP INDIRANI

After her husband's departure Indirani occupied herself in performing penance. Asamuki, the sister of the Asura Lord, considered the absence of Theivendra provided her a favourable opportunity to approach Indirani. Asamuki's fascinating pastime was to procure women to cater to the carnal appetite of her brother. She was well aware how Soorapathma pined over the beauty of Indirani. Asamuki with her evil companion, Thunmuki stole in to the haven where Indirani was relaxing. Approaching her stealthily, Asamuki said, "Fairest of the Fair! why do you immolate yourself performing penance? Your husband has deserted you and gone to Kailas. Leave this wretched place and come with me, My brother Soorapathma the ruler of this world and a thousand others is pining for you. His irresistible passion for you is gnawing his body everyday. I will take you to him and make you his queen" So saying she got hold of Indirani by her hand and tried to pull her to go with her. Indirani with all her strength drew herself away from the iron grip of the Asura temptress, spurning her malicious venture and reproaching her in the most abusive terms. The fiendish woman was undeterred by the words of Indirani and was about to abduct her when Indirani screamed aloud for help. Mahala, the chief of the army of Iyanar, who had been keeping a close watch all round from an eminence on hearing the cry came instantly to the spot and saw the evil attempt of the Asura woman. Immediately he drew his rapier and seizing her by her hair severed the hand that caught Indirani.

As the mutilated hand fell she writhed with pain, roared like a wounded tigress and rolled on the ground, blood gushing out from the wound. She said "Soorapathma holds sway not only over this world

but over numerous other worlds. Therefore whether you stay in this world or seek protection in any other world you cannot escape his wrath, I am not Soorapathma's sister if I don't have you imprisoned. Then she left the place, blood dripping from her maimed hand and tears running down the cheeks.

30. ASAMUKI AT SOORAPATHMA'S COURT

Soorapathma the invincible and supreme Lord of this world and numerous other worlds including the celestial realm, was sitting in his administrative chambers in his grand palace surrounded by his ministers, courtiers representatives of other countries, and attendants. The rulers of this orb whom he had reduced to serfdom stood about with their hands kept over their heads signifying perpetual salutation. Damsels from different worlds hopped around him like butterflies singing dancing and catering to needs, ever ready to supply him with pleasure and service. Poets sang lyrics of encomiums describing his valour and the various boons he had obtained from Lord Siva.

Into this backdrop rushed Asamuki crying so loudly, that the ministers, ambassadors and attendants all turned their eyes towards the spot from where the cry came. Asamuki flung herself at the feet of Soorapathma and cried, "See what has happened to your sister".

Noticing the plight of Asamuki Soorapathma roared "who has done this accursed thing?" in such a frightful tone that even nature shrank back away from the scene: gods held their breath in fear.

Asamuki without answering her brother went on wailing, weeping and intermittently calling out the names of the closest kin. "Where has all your valour gone oh you Asura leaders? You boasted of your might and strength. You boasted of having reduced the celestials to serfdom; oh Banukopa you often blew your own trumpet of having defeated Lord Vishnu the protector god; Oh Sinhamuka. Aren't you

aware, the humiliation I have been subject to? Oh Soorapathma my most affectionate brother; Oh Lord of the Lords of the Asura clan! I have lost my hand and consequently my honour. Is it not a slur on your reputation of valour to have your sister maimed and disgraced thus?"

"Who has done this to you;? tell me in detail" demanded the Asura Lord, Asamuki explained in full as to how she came to lose her hand and concluded referring to Indirani, "Even Athisesha though thousand tongued could never fully describe her beauty. It was due to my attempt to bring her to you this disaster fell upon me. It was a celestial who was keeping guard over Indirani who cut off my hand" Scarcely had she finished her talk when the Asura's frame was aflame with rage. His words dropped like sparks of fire. "I am reputed to be the most indomitable and relentless ruler having reduced the celestials to vassaldom. My brothers and children too are unconquerable. My army is unquestionably unassailable. But all these accomplishments have been rendered meaningless. My sister has been put to irreparable loss and shame." As soon as Soorapathma stopped talking his eldest son Banukopa got up, bowed down with reverence and said, "Indira the Lord of the celestials who had been shorn of all his plumage and rendering us menial service is now hiding for fear of punishment and humility. His son is in prison. The celestials are so meek and submissive that they wouldn't dare to offend our people. That your sister had been assaulted sounds incredible. However I am setting out forthwith to Swarkaloga to ransack that realm, seek the hideout and seize the villain who deformed Asamuki, seize Indirani who has set your heart ablaze with passion and Indira who is absconding and manacle them and bring them to fall at your feet"

31. SWARGA IS RANSACKED

So saying Banukopa left the court and set off on his mission accompanied by an army. He asked Thurmuki, Asamuki's companion

to show him the spot where the incident had occurred. Thurmuki took him to Seekaly where Indirani was kept in secrecy under the protection of Mahasatha. But neither Indirani nor her guardian was to be seen there. Banukopa searched all over the place in vain and then directed his way to the celestial region. News of Banukopan's approach reached the celestials in no time. The message was soon dispatched to Sayanthakumar. Though he was initially apprehensive he decided to defend his people and the kingdom.

The armies of both parties clashed with fiery vehemence. But the celestials could not stand the attack of the Asura forces and withdrew. Wounded by the enemies arrows Sayantha fainted Banukopa instructed his men not to inflict much pain on Sayantha but catch him and put him in chains. The Asura army chiefs rummaged the capital city and imprisoned the celestials whom they could lay hands on. They plundered and looted the region and set fire to it. Banukopa with great pomp and triumph returned to Mahendrapura and reported of his activities to Soorapathma and committed the captives to prison. The Asura Lord felt proud of his son's accomplishments but was disappointed to learn of his failure to entrap the phantom of his dream.

"In this way the celestials have been deprived of their station, robbed of the possession, and subjected to misery hardship and calumny". Thus Prakaspathy concluded the pathetic story of the celestial.

CANTO III

MAHENDRAPURA

32. MURUGAVEL SENDS VEERABAHU ON PEACE MISSION

After listening to the atrocious deeds of the Asura Lord, from Prakaspathy, Lord Skanda told Indira and the celestials that war on

the Asuras would be declared the next day. "But before invading their territory we shall send an envoy to Soorapathma to find out whether he is willing for an amicable settlement" said Murugavel. Brahma and Vishnu welcomed the idea.

It was decided that Veerabahu the greatest of the warriors on the celestials side and chief commander of Skanda be sent as an envoy to Soorapathma. "The purpose of your mission is to enlighten the Asura Lord that we espouse peace. If he is of the same diposition, suggest to him to release the celestials from prison. He should also pledge to carry on a benevolent rule. If he is disposed to comply with our request we shall make peace pardoning all his past atrocious deeds. But if he is adamant and persistent in his hostile course of action we have no alter-native but to pursue military action." Brahma and Vishnu endorsed Murugavel's proposal.

Veerabahu then paying reverence to Lord Skanda and promising to act as directed left the place. Seeing him depart Indira followed him a few yards and beseeched him to pay a visit to his son Sayanthakumara and the celestials squirming in prison and console them.

Setting out on his diplomatic mission, Veerabahu approached Kandamathana mountain, climbed up to its crest, sprang up into the air and mentally saluting the feet of Skanda Kumara, assumed an enormous form, flew across the sea and landed in Lankapura which lay in the north of Mahendrapura and was ruled by Yalimuka, Soorapathma's representative. When Veerabahu arrived, Yalimuka's son Athi veera accosted him. Fierce fighting took place between Athi Veera and the divine emissary. Veerabahu seizing a favourable opportunity cut off his enemy's hands and legs and eventually the head and thus put him to death.

33. VEERABAHU IN MAHENDRAPURA

Leaving Lankapura he flew to Mahendrapura, covering a distance of about thousand yoganas (nearly 5000 miles) and arrived at the Northern entrance of the city. It was heavily guarded. The emissary thought that to make a way through that entrance would cause enormous delay besides killing a large number of soldiers. He thought it prudent to enter the city through the southern gate. But that too was massively guarded by a thousand headed Asura chief called Kayamuka. In the fighting that ensued Veerabahu cut off the thousand heads of the Asura, thereby killing him forth with. However Veerabahu feared that his progress might be impeded by the probability of encountering more and more opposition. He therefore decided to gain access to Soorapathma's court without being seen by anybody. Accordingly he reduced his figure to the size of an atom. As he moved in he was amazed to watch the splendour of the city. Wherever he turned he heard the sound of music emanating from various instruments. Whichever way he cast his glance he saw places of entertainment, dancing halls, gymnasiums gymkana clubs all swarming with young men of diverse interests. The houses abounded with wealth and the streets teamed with people. The city was overflowing with milk and honey and the mansions with pomp and pageantry.

34. VEERABAHU MEETS JAYANTHA IN PRISON

Before entering Soorapathma's court Veerabahu thought of the promise he had made to Indira assuring him he would visit Jayantha and the celestials. He therefore directed his movement towards Banukopa's palace, beside which lay the apartment where in Jayantha and the sky-dwellers were kept in prison.

Jayantha appeared pale emaciated and gaunt. His mind often indulged in reminiscences of his past glorious life. Pleasant memories of

his joyous moments he spent in the midst of glamorous galaxy of maidens recurred often. His life in the heavens with his parents was one of unadulterated bliss. Only after his encounter with Banukopa did he come to know that there was a thing called sorrow. It was only after being made captive that he realized what suffering meant. Thoughts of his mother's love and tenderness, his father's affection and attachment often came to his mind in succession. "How afflicted my mother would be if she comes to know of the torture inflicted on me by the Asuras" he would imagine and sorely grieve. Languishing in grief thus he would intermittently appeal to Lord Siva, craving for mercy and rescue from the thralldom perpetrated on them by the Asuras. Mourning thus over their illfated existence Jayantha felt the pangs of sorrow so much that he fainted and dropped down out of exhaustion and fatigue. In a state of semi-consciousness he had a dream. In his dream there appeared a vision of Lord Muruga scintillating with beauty and grace. In his graceful form the Lord appeared with six faces and twelve arms all of them except the Apaya (the one giving protection) and the Varatha (one bestowing rewards) bearing various weapons. Kadambu flower (*Eugenia racemes*) garlands adorned his shoulders and chest. Jayantha was overwhelmed with astonishment at the vision. Since he had never before seen the figure of Lord Muruga he mumbled, "You are neither Brahma nor Vishnu. You are perhaps another form of Lord Siva. But I am sure you have come with the view to redeeming the celestials' from the atrocity of the Asuras" So saying he fell flat at the feet of the Lord. Murugavel revealed to him his nature and assured him of early release from the prison and vanished. Jayantha woke up from his sleep to realize that all what he saw was a dream.

In the meantime Veerabahu who had been roaming all over the city came to the place where the celestials were imprisoned. The prisoners were under heavy guard and tight security. Veerabahu wanted to show himself to the celestials but without being seen by the guards. He thought of Lord Skanda's form and pronounced his six-lettered pri-

mordial Mantra. The prison guards fell into a swoon. Then he entered the cell and appeared before Jayantha. Jayantha stood amazed as he could not identify him. With a view to clearing his confusion Veerabahu spoke, "Listen young lad, I am a kin and ardent devotee of Sivakumara. I have come as his emissary to Soorapathma to request him to release you from prison. Lord Skanda is none other than Lord Siva himself but has assumed this present form to defeat and destroy Soorapathma and demolish the entire Asura clan. You will soon be set free from the cruel bondage" declared Veerabahu. The suras were overjoyed to hear these words of comfort and wished him success and glory.

Veerabahu left the prison house and crossing over the moats and going round the ramparts he watched the defensive strategies of the Asura Lord. Leaving them behind he flew to Soorapathma's palace and walked into the audience hall. He saw the Asura potentiate seated in the diamond-studded throne at the apex of the body of ministers and councillors.

35. VEERABAHU IN SOORAPATHMA'S COURT

"Being the envoy of Skanda the son of the supreme Lord it is infra dig on my part to be standing in a low position while the Asura leader is seated in his state chair" thought Veerabahu and worshipped Muruga within himself and all of a sudden there came into the hall a golden canopied seat more lustrous and splendid than that of Soorapathma. While all sat aghast with amazement Veerabahu occupied the seat with majestic deportment Soorapathma over whelmed with anger spoke thus, "I have heard of various miracles performed by ascetics, but they wouldn't dare to do such things in my presence. Do you imagine yourself great by showing such mean things? Even the womenfolk and toddlers are capable of performing such mediocre tricks. By the way you imp of a fellow who are you? How dare you appear in my presence? Indira the celestial chief is ever hiding through fear. Brahma

and Vishnu wouldn't make bold to intrude. Who are you then? thundered Soorapathma Veerabahu spoke with restraint.

"Sivakumra the son of Siva the Almighty is presently stationed at Thiruchenthoor. His purpose of encampment is to remove all ills and woes of Indira, claim back the position of Brama and other celestial chiefs, release the imprisoned sky dwellers from bondage and in short eliminate all your evil doings committed to them. I am his vassal and devotee. Kumaravel who destroyed your younger brother Tharaka with mount Kravuncha has sent me as an emissary out of sympathy towards you to negotiate peace.

"Sage Kasipa is paternally related to the celestials. You, as the whole world knows, are the son of that sage. Does it behove you to imprison the celestials? You have gone astray from the path of righteousness to be followed by righteous rulers as prescribed in the scriptures. You did great penance for an inordinately long period and you went to the extent of immolating yourself to attract the attention of Lord Siva who, pleased with your all too rare performance of penance, gave you immortality of life, immeasurable wealth and incontestable authority. You have been misusing all your powers chiefly to harass and torture the celestials. If you are keen to prolong your prosperous life and sustain your undisputed authority, stop all your atrocious activities and release the sky dwellers from jail. If you fail to do so, it is certain that Kumaravel will pursue a military course of action to undo all what you have done, destroy you with your clan and reward the celestials their rightful claims".

On hearing these words Soorapathma seethed with rage and rancour "How fantastic it is" fumed Soorapathma, "for your toothless toddler trying to preach me, the potentate of 1008 worlds. The celestials subjected the Asura to great suffering and humility; they drained all our wealth reducing us to poverty and penury. I therefore resolved to re-

taliate adopting the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth policy. I enslaved them; I imprisoned them. All this I did in accordance with our Kula dharma. My men are still in pursuit of the absconding Indira who one day will be caught and jailed. When I am hoping to imprison the celestial king how foolish it is to expect me to release the already imprisoned celestials. Lord Siva, your Murugavel's father has endowed me with an imperishable life and made me the potentate of 1008 worlds. Who, on earth or in the heavens can defeat me? Why should I waste my words. and time? I will not release the celestials from prison. You should be an ignoramus to have listened to the words of your Lord and come as his envoy. I spare your life. Be gone hence" Veerabahu fretted restlessly as fumes of anger baked his heart on hearing these words. But he controlled himself and said "Soorapathma you are yet to learn of the supreme eminence of our, Lord. Brahma, Vishnu and even, the scripturess have not fully realized his paramount excellence. By Lord Siva's gracious wish, Murugavel appeared from the fiery eye of Siva. He is none other than Lord Siva who is sans beginning and end. He is the Supreme Soul shining within the souls of all living beings. He is life within life. He is both immanent and transcendent. He is the embodiment of love. He is grace personified and mercy epitomized. He appears like a small child encapsulating omni potence and omniscience. He has come to Thiruchentoor to relieve the sufferings of the celestials by destroying those who were instrumental for their affliction and agony. Without realizing my Lord's greatness, you spoke of him dishonourably in mean words. I could have cut off your tongue that spoke so disparagingly but that would be overstepping the limits of propriety. However I reiterate my mission. If you want to live through the full extent of your life, set free the celestials from prison. Give up acting contrary to the dictates of righteousness. Seek Murugavel's feet as the resort of refuge"

When Veerabahu described in detail the prowess and greatness of Lord Skanda, the Asura emperor was enraged and expressed

his contempt for the Lord thus; "Let the lisping child be your hero, saviour or redeemer; I care the least for him. I, the unchallenged Lord of the three worlds, am fearless of even the three chief gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva." Then turning to the hundred attendants beside him said

"This so called emissary deserves to be beheaded for the destruction he has caused here. However, since it is unethical to harm one who has come as an emissary, let him be put in prison" As the attendants approached to arrest him he got hold of them by the tufts of their hair, dashed their heads on the ground and put an end to all of them instantly.

Then he turned to Soorapathma and said, "I finally warn you to change your decision and surrender, failing which you are sure to be destroyed by my Lord's Vel (spear). Till then enjoy life to the core doing things as you please." As Veerabahu left the place the throne-like-chair in which he was seated all the while also disappeared. The Asura king burnt with rage at this sight, ordered Sathamuka the hundred-headed commander to catch Veerabahu and put him in jail. Veerabahu caught the approaching commander by his arms, struck him with his mighty hand, pushed him to the ground, and ground his head with his feet and thus put him to death. Veerabahu leaving the king's court began to smash the buildings and destroy the capital city. Then Veerabahu was met by Vachchirabahu who was in charge of the capital city. A skilled archer as he was Vachchira bent his mighty bow and rained arrows at Veerabahu. The undaunted emissary lost no time in approaching the young asura lad and flooring him down he crushed him to death. Leaving Mahendrapura, the capital city, he proceeded northwards to reach Lanka where Yalimuka the ruler of the Island and Soorapathma's viceroy accosted him. There ensued a great fight between the two and needless to say that Skandakumara's envoy emerged victorious, the Asura leader having been put to death.

36. VEERABAHU REACHES TIRUCHENTHUR

Leaving behind the beautiful and prosperous city of Lanka and crossing over the blue sea Veerabahu reached Tiruchenthur. Laying himself prostrate at the crimson feet of Skandakumara and with tears streaming down the eyes, the heroic envoy described in detail, the discussion he had with the Asura. "It was really no discussion because Soorapathma paid no heed to the peace proposals regarding the release of the devas. "He was bent on boasting of his pelf, power and prowess, of his supremacy and zuserainty. Feeling it worthless and even irreverent to be in his presence I returned soon" So concluded Veerabahu his talk about his mission "But you have said nothing of your doings. Tell us what you did, there", insisted the Lord. "My Lord, on my way to his capital and back, I encountered several adversaries who obstructed my progress and with your benediction, I erased them all; this is what happened", said Veerabahu modestly. "He is destined to die, so he is arrogant in not releasing the gods. We shall proceed tomorrow itself to undo his arrogance" As Skandakumara pronounced these words, the devas shouted with joy, "Our sorrows are over"

37. SOORAPATHMA RECONSTRUCTS HIS CITY

Soorapathma ordered Visvakumara - the architect of the gods, to rebuild and renovate his capital city destroyed by Veerabahu deva. Within a short while, Visvakumara reconstructed the city, reclaiming its original splendour replete with fortification, the royal palace sky scraping towers, steeples, palatial halls, storeyed houses temples belfries, Lakes, parks etc. Soorapathma was amazed to see the new resplendent city with all its original grandeur and felicitated the architect for his magnificent workmanship.

Seating himself on the newly constructed diamond-studded throne amidst encomiums and peals of joy. Soorapathma glanced

around proudly and pleasantly, his eyes searching for messengers from abroad. At this point of time some harbingers from lands across the seas, emerged from the audience and paying obeisance to the king spoke thus, "Hail mighty king, the Lord of Asura and Devas. We have been to the Northern strip of Land across the sea called Tiruchendur where we found the encampment of Skandakumara and his retinue all in readiness to mount an attack on our city. It is left to your Majesty to weigh and consider the gravity of the impending peril of such a probable attack".

On hearing these words of alarm the Asura king immediately decided to convene a conference comprising his brother Sinhamuka, his sons, his ministers and commanders -in -chief.

38. SOORAPATHMA CONFERS WITH MINISTERS AND ADVISERS

All personages whose presence was solicited came without delay, paid their homage and took their respective seats. Soorapathma appeared steaming with rage his nostrils emitting fumes of smoke. He addressed the audience thus.

"This glorious city has been destroyed. Innumerable soldiers have been killed. Wherever you turn you find nothing but heaps of bones and burnt buildings. Streams of blood have been flooding the streets with carcasses floating on them. All the splendour of the city has been destroyed by the self styled envoy who called himself an emissary of Skanda, our accursed enemy. All my fame and prestige have been ruined. I made the grave mistake of allowing him to escape. I ought to have killed him or put him in prison. My lackadaisical inactivity has brought upon me ignominy and discredit to my country. That emissary left behind the message that the child commander of the Devas, I mean Sivakumara, is preparing to launch an attack, if the captives in prison

are not released. I have summoned you all to voice your opinion regarding the action we are going to take, whether we should seek peace or make war.”

As the king concluded his speech one of the ministers called Maithyan (the buffalo-headed) rose to speak made his obeisance and said, “My Lord is it judicious on our part to consider lightly of Kumara the leader of the immortals, forgetting the fact that he destroyed the miraculous fortress of your youngest brother, defeated him in fight and put an end to his life and prowess? You have delayed too long in showing your valour and subduing him. It is expedient that you yourself set out immediately to crush that impish son of Siva and save our prestige”

Darmakopa, the chief minister, bidding him stop talking declared, “let us talk sense. Do you have to move a mountain to catch a mole? A trap will be most suitable for the job. It is beneath our dignity to go and fight with that insignificant child hero of the sky - dwellers. What is needed is to send a strong troop under an efficient commander, to deal with the enemy”.

Several other ministers and commanders in - chief voiced their opinion mostly supporting the words of the chief minister. Glancing around and noticing nobody was coming forth to speak; Panukopan the eldest son of the Asura king arose and said.

“My Lord when your youngest brother Tharaka was killed and his fortress destroyed you should have sent me to the warfront where I would have devastated the entire race of the sky-dwellers. You will be belittling yourself if you are to fight with the small child Sivakumara. Does it behove a lion to attack a mouse? Give up the idea of going to the battle field yourself. Send me instead to tackle the issue. I will subdue the Suras and bring both Indira and Sivakumara as prisoners”. Sinhamuka waited patiently till Panukopan finished his harangue.

“All those who spoke before me”, he began, “were speaking of their own prowess, but none was concerned in giving you the much needed advice. They were bent on expressing words that would serve to please your ears but they were of little use in brain-storming you. Now, I request you to pay heed to my words that may initially sound unpalatable. You forced the devas to go to the sea and catch fish and carry them on to you. Does it behove a fair ruler? You put Indira the Lord of the devas to great suffering. You snatched away his kingdom robbed his wealth put his son and a host of sky-dwellers in prison. You made several attempts to have Indirani abducted; you never thought of releasing them from prison. Lord Skanda sent Veerabahu as envoy, to make a final request to free the devas. But without paying heed to the peace mission you are bent on perpetrating the enmity and mercilessly afflicting torture on the helpless devas. It is your ruthless attitude that has impelled Lord Skandakumara to wage war against you. Have you forgotten the words Lord Siva uttered when he granted you the boons? Didn't he say, 'None but my Sakti (power) will conquer you'. Can't you realize that it was his Sakti embedded in Skanda's javelin that took away the life of Tharaka? My suggestion, My Lord, therefore is, Consider the release of devas from prison. If you do that, Skanda will forgive all our past crimes, give up the idea of war and return to Kailas.

When Soorapathma heard these words which were in contra distinction to those of all the previous speakers, he shook with rage; he bit his lowerlip ground his teeth, clapped his hands and thumped his feet on the floor. He found it hard to digest the words of his brother.

“Are you speaking in faith” he thundered; I have kept the sky-dwellers in prison for timeless eons and even Brahma and Vishnu dared not question me; while those stalwarts slumber in the slough of despondency, is it that small kid of Siva who ventures to question my authority? Your idea that that toddler will conquer me is synonymous with the statement that a handless person plucked the sun from the sky

when a blind person pointed it to be a fruit.”

As Soorapathma suspended his talk for a while Singamuka intervened. “Bear with me, my dear brother and listen to one more thing I have to say. It was from the six sparks that emanated from Lord Siva’s third eye that Skandakumara got his six- faced form. He is the embodiment of pure divine knowledge. His nature is beyond the ken of human knowledge with which it is foolish to attempt to fathom his greatness. Even the sages with the acquisition of life long penance and knowledge have not yet understood his infinity. You boast of the boon of endless life. Sages interpret the term endless life as a longer period of life than ordinary life span of inhabitants of the three worlds. If you desire an inordinate long life with prosperity and happiness, release the devas from prison and make peace with Skandakumara”. Thus concluded Sinhamuka, the sagacious brother. When Soorapathma heard these words, he trembled with rage, he felt that somebody had poured molten lead into his ears. Suppressing his anger, he again let loose tirade at his brother; “The toddler whom you have been praising, has a strange history of origin.

காற்றிற் றள்ளுண்டு நெருப்பினிற் சூடுண்டு கங்கை
ஆற்றில் தாக்குண்டு சரவணம் புக்கலை யுண்டு
வேற்றுப் பேர்முலை உண்டழு தேவிளை யாடும்
நேற்றைப் பாலனை யோபரம் பொருளென நினைந்தாய்

“Do you know how his life burgeoned? Being tossed in the air, scorched in fire, launched into the Ganges, he finally sprouted into his present form in Saravana pond to be suckled by the pleiad sisters. Such is his prowess and you consider him a supreme and invisible God.

“I am ashamed to say that you and I were born of the same mother’s womb, you grew with me sharing the same meal. The Suras are our inveterate enemies. Instead of considering meting out punish-

ment to them you speak in favour of them. I need no other enemy while you are there. You have no respect for our race. You are born to destroy our kith and kin. Of what use is your titanic form? You are only living among the dead You are nothing more than a moving corpse. Get hence; I no more need your presence. I know how to defeat the enemies without the help of betrayers”.

Sinhamuka felt sad to consider his brother's fate. He knew well that ones destiny could never be altered and Soorapathma was destined to be felled by the mighty weapon of Lord Skandakumara. It would be improper to live after witnessing death of his brother. Considering thus he fell at the feet of Soorapathma and said, “Pardon me my Lord for my foolish talk. I shall never forsake you. Grant me permission to go to the battle field instantly”.

The Asura king embraced his brother with love and joy and instructed him to return to his castle and be prepared to go to war in case Lord Skanda declares attack. He then dismissed the cabinet conference and bade his ministers, leaders of the forces and his sons to disperse.

CANTO IV THE BATTLE

39. SRISKANDA LAUNCHES ATTACK

As decided earlier on Veerabahu's return from his mission, Lord Skanda directed him to make necessary arrangements to declare war against Soorapathma. He wanted Veerabahu to set out for the attack on the day itself. As the Lord's words reached the ears of sky dwellers, they started dancing with joy, feeling that their days of woe were at an end. The one hundred thousand and eight heroic brethren with their Leader Veerabahu encircled the Lord seeking his blessings and approval for the mount of attack. The short legged demons comprising two hundred thousand with their squadron leaders thronged encircling

Lord Muruka paying their obeisance and expressing their joy and eagerness to face the enemies. As his retinue of soldiers surrounded him Lord Muruka amidst showers of flowers rained by Suras set out on his campaign of assault against Soorapathma. Vayutheva the charioteer of Lord's chariot steered it right into the air and directed its passage across the sea to reach Mahendrapura the capital city of Soorapathma. As soon as the Lord and the battalions reached the outskirts of the city the divine architect on the instructions of Lord Skandakumara set up a camp for them to stay during the night. It was named 'Hemakooda' meaning 'Golden Rock'.

The appearance of a new camp, drove the inquisitive messengers of Soorapathma, to learn everything in detail and carry the message to their Lord.

Soorapathma burnt with rage on learning the news. "I shall instantly destroy that Sivakumara's power strength and prestige with his army" So saying to himself he instructed his messengers to bring Banukopan his eldest son to his presence. On his arrival, Soorapathma put to him the news of Skandakumara's advent into their territory "Siva has sent his son Skanda here to fight. Therefore it is meet and proper that I should secure victory through you. Go to the battle field with a strong army, defeat Sivakumara and bring victory to me and prestige to our country"

FIRST DAY OF THE BATTLE

40. THE FIGHT BETWEEN BANUKOPAN AND VEERABAHU

Banukopan readily assented. He armed himself with a mighty bow and quiver of arrows, and several other weapons. On his orders there went before him the four kinds of army, the cavalry, the infantry an array of elephants and a galaxy of chariots.

In the battle field the armies of Banukopan and Lord Skanda clashed with vehemence. Banukopan rode to the forefront to meet Veerabahu who, armed himself with a mighty bow and ruthless rapier, appeared well groomed for the attack. Banukopan, finding his men being ruthlessly butchered and killed in great numbers by the goblin troops of Veerabahu, decided it was time for him to get down to business, strung his mighty bow and sent showers of shafts at the enemy's forces. Veerabahu instantly rained arrows from his bow, which cut down the approaching darts and proceeded further to destroy the Asura troops. Within minutes Veerabahu swept off the entire Asura forces with his continuous torrent of arrows leaving Banukopan alone to stand in dismay.

Banukopan could not believe his eyes. He stared at Veerabahu standing in all majesty with an invincible look. "Am I to believe that I have lost in the battle? No, Never. I will reduce his army to dust, and make him prey to the kites. If I fail I will not return home; instead I shall throw myself into fire." So saying he invoked his 'Mohastra' a weapon that created illusion and oblivion in the enemy's mind. He sent it with the instruction to render the enemy and his men unconscious and lifeless. As it dashed towards him Veerabahu was at a loss to know which weapon he should send in order to thwart it. Meanwhile the Mohastra swooped over Veerabahu and his men and made them unconscious. Lord Skanda the omnipotent observed Veerabahu's plight and sent an amohastra a weapon capable of destroying the magic potency of the Asura's dart. At the approach of the Lord's weapon, Mohastra fell to dust and Veerabahu and his men regained their consciousness. They readily got up.

Banukopan watched all these and felt dejected and heart-stricken at the thought that he could in no way defeat Veerabahu. To his horror he observed Veerabahu getting ready to send Sivastra a weapon gifted by Siva, against him. He realized that he had not brought the

same with him. He was sure to die, if he stayed anymore in the battle field. "The only course left for me is to return home, collect more powerful weapons and come back to fight tomorrow." Having decided thus he suddenly disappeared unseen by pronouncing a mantra.

41. SOORAPATHMA DECIDES TO FIGHT

On learning about the events in the battle field through the messengers, Soorapathma was wild with anger. The very thought of his son's defeat incensed him. He decided that he himself should go to war without sending any body else. Accordingly he arranged heavy battalions to accompany him, and collected several weapons gifted by the chief gods. He appointed Sinhamuka's son and Tharaka's son as leaders of the phalanxes of the army. Amidst enormous arrays of cavalry, infantry, and hordes of elephants and several lines of chariots Soorapathma rode on his diamond decked chariot, like a hillock moving on a mountain.

Watching the movement of Soorapathma with his troops, Indira ran to inform Skandakumara of the coming of the Asura king and prayed to the Lord to defeat and destroy the deadly enemy of the gods. Lord Skanda smiling gently looked at Vayudeva his charioteer who in an instant brought the vehicle upon which the Lord mounted with royal dignity. Veerabahu with his one hundred thousand and eight brothers went ahead of Lord's chariot. As Skandakumara approached the battle ground Soorapathma's light infantry surrounded Kumara's troops. Seeing this Veerabahu strung his bow and sent myriads of arrows against the Asura soldiers. The arrows cut off the heads of several asura soldiers, severed the limbs of several, pierced the hearts of numerous attackers thus destroying the asura troops that tried to approach the Lord. Observing the destruction of his army, perpetrated by Virabahu, Soorapathma made it his business to initially smite him off before fighting with Skandakumara. "This is a fine opportunity to take revenge on

you for the destruction you had caused to my city when you came as a messenger.” So saying he bent his mighty bow and rained arrows at Veerabahu who in turn sent hundreds of arrows and destroyed them all. The Asura king then cut off Virabahu’s bow sending fifteen arrows. Almost simultaneously he sent a bludgeon which struck Veerabahu’s chest causing blood to flow like waterfall. Losing valour and consciousness Veerabahu fell down from his chariot. The sky-dwellers ran amok in fear. There then appeared Lord Skanda on the scene, and Soorapathma seeing him for the first time watched him with deep interest and close intent. His figure, with six lotus like faces, twelve shining eyes, beautiful hands bearing various weapons and anklet-girt feet, struck him with awe and admiration. People often speak of Soorapathma as a ruthless inhuman and unrelenting despot. But he was fortunate to be gifted with the rare boon of directly beholding the supreme young Lord whom the immortals including Brahma and Vishnu could not easily comprehend. He realized that the Lord standing before him was the son of Lord Siva, but arrogance was surging uppermost in his heart. So he addressed him with pride, “Young child that you are, you have not realized who I am. Do you take me for Tharakasura or his mysterious mountain whom you have earlier met in the battle field. Within minutes you will come to know of my prowess. You will also realize your folly of having come to fight with me foolishly believing the silly complaints of the sky-dwellers.” In reply Lord Skanda said “I believe in deed casting and not in broadcasting. If your valour is indomitable show it in your fight”. Before Lord Kumara could end his words the Asura leader bent his bow and rained cascades of arrows over the arms of Skandakumara; The Lord in return sent a discus that dashed through the air like a tornado and in a single swoop destroyed all the arrows of Soorapathma, and proceeding further destroyed all the battalions of army in the battle field including the Asura’s cavalry, infantry, the elephants and the chariots. Soorapathma felt dejected and depressed but not discouraged. In a desperate attempt he sent the Brahmastra (a weapon presented to him by Lord Brahma). It sped on like a jet emit-

ting fire and routing at the same time like a whirlwind the demon soldiers of Lord Skanda and as it approached near, Lord Skanda let fly his 'Vel' which swooped on the Asura's weapon and consumed it. Soorapathma still undaunted, dispatched Sivastra, gifted to him by Lord Siva earlier. Lord Subramania realized the nature of the approaching weapon, stretched out one of his hands and welcomed it into His fold. The enemy king was thunder struck and thought for the first time, "This is no small child as I had imagined all this time". Being the son of Lord Siva he is invincible, but I will not give up fighting. I am equally endowed with strength and boons. Now I am alone without any supporting army. I have to furnish myself with enough army and weapons. I will meet him on another suitable occasion fully armed and prepared". Deciding thus Soorapathma with the help of a mantra suddenly disappeared from the scene. Lord Skanda was aware of Soorapathma's plight. The Lord did not want to take away his life sending the divine weapon. "Well and good if he changes his mind". Muruga benignly thought and returned to the camp.

THIRD DAY OF THE BATTLE

42. FIGHT BETWEEN BANUKOPA AND VEERABAHU

The Asura messengers losing no time conveyed the news of Soorapathma's defeat to his son Banukopan. He immediately met his father and expressed his desire to go to the battle field. Soorapathma told his son that it was no easy matter to defeat Lord Skanda though he was a child in appearance. Only he himself, endowed with innumerable divine boons as he was, could defeat Sivakumara "It is left to you my son, to defeat dishonour and terminate, the life of Veerabahu the one time envoy".

Banukopan made additional and exhaustive preparations for war, with the main aim of dealing a crushing blow upon the Lord's

messenger. He sought the help of Maya (Soorapathma's mother) for strategic advice and more powerful weapons. In addition to several weapons she gave him a Mayastra (a powerful weapon with magical potency) directing him to use it against the devas. "The weapon will render them senseless and rob them of their might. Today's victory will be yours", she concluded. Banukopan entered the battle field with high hopes. As he approached, the goblins on the Lord's side started the attack, putting to death several infantry men of the Asura side. Seeing this Banukopan advanced with his bow and showered arrows targeting the demon troops who fell like white ants. Catching sight of this onslaught, Veerabahu came to the fore-front, rained arrows torrentially and routed the entire army of Banukopan, leaving him alone to gaze at the mountain of his dead soldiers. However, undismayed, he pretended to retreat, hid himself in a mass of darkness which he created with his black art, dispatched the Mayastra (given by his grand mother Maya) directing it to submerge all the soldiers including the leader Veerabahu in a swoon and throw them into the fresh water sea. The weapon encircling the forces on Skanda's side produced on them the desired effect. The weapon as instructed kept watch over them after throwing them into the sea. Watching all these, Banukopan felt elated. His pride knew no bounds at the thought that his plan had worked well in destroying Skanda's men. He soon returned to his father's place to convey to him the happy news of his success. Soorapathma was highly pleased to hear of his son's accomplishment. He praised the lad for his valiance. He happily acceded to his sons request allowing him to go to war the next day also. He would completely demolish the demon troops, put to death Veerabahu and his brothers and finally defeat young Skanda, he assured.

Meanwhile sage Naratha conveyed to Lord Skanda the message of what had befallen Veerabahu and his brothers. "They have been rendered unconscious and thrown into a fresh water sea by a weapon of Banukopan" he said. On hearing this, Skandakumara sent

his Vel instructing it to destroy the Mayastra and bring back Veerabahu and his brothers, redeeming them from the stuporous state. As soon as the divine weapon approached the sea, the Mayastra lost its power and strength. Veerabahu and his followers regained their consciousness and praised the Vel for its inestimable service in resuscitating them. They paid their homage to Lord and to the Vel with gratitude. Meanwhile Veerabahu took a pledge to the effect that he would return to the camp only after defeating and exterminating Banukopan.

43. HIRANYA GOES TO WAR

On hearing the words of Veerabahu devar the goblin soldiers instantly started attacking Mahendrapura. Using rocks and big trees as weapons they smashed the towers and tall palatial houses in the city. Meanwhile Veerabahu dispatched Vayuastra and Agniastra (air and fire weapons) which together produced devastating conflagration that spread over the entire city causing immense destruction. Soorapathma decided to go to war himself immediately.

Hiranya, one of Soorapathman's sons tried to dissuade his father from going to war. "Lord Subramanya is no small child as you imagine him to be. He is none other than Lord Siva. We should not judge a person from his appearance. It is only a spark emanating from Lord Shiva's laughter that destroyed the entire universe. You are aware that it was young Kumara's weapon that destroyed Tharaka with his mountain. It is the same weapon that redeemed the devas from the sea. Skanda endowed with such mighty weapon is invincible. He has come to fight for a right cause. If we are to save ourselves and our clan from destruction, we have only one course of action and that is to free the gods from prison and make peace with Skandakumara. He will pardon all our evil doings and allow us to live freely". Soorapathma seethed with anger when he heard the words of Hiranya.

"You are a coward", he thundered. "You are afraid to go to war and in order to hide your cowardice you try to advise me against my plans. I shall never be deterred from my course of action even if Siva intervenes. I am ashamed of a spineless son like you. Zenana is the most suitable place for you to languish. Therefore be gone".

Hiranya felt his father's granite heart could never be moved or melted. He decided to go to war, and embrace death at the hands of Lord Skanda. "Pardon me my Lord" he said to his father, "I have determined to go to war. I shall fight for your noble cause. Adieu". Pleased with these words Soorapathma hugged his son with affection and appreciation and bade good bye.

Accompanied by battalions of soldiers and brigades of elephants and chariots, and amidst cries of swaggering and swashbuckling, Hiranya approached the battle field, and entered into the fray with Veerabahu and began fighting with manly courage and valiance but soon realized he was no match to Veerabahu who proved non-pareil in archery and swordsmanship. At the sight of his army being routed and recited by the constant onslaught of the endless flow of Veerabahu's poisonous missiles, Hiranya lost courage and hope, He could neither defend his army nor offend his opponent, He decided to save his life and escape. His ostensible reason for doing so was, he should be alive to perform funeral rites to his father after his death. He then suddenly disappeared and hid himself in the ocean. Thus fighting for the day came to an end. Messengers carried the news of Hiranya's defeat and escape to his father. Veerabahu, his brethren-soldiers and the goblin army retired to the camp. (Hiranya's fight took place on the third day night).

44. AGNIMUKASURA'S FIGHT AND DEATH

Agnimukasura was one of Soorapathma's sons. While he was in his mother's womb her body shed fire. Seeing this strange phenom-

enon, Maya Soorapathma's mother fore told that the child would be born with a fiery face and called him Agnimukasura. He was an indomitable fighter, an adept in deception and wizardry, was more agile and valiant than the five heroes, the pandavas.

As soon as he heard of Hiranya's disgraceful disappearance, he met his father and expressed his desire to go to war to make amends for his brother's shameful act as well as to quell and subdue the devas. Soorapathma readily granted his request.

Agnimuka from his childhood had been a devotee of Kaali whose favour he had sought and gained in abundance through his offerings and oblations. He had obtained a special boon from the goddess to the effect that wherever he sought her assistance in times of danger she would come to his rescue. So in the battle field when he found he could no more resist Veerabahu's assault he thought of the goddess. Instantly she appeared. She had a frightful figure. Her eyes were burning red; she was black, dressed in blood red costume. She wore a garland of skulls and bore a trident in one of her hands. Noticing the despairing state of Agnimuka and the commanding position of Veerabahu, she assured her votary protection, and death of his enemy and hurled her trident at Veerabahu who noticing its valiance sent fourteen hard hitting arrows and demolished the weapon. Desperate and wrathful at the destruction of her weapon Kaali, with a sword in hand climbed up Veerabahu's chariot intending to slay him with the sword. Aware of her intention but feeling reluctant to kill her, she being a member of the fair sex the hero caught hold of her by the hair with one hand and struck forcefully with the other on her chest. Unable to bear the onslaught Kaali fell senseless but soon recovered. Realizing her plight and begging the hero's pardon for her daring to attack him she wished him victory in the fight and disappeared. Agnimuka felt crest-fallen, betrayed and helpless. However instantly deciding to continue the fight, defeat Veerabahu and obtain victory for his father, he hurled

Brahmastra at his enemy. Observing this Veerabahu thought for a while and flung Veerapathra's weapon, the trident, at Agnimuka. As it proceeded with terrific speed and vehemence Brahmastra withdrew and drifted away, Veerapathra's trident sped on with indomitable valour approached Agnimuka cut his head off and returned to Veerabahu. Thus ended the life of Agnimuka (Agnimuka's fight took place on the fourth day night)

45. THE DEATH OF SOORAPATHMA'S THREE THOUSAND SONS

The news of his son's death soon reached Soorapathma and spread over the city as well. Hearing the sad news, Soorapathma's three thousand children born to his several mistresses, approached the Asura Lord and sought permission to combat with the devas assuring victory to the asuras and destruction to devas. They proceeded with pomp and flourish to the battle field, where a thousand soldier brethren of Veerabahu accosted these. In a fierce battle that ensued, Vijaya a brother of Veerabahu, sent Vairavastra (Gifted to him by Skandakumara) and put to death all the three thousand warrior-sons of Soorapathma thus bringing victory to Lord Subramanya.

The news of the defeat and death of the three thousand sons spurred on Soorapathma to go to war but his chief minister Tharmakopan dissuaded him from his intention. The minister argued it was below the dignity and honour of such a mighty monarch as Soorapathma to engage in war with a puerile and immature opponent "I myself shall destroy the enemy. Grant me permission to go to the battle field" pleaded the minister. Soorapathma acquiesced.

Tharmakopan set out on an elephant armed with several weapons and in accompaniment of several other ministers and supported by a battalion of soldiers. The minister was thunder struck at the enor-

mous extent of the demon soldiers and at the array of Veerabahu's brothers. At the first thrust, he showed great valour hurling weapons and inflicting great suffering on Veerabahu's lot. Meanwhile Tharmakopa's elephant got hold of the demon soldiers in clusters and smashed them on the ground and started attacking Veerabahu's charrioteer with its tusks. Then picking a rod from the ground the elephant struck with it the charrioteer killing him instantly. Flying into a rage, Veerabahu seized it with vehemence and flung it into the air. The animal came tumbling, fell on the ground with a peal of thunder like cry and lay unconscious. Watching the elephant's plight Tharmakopan hurled a bludgeon at Veerabahu who cut it off with his sword and dealt a blow with great force at Tharmakopan's chest at which he dropped prostrate like a felled tree and lost his life.

46. BANUKOPAN'S DEFEAT AND DEATH

The messengers conveyed the news of the death of the three thousand siblings to Banukopan. He immediately went to meet his father payed his homage and started talking about the on-going war which in his opinion was an unwise undertaking, resulting from their injudicious appraisal of the strength of their adversaries, particularly the greatness of their leader, Skandakumara. He reminded his father of his attempt to destroy the enemies by throwing them life-less into the ocean with the help of the weapon granted by his grand mother Maya. But Lord Skanda sent his Vel (lance) and redeemed them bringing them back to life. "In your confrontation with him, you yourself lost all your army and faced a crushing defeat. Is there anyone, among us, who is more powerful to over come him? I am telling all this in the interest of your welfare. Release the gods from prison. Lord Skanda will accept peaceful offer." On hearing these words Soorapathma's eyes burnt like carbuncles with irrepressible anger.

"How base and timorous you sound! Have you forgotten I am

the unrivalled monarch of one thousand and eight worlds in this universe? Don't you know even the gods of creation and Protection dare not challenge me! Do you think I would ever shrink back and bring ignominy to the Asura race? Youth, beauty, wealth and power are transient, but fame is everlasting. I may give up my life in the battle field but I will never give up the devas from prison. Don't be regretful for my sake. I have determined to go to war myself."

Banukopa n felt sad at his father's resolution which was firm. as a rock. However apparently changing his mind he told his father he had decided to go to war and Soorapathma was highly pleased at the sudden change of heart of his son and wished him good luck.

Banukopan entered the battle field determined to subdue his arch enemy. Veerabahu observing the approach of the young Asura Lord, came forward in his chariot and rained arrows to resist the progress of the Asura army. Within minutes their chariots were destroyed by each other's volley of weapons, and the two heroes reaching the ground started sword fighting; Seizing dexterously an opportune moment, Veerabahu cut off his enemy's head with his sword. Peals of joy of the devas rent the air as the foe's head rolled down the earth. On hearing the death of his Son Soorapathman smote the earth with his lusty arms, and shed bitter tears. Suddenly his heart-wrenching agony turned into wild fire of anger and he immediately made preparations to go to war.

47. SINHAMUKASOORA'S FIGHT AND DEATH

Meanwhile SinhaMuka arrived at the palace. Like Banukopa he too tried to dissuade his elder brother expostulating on the evils of war, but found it impossible to talk him out of it. Soorapathma sarcastically said, "what for have you been carrying your thousand heads and two thousand hands if not for fighting the enemy. You would have felt them a burden all these days. Go back to your palace and take rest

satisfying your maw with favourite cuisine.

Sinhamuka, found no alternative other than going to war. However he said, "My dear Lord and brother, It is due to fate that my words of ambrosia appear to be words of poison to you. Go to war I shall, but never expect me to return." Sinhamuka set off to the battle field with huge battalions of army, cavalry, arrays of elephants and chariots.

The light armed soldiers of both parties met in bitter clash. Weapons were hauled; chariots smashed against the opponent's ones. The one hundred sons of Sinhamuka came to the front and quelled the goblin forces with their constant supply of arrows. Seeing this Veerabahu pushed forward brandishing his sword with which he felled the bodies of all of them there. Immersed in filial sorrow Sinhamuka writhed with agony at the sight of his children's death but soon overcoming the emotion and resolving to strike back threw the magic rope (gifted by Maya) at Veerabahu and brothers, instructing it to bind them all together and deposit them in the sea, rendering them senseless. The magic rope acted as instructed. Noticing this Lord Skanda sent an arrow aiming at Sinhamuka which struck him, pierced his heart and rendered him senseless. Simultaneously Lord Skanda sent another arrow instructing it to destroy the magic rope and bring back Veerabahu and his lot. As the divine arrow approached the magic rope, the latter lost its power and withdrew. The Lord's weapon then brought the heroic brother to the presence of the Lord.

Meanwhile Sinhamuka recovering from his swoon, found to his dismay all his army had been completely destroyed. He soon realized it was all the working of Muruga. Holding a thousand bows in his hands the Asur Lord showered torrents of arrows targeting Skanda. At the same time he indiscriminately hurled numerous weapons and rocks intending to destroy the divine brother and the goblins. Skandakumara

sent two thousand arrows of steel and demolished them all. The Lord sent another two thousand shafts seeking to cut down the two thousand arms of the Asura Lord, but as soon as the mutilated arms fell, fresh arms sprouted out. The Asura laughed riotously with exultation and rancour. Skandakumara noticed this strange phenomenon to be the result of Lord Shiva's boon. However he rushed another thousand arrows, meaning to cut off his head and arms entirely, leaving one head and two arms. No sooner did the slit heads and arms fall than new organs were about to grow when Lord Skanda voiced a thunderous yell which made the sprouting limbs to shrink back without appearing again. Realizing the loss of limbs, Sinhamuka stood dejected and dismayed. Crest fallen though, he was undaunted. "Except the use of the Lance, you are perhaps ignorant of all the techniques of warfare" he snapped and hurled a bludgeon at Srikumara. Considering for a while the words of the Asura, Skanda flung a Vajrayudha (a two headed weapon) which flying with vehemence and striking down the bludgeon, approached Sinhamuka, dived into his chest, took his life and returned to Skandas' hands amidst shouts of joy and showers of flowers.

On learning the news of his brother's death, Soorapathma fell like a cliff from a rock, smote his chest and the earth with both his hands and roared like a wounded lion,

பொன்னை நிலந்தன்னைப் புதல்வர்களை மங்கயரைப்
பின்னை யுளபொருளை யெல்லாம் பெறலாகும்
என்னை யுடைய இளையோனே இப்பிறப்பில்
உன்னை இனிப்பெறுவ துண்டோ உரையாயே

"Oh! My dearest brother how can I bear your loss? Any loss on earth can be replaced. Wealth, fame, kingdom, even wife and children can be replaced but never the loss of a brother." He wailed with uncontrolled anguish.

Soorapathma however relieved from agony and coming back

to his senses ordered the attendants on waiting to inform the authorities to make arrangement to muster all the battalions of his army kept in reserve in all his one thousand and eight states.

48. THE DEFEAT AND DEATH OF SOORAPATHMA

Accordingly several squadrons of army assembled in his esplanade. Soorapathma, after performing his prayer and poojah set off to the battle field surrounded by multitudinal columns of troops. As the Asura army approached the warfront, the goblin soldiers heaved tumultuously and roared with contentious avidity. The celestial messengers carried the news of Soorapathma's entry into the battle field with a huge army. Skandakumara smiled gently and set off to meet him like a war Lord. Encouraged by the presence of their Lord the Asura soldiers started an outrageous attack on the pot bellied short legged goblins who in retaliation hurled rocks and smashed them with clubs and bludgeons and drove them back. Infuriated by the retreat of his men Soorapathma sent showers of shafts felling the divine attackers. Unable to bear the onslaught the goblind troops retreated. Taking note of this Lord Skanda advanced, bent his bow stringed it creating a resounding thunderous sound that produced fearful terror in the hearts of all those in the battle field. At that moment the appearance of Lord Skanda, endowed with six faces beaming with effulgence, twelve arms bearing various weapons struck a note of awe and wonder in the mind of Soorapathma who, however concealing his admiration said, "Siva kumara! You have devastated my army; I am not going to allow you to escape just because you are a lisping child. I will exterminate you and the celestials too who were instrumental for this war. Then concealing him self in a massive layer of darkness and mounting on his sorcerous chariot and assuming various forms rained torrents of arrows. Laughing gently at the wistful conjuration of the Asura Lord, Skandakumara flung a divine astra instructing it to demolish the evil machinations of Soorapathma. At the approach of the astra the Asura Lord's black

maneuvers shrank to nothingness leaving him stand a solitary figure. The celestials danced with joy at the pathetic plight of the enemy. Soorapathma suddenly vanished from the scene to appear on another globe of the universe.

Skandakumara persued him to fight but the Asura Lord dodging artfully trotted from one globe to another and persistently followed by Lord Skanda he again came to Mahendrapura. The Asura army on seeing their Lord leapt with joy and swelled with agitation like eonic floods and started a fresh attack on the celestials. Viewings this Siva-kumara cast a glance at the troops with burning eyes and the entire army was burnt to ashes.

Standing alone in distress Soorapathma felt his feeling of disgrace knawing at his body inch by inch. Suddenly a bright streak of thought crossed his mind. He recollected his mother's promise to help him in times of danger and distress. He desired her presence at the moment and she stood there instantly before him. She saw her sons' plight. She reminded him of her warning against his decision to fight with the gods and the futility of his enterprise. "There is no supernatural power that can disable the course of destiny". she said. "However I know your desire is to have all the dead people brought back to life. This is possible if you can bring to this spot the 'Nectar Mount' which is situated beyond the seven seas". Saying this Maya vanished Soorapathma was highly pleased. Mounting on his vehicle of lion, he released his chariot with the instruction to fetch the Nectar Mount without delay. The pilot-less but sorcerous chariot sped on as directed and came back bearing the said Mount. As the breeze of the mount blew over the battle field all those who perished woke up revived as if getting up from a deep slumber. Sinhamuka got up. Banukopan got up. The other sons of Soorapathma, Agnimuka, Vajirabaku and the thousand siblings all got up. They roamed about the field picking weapons they had shed earlier, praising their Lord and blowing their own trum-

pets. Noticing all these Skandakumara sent amidst the asuras a trident like the one used by Siva to devastate everything on the day of destruction. The lethal weapon dived through the troops emitting fire and thunder and slew them completely. It also destroyed the 'Nectar Mount' lying in the chariot.

Soorapathma saw with a mixed feeling of bewilderment and agony, how his army had been obliterated by the 'Sivastra'. Burning with anger and desperation he instructed his chariot to pick Veerabahu and company enbloc and keep them in prison on the crest of the universe.

Accordingly the chariot carried them and kept them stock-still. Lord Muruga immediately sent forth a redeeming weapon to bring back his brethren together with the chariot. As the chariot returned, Veerabahu and his clientale got down praising and lauding their Lord and when the chariot was about to go back to Soorapathma, Lord Kumara stopped it and kept it by his side.

Bereft of his vehicle though, the Asura king determining to fight, assumed by sorcery the form of a large bird with the evil intent of destroying the celestials. Circling round the battle field he would swoop down on them pick them in twos and threes and devour them ravenously. Intermittently he would peck the charioteer and the horses of Skandakumara's vehicle. Observing the exploits of Soorapathma, the Lord considered it unjust on his part to move on his vehicle and attack him while he was mountless. Hence he bade Indira to be his vehicle. Indira then took the form of peacock on whose Skanda got himself seated. This facilitated Soorapathma to show all his animosity towards the celestial king. He struck him with his wings and wounded him with his beak and claws. Indira writhed and wriggled with pain. Once Soorapathma made an attempt to snatch and break the bow of Muruhavel. The Lord immediately swung his sword and cut down the

bird; but Soorapathma escaped death. Using the black art he took several forms. He would now appear as a ghoul, then as a celestial; he would appear like a devastating fire, then as a swelling sea. He then created a dome of darkness, hid himself in it and began consuming the goblins and the sky dwellers. he devas appealed to the Lord for their protection and destruction of the Asura Lord. he Lord then sent forth a thousand arrows to destroy the various forms assumed by the Asura. The arrows multiplying themselves into innumerable weapons wiped out all the sorcerous phantoms and figures assumed by Soorapathma, who now stood helplessly alone. Now the Lord addressed him thus. "In my presence you assumed different forms as evanescent as the lighting that appears and disappears among the clouds and I destroyed all of them. Now I shall show you my real form. So saying the Lord assumed a colossal form that was ultradimensional in nature encompassing all the elements, objects and aspects of the universe. The figure sparkled with the effulgence of myriads of sun-gods. The gods shuddered with fear and amazement. The Lord assuaged their fears signifying protection. Soorapathma stood awe-struck, looking at the amazing figure of endless beauty, grace and charm. At this point Srimuruga instilled a bit of spiritual insight into Soorapathma's mind. Now his mind began to trace back recollecting the words of Sinhamuka. "It is only now I realize the greatness of Kumara. Sinhamuka repeatedly told me that this Kumara is none other than the Supreme Lord whose greatness is yet unrealized by Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma. Only now do I perceive that his beauty is indescribable, greatness unfathomable and grace infinite.

சூழுதல் வேண்டுந் தாள்கள் தொழுதிடல் வேண்டும் அங்கை
தாழுதல் வேண்டுஞ் சென்னி துதித்திடல் வேண்டுந் தாலு
ஆழுதல் வேண்டுந் தீமை அகன்றுநான் இவற்கா ளாகி
வாழுதல் வேண்டும் நெஞ்சம் தடுத்தது மானம் ஒன்றே

My only desire is, my tongue should sing his praise, my hands clasp in submission, my legs go in circumambulation but lo! My ego

prevents me from all these. Now the Lord took away the spiritual vision with which he endowed Soorapathma. His ego got inflated again. He thought Siva kumara was trying to deceive him with illusory images; he would not succumb to such legerdemain. He thought he would first crush the celestials and then deal with Muruga. He pronounced a mantra and created a sphere of darkness. Concealing himself in it he began to attack the sky-dwellers. The suras foresaw the danger and entreated the Lord in heart-rending terms to save them from destruction. Noting the evil design of Soorapathma and listening to the appeal of the Devas, Srikumara flung his Lance with the direction, to slay the Asura Lord. The Lance zooming with double velocity sped along shedding light and fire. The Asura king still proud and sure of the perpetuity of his life and undaunted by the approach of the weapon, moved into the ocean and stood in the form of a massive mango tree, bearing golden flowers, emerald-like semi-ripe fruits and ruby-like full grown fruits. Reaching the Asura the 'Vel' struck hard the trunk and felled the tree into the ocean. Soorapathma fell like a broken colossus, but did not lose his life. He stood up in his real form and drawing his sword, roared loudly expressing his warlike intent.

The Vel pierced his chest, cleaved his body into two, threw them into the ocean and left. It swam amidst the showers of flowers strewn by the Devas, bathed in the Ganges and reached Skandakumara and reposed in his hand. Though smitten and cleft Soorapathma did not die, because of Lord Siva's boon. The two parts of his body assumed the forms of a cock and a peacock and moved towards Siva kumara intending to fight. The Lord glanced at them with grace. Molli-fied by his benign look, they became calm and peaceful. Sivakumara now descending from his peacock that was Indira, got upon the new one that was Soora. Then he ordered the cock to climb upon his chariot and adorn his banner.

The hearts of the celestials overflowed with joy when they saw

Lord Skanda seated on the peacock, then one time tormentor, now transformed into a grateful bird. They assembled in his presence and prayed with deep devotion singing his prowess and expressing their gratitude. "Oh ! Lord of divine Lords, we had been suffering for an inordinately long period of one hundred and eight eons under the tyrannical and oppressive rule of the Asura without anyone to alleviate our affliction. It was your inexpressible benign grace that salvaged us from the eternal persecution and distress. By sending your divine lance you not only eliminated the evil Asura Lord, Soorapathma, you also eradicated the very roots of our sinful life. We have nothing to grumble, nothing to moan". Lord Skanda bestowed his benison on them in full measure.

Lord Subramaniya then bade Veerabahu to redeem without delay the celestials who had been mercilessly kept in prison by Soorapathma. As Veerabahu broke the news of their enemy's downfall and the purpose of his visit the inmates of the prison wept with joy, relating to him their woeful tales of their torturous life. Breaking their fetters and shackles they clasped their hands over head in obeisance to their redeemer Lord Skandakumara, They then with immense joy eagerly followed Veerabahu yearning to see and worship Murugavel.

CANTO V

49. MURUGAVEL WEDS THEIVAYANAI

Having accomplished the task of exterminating Soorapathma and his tribe as directed by Lord Siva, Siva kumara now set on a journey to Thiruchenthoor, one of his famous six abodes, accompanied by Vishnu, Brahma, Indira and Veerabahu and his brethren. He left the borders of the now extinct Mahendrapura, and crossing Lankadeepa reached Thiruchenthoor, where, descending from the peacock entered his temple and sat in repose. Then with the Lord's kind permission the devas conducted a grand poojah with due pomp and ceremony. Early

next morning, Skanda kumara had a shrine erected and installed a Sivalinga therein and performed a pooja in honour of his father.

The next day he set off to his hill abode, Tiruparankiri, on the west of Madura. A temple was soon raised surrounded by miscellaneous accessory buildings like halls, parks and rest houses. Herein Shanmuka made his residence. Now Theivendra approached Skandavel in all modesty and expressed his long cherished desire. "My humble desire is to give my adopted daughter Theivayanai in marriage to you, my Lord, as a mark of gratitude for all the inestimable and profound grace you have shown to us in resuscitating our lives. It is also the consensus of all the devas".

Theivendra was overjoyed when Murugavel expressed his consent. Without a moments' delay he sent a message to Indirani in Mount Mehru to bring Theivayanai to Thirupparankiri, Indiranai was delighted at the prospect of her daughter's wedding. When Indirani and Theivayanai reached Tirupparankiri they found the city in a festive mood. The wedding hall, decorated with garlands, festoons and sparkling array of lights, presented a dazzling sight. Indira together with Brahma and Vishnu approached Skandakumara and beseeched him with supplication to come to the wedding hall. Lord Subramania the bride groom arose and chaperoned by Indira, Brahma and Vishnu reached the hall and sat on the nuptial seat. Meanwhile Siva and Parvathy arrived at the scene to witness their son's wedding. As they entered the hall all the inmates got up and paid their homage.

A special seat appeared there which Lord Siva and Umadevi occupied. In the meantime the celestial Ladies adorned Theivayanai the bride with specially designed nuptial apparel and jewellery. Then, attended by Laksmi and Saraswathi on either side and led by Indira, Theivayanai reached the wedding hall. As the bride came in Umadevi led her to the place where Murugavel was seated and sat her beside

him. Indira felt extatic at the sight of his daughter and Murugavel being seated together. Indira washed the feet of Murugavel as Indirani poured water over them. He decked the feet with flowers and anointed several perfumes on them.

Indira then placed his daughter's hand in the hand of Lord Skanda and poured water saying, "Here by I give unto you my daughter in wedlock". Then Murugavel wore round the bride's neck a necklet (a symbol of wedlock) and a garland. After the matrimonial ceremonies were over Murugavel together with his bride, circumambulated his father and mother and fell at their feet in supplication. Lord Siva and Umadevi lifted them and embraced them and wished "Let the world treat and honour you as they do to us". The celestials and inmates moved in a beeline paying there hoqmage and regard to the divine couple and their parental gods. They then left the hall while Indira thanked them all profusely for their partcipation in the ceremony.

CANTO VI

50. THE RISE AND FALL OF THAKSHA

As requested by Lord Subramania, Indira was crowned king of the new celestial world. Tired of war, and of the sufferings under the cruel rule of Soorapathma, and consequently realizing the instability of material prosperity, he lost interest in royal splendour. He made his son Jayanthakumar the ruler and retired from public life. Jayanthakumar one day requested Jupiter the royal adviser to explain to him what he considered to be the cause of the long and excruciating sufferings of the celestials under the cruel rule of Soorapathma, The Guru explained to him that the ultimate cause of their suffering was their participation in a yaga performed by Thaksha Prajapathy, discarding Siva's paramount lordship. The young prince desired to know the story in detail.

Thaksha was one of the sons of Lord Brahma. He asked his

father how he could become a celebrity like one of the three chief gods or even greater. Brahma explained to him the greatness and glory of penance and added that he could attain whatever he desired through penance. Thaksha started doing severe penance expecting to obtain boons from Lord Siva. Siva appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. He desired that he be given supremacy over Brahma, Vishnu and other chief celestials. All those who pay obeisance to Siva should do so to him. He should be the over lord of all the rulers of the three worlds. His last request was Umadevi should be born as his daughter and be married to Siva. All his requests were granted.

Thaksha started as a benevolent ruler but gradually became arrogant and autocratic. The thought that his daughter would become Siva's consort made him inordinately proud. Siva in the meantime secretly met, Thakshayani Thaksha's daughter and took her away. The infuriated Thaksha was now a sworn enemy of Siva. He performed a yaga to which all the celestials and the rishis were invited. But he purposely discarded Siva, but the religious practice hitherto had been the first offering was given to Lord Siva.

Sage Thatheesi told Thaksha that Lord Siva being the supreme Lord, it was meet and proper that the offerings should be first given to Siva. Thaksha scoffed at the idea of Siva being the supreme God. He posed several questions refuting the idea of Siva's paramountcy. Sage Thatheesi patiently answered all his questions regarding Siva's activities. Thaksha asked, for example, why Siva wore garlands of skeletons; why he wore the crescent moon on his head. He asked the sage about Siva's having a bull as his vehicle, the wearing of holy ash, donning of the tiger's skin, going abegging, wandering in nude form, drinking of poison, having a woman on his left and another in the matted hair (Ganga devi), the appearance of Lord Ganesh etc.

Sage Thatheesi gave cogent explanations for his questions. Still

he was not satisfied and told the sage of his determination to perform the yaga without inviting Lord Siva. The Sage warned him that he was courting doom for himself and destruction for the participants. Then he left the place. Some of the Sage's explanations are as follows.

51.WHY SIVA WENT A BEGGING IN NUDE FORM

Once upon a time the Rishis living in Darukavana believed that they could attain salvation through ascetic life and good deeds without worshipping Siva or any other gods. They led a very austere life performing several yahyas. These Rishis were also proud of their Vedic knowledge and of their capabilities. They were of the firm belief that they could perform any feat and achieve any goal through conducting yahyas. Siva wanted to disencumber them of their illusion regarding their notion of attaining moksha. Calling Vishnu to his side he requested him to take the form of a beautiful woman with an enticing appearance while he himself assumed the form of a beggar extremely handsome and nude in appearance. They then roamed the streets of Darukavana, the enticing damsel walking a little ahead of the alluring beggar. As soon as the Rishis saw the enthralling angel they began to follow her, leaving behind their moral austerity and each of them claiming to be the most suitable suitor, begged her in the most entreating terms to satiate his desire. Thus the false prestige and austerity of the rishies were undermined by the leela of Lord Siva.

52. WHY LORD SIVA WORE THE CRESCENT MOON

Thaksha Prajabathy at one time, before Umadevy became his daughter, had twenty seven daughters they being the constellation maidens ranging from Aswini to Revathy, Thaksha gave all of them in marriage to Chandradeva (Moon god) securing from him the pledge that he would love all of them equally well, without showing any partiality.

However in course of time Chandradeva appeared to be wholly devoted to Rohini while treating others indifferently unmindful of their care. They all felt hurt of their husband's treatment and complained of the same to their father. Thaksha was highly enraged and cursed the moon-god swearing he would very soon lose all his 16 phases one by one. Consequent on the curse the moon-god started losing the phases and when he had only three phases left, he prayed and appealed to Lord Siva for help. Lord Siva taking pity on him put the third phased moon on his matted hair after which the waning stopped. Lord Siva decreed that hence forth the moon god would wane and wax alternately for fifteen days.

53. THE AVATAR OF LORD VINAYAKA

In order to make Thaksha knowledgeable regarding the noble deeds of Lord Siva, sage Thathisi untiringly went on answering his questions. One of the questions was about the appearance of Lord Vinayaka.

Once upon a time the king of the Asuras, who got defeated by the Lord of the Devas, told his Guru of his ignominious defeat and sought his advice to reactivate his clan. Sukkirachairar suggested to him to send a beautiful maiden to disturb the penance of sage Magatha son of sage. Vasista, and allure him into her lustful net and thereby beget a son who would prove valiant and strong to rebuild the down-trodden Asura clan. As suggested by his guru the Asura king sent a glamorous damsel to entice sage Magatha who at the very sight of the girl was enamoured of her beauty and giving up his penance beseeched her to satisfy his desire. The young woman willingly acceded and as a result of their union was born the young valorous lad who came to be known as Kayamukasura, because of his elephant face.

The young lad on the advice of Guru Sukkirachariar performed great penance invoking the appearance and favour of Lord Siva. Lord

Siva appeared before him and asked him what he wanted. The Asura prayed to him in obeisance and requested that he be given such a high position that even Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu should pay allegiance to him. Further he should be so invincible that no weapon could fatally harm him and no being celestial or terrestrial, whether divine, human or animal could endanger his life and his supremacy should prevail over the kingdoms in the universe. As desired Lord Siva granted all his wishes. Considering himself the unrivalled and undisputed ruler of all the territories and the inhabitants under his suzerainty, he became ruthless and despotic. He constantly struck terror in the hearts of the celestials with his evil machinations often blaming them of some wrong doing and subjecting them to inhuman torture and, untold misery. He married several women from among the celestial terrestrial and even Nagaloka women and yet like an insatiate cormorant coveted the wives of his subordinates. His evil ways were so excruciating and intolerable that the celestials went to Mount Kailas and complained to Lord, Siva of the atrocities of the Asura Lord and begged him to put an end to the cruelty of the despicable despot.

Listening to the heart-rending complaints of the celestials, and determined to save them from the atrocities of the Asura emperor, Lord Siva issued forth a child endowing him with all his (Siva's) aspects. The child came to be known as Vinayaka who appeared with the Head of an elephant and five arms including the proboscis. On the instruction of his father, he set out accompanied by numerous goblins, to the battle field. The messengers of Kayamukasura informed him of Vinayakar's expedition Armed with various weapons and surrounded by several battalions of soldiers, the Asura leader arrived at the war front where fight began between the Asura soldiers and the goblins. Initially the Asura army was beaten back. But when Kayamuka approached raining arrows, the goblins suffered defeat unable to stand his attack. Seeing the retreat of his soldiers Lord Ganesh approached the Asura Lord and said "Kayamuka. You seem to have forgotten the fact that you

should make use of the boons granted by Lord Siva righteously and altruistically. If you want to prolong your prosperous life you should release the celestials from prison and give up your atrocities; otherwise you stand to lose your life; what do you propose to do!”

These words only enraged the Asura who then bent his bow and rained arrows aiming them at Lord Ganesh. But the Lord was least affected by them. Vinayaka then sent an axe shaped weapon which destroyed the bow and the quiver of arrows of the Asura. Kayamuka then threw a bludgeon at the Lord. Ganesha destroyed it with a bolt and struck a blow at the Asura's chest with the same weapon. Then realizing the fact that the Asura could not be killed by any weapon, Vinayaka broke one of his tusks and flung it at the Asura. The tusk struck him like a thunder bolt and rent his body into pieces. The Asura fell dead but there emerged out of his fallen body a rodent which appeared fearful and ferocious and approached Lord Ganesh intending to continue the fight. But at the Lord's benign look it became submissive and consequently it remained his vehicle for ever.

The sky dwellers whose sorrows were got rid of and rights redeemed henceforth adopted the practice of worshipping the Lord by knocking the forehead with their fists and stooping down holding the ears with their hands.

54. THE DESTRUCTION OF PRAJAPATHY'S YAGA

Sage Thathesi narrated several episodes of Lord Siva's gracious deeds to illustrate his prowess while at the same time answering Daksha's questions, but to no avail. He was still adamant in his decision. Without inviting Lord Siva to partake of the offering; he continued to perform the Yaga inviting all the celestials to participate in it. A sumptuous feast was held and several gifts were liberally awarded to the invitees. It was a grand occasion of festivity and entertainment.

Saint Narada broke the news of the Yaga celebration to Lord Siva and Umadevy. Desirous of witnessing the celebration Lady Uma obtaining her Lords permission eagerly arrived at the site of the celebration, anticipating a grand welcome. But contrary to her expectation Daksha spoke ill of Siva in abusive terms and ordered her to quit the place. She cursed him with evil forebodings, soon returned to Kailas and beseeched her Lord to destroy Daksha's Yaga. Granting her wish Lord Siva out of his third eye created Veerapathira who appeared with a thousand heads and two thousand hands and armed with several weapons; and out of Umadevi's wrath emerged Pathrakali. Both of them paid their obeisance and awaited Siva's instructions regarding their mission. "Approach Daksha Prajapathy ask for the consecrated offering due to be awarded to me as the supreme Lord. If he awards it bring the same. If he doesn't decapitate him and destroy the Yaga inflicting punishment on the participants. "We shall appear on the scene at the end" With these words Lord Siva permitted Veerapathira to depart.

Arriving at Daksha's place and introducing himself as Lord Siva's son, Veerapathira requested Prajapathy to make the rightful offering to Siva. Instead of acceding to the request Daksha spoke disparagingly of Siva. Veerapathira stood outrageous and casting a burning look at Brahma and Vishnu who were standing nearby, He struck hard at Vishnu with a bludgeon and as a result he fell unconscious. He struck, Bramah's four heads with his knuckle, Chandradeva with his foot, knocked off Sooriadeva's teeth, cut off Yama's head and slashed the noses of the celestial ladies and finally Daksha- prajapathy was beheaded. Now, Vishnu regaining consciousness watched the happenings and attempted to fight with Veerapathira. He mounted on his vehicle garuda and blew his conch indicating his intention to fight. By Siva's grace there came a chariot for Veerapathira. Taking time by the forelock Brahma volunteered to be the charioteer. In the ensuing fight, Veerapathira sent arrows of fire that struck down the weapons flung by Vishnu and also

clipped the wings of Garuda Vishnu then hurled his chakra at Veerapathira. Catching it Veerapathira put it into his mouth and swallowed it. Vishnu realized his mistake, tendered his apology and made obeisance to Veerapathira. At that moment Lord Siva appeared with Umadevi at the scene and signalled to Veerapathira to calm down. At the sight of the Lord all the celestials including Vishnu and Brahma rushed to him, fell at his feet and craved pardon for their participation in the Yaga. Umadevi begged her Lord to give life to those who were dead. Lord Siva looked at Veerapathira signalling him to show mercy on those who were rendered lifeless Veerapathira acted accordingly and all those who were recalled to life paid their homage to Siva and Uma and prayed for absolution. On Brahma's humble appeal Daksha too was granted life. Since he had lost his head in the battle Veerapathira brought a goat's head and fixed it to Daksha's body.

In consequence of the devastation of the Yaga and following the humiliation and punishment, Daksha became docile and disciplined and sought Brahma's guidance and advice regarding his future activities. Brahma told him that it is arrogance that brings down-fall in ones career. In the course of his talk he referred to the incident where in he and Lord Vishnu in consequence of their foolish disdainfulness claiming each for himself superiority and mastery over the entire universe, fought for eons and how they were eventually made to realize the supremacy of Lord Siva. Thaksha was anxious to know the story in detail and Brahma conceded.

55. BRAHMA AND VISHNU IN SEARCH OF THE TOP AND BOTTOM OF THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

“It is with Siva's grace and direction I have been carrying on the task of creation. Forgetting this fact I began to think, out of pride and ignorance, that I have been instrumental for the creation of the universe including the fauna and flora, that it was I who appointed Indira

and other celestial chiefs in their respective jobs, that when I go to sleep all the world would cease to exist and when I wake they would come back to life and as a result of several other similar imaginary reasons, I concluded that I am the supreme Lord of the whole gamut of all life and creations. As a result of this conceit, I approached Vishnu who was sleeping on the snake couch in the midst of the ocean of milk, challenged his supremacy, declared my overlordship and demanded his allegiance. Vishnu asserted that he being the Protector of all the world is the real paramount head. A heated argument arose between the two regarding the over lordship and the argument turned into a fight which grew vehement and destructive lasting for several eons. As a result of our fight needless to say that all the lives on both celestial and terrestrial spheres were affected badly, But still we went on fighting caring little for the welfare of the lives. Suddenly to our utter amazement, a pillar of blazing flames that reached the sky appeared between us. As we watched the strange luminous phenomena a voice was heard in the sky, saying "who ever discovers the top or bottom of this pillar of light is really the foremost Supreme, Being" When we heard these words we stopped fighting. Vishnu decided to find out the bottom and assuming the form of a boar began boring the earth to reach the base of the blaze, while I took the form of a swan intending to find out the top. We engaged ourselves in the search for ages, but in vain. Tired and exhausted of our long fruitless endeavour, we realized our limitation and naturally shorn of our pride, came back to earth and stood feeble and humble near the pillar of light, with the realization that there is a Supreme Lord above us and that Lord is Siva. We together established a Sivalinga and prayed with submission, sacrificing at the altar our arrogance and conceit. At that time Siva appeared amidst the blaze, pardoned our faults, blessed us and disappeared. The blaze then contracted itself into a mountain which stands to this day and is known as Annamalai. The night on which the blaze appeared is Sivarathri.

The story made a deep impression in the mind of Daksha and

made him an earnest devotee. Pleased with his offerings of prayer Lord Siva made him a chief among the goblins.

56. SKANDA WEDS VALLIAMMA

As a child Skandakumara used to play on several hills. One of them is known as 'Vallimalai'. The place is so called because the inhabitants of the place usually grow a kind of yam called "Valli". In that place was a tract where in dwelt some huntsmen. Their chieftain was known by the name of Nampi. He had male issues but no female child. He yearned for one and for which he constantly prayed and eventually his prayer was granted. One day while Nambirasan and some of his tribesmen were roaming in the millet coppice, they heard a feeble cry. As they approached the spot the chieftain saw a small baby with shimmering lustre lying in a pit. He took the infant in his hands gazed with wonder at its grace and beauty, carried it home and gave it in the hands of his wife. He named the child as Valli.

As Valli grew up her Loveliness and homeliness also increased. When she came of age, she was sent to the millet grove to protect it from being destroyed by the birds and animals. Her duty was to stand on a scaffold and scare the birds and animals that flocked to the grove. When they approached she would hurl stones at them with a sling intermittently singing in her melodious voice. Birds like the parrot the mynah and The dove often roamed about the place hovering over the thicket desirous of listening to and imitating the voice of the damsel on the scaffold.

In the meantime Lord Skanda Kumara left mount Kailas and came to Thanikasalam. While at Tanikai. He was accosted by sage Naratha who told him of the story of Valliama in detail referring to the past history of her being the younger daughter of Lord Vishnu, and one of her penance she performed to attain Lord Skanda. Listening to the

sage's narration which was interspersed with the description of the "Wood Land Virgin", Lord Skanda decided to make a trip to Valliamma with a view to finding her feelings and her romantic disposition.

He disguised himself as a hunter wearing anklets his waist cloth girded up and a bow in hand with arrows attached. He went to Vallimalai and reached the spot and saw Valli, watching the millet grove. Captivated by her bewitching look he approached the dais, began addressing her thus, "Fair Angel I am allured the moment I saw you.

மொழியொன்று புகலா யாயின் முறுவலும் புரியா யாயின்
விழியொன்று நோக்கா யாயின் விரகமிக் குழல்வேன் உய்யும்
வழியொன்று காட்டா யாயின் மனமுஞ் சற் றுருகா யாயின்
பழியொன்று நிற்பாற் சூழும் பராமுகந் தவிர்தி என்றான்

May it please you to tell me your name? If you desire it not, tell me the name of your place; if unwilling for that too tell me the way that leads to your place". Finding the lass tight-lipped he again began, "Oh Mistress of my passion! Won't you move your lips? Won't you gladden me with a smile? Will you not cast a tender glance?"

"If you deny me your love the sin of tormenting me with your beauty will settle on you. Therefore discard not my love". As he was thus engaged in expressing his amorous feelings Valli's father Nambirajan came that way accompanied by several huntsmen and sounding the bugle, scaring the wild faunas such as the boar, the bear and the elephant. As soon as the young lover saw the group, he changed himself into a tall tree and stood there to the utter surprise of the maiden. The huntsmen were thunderstruck at the sight of the newly sprung tree. Some of the huntsmen expressed the view that the sudden appearance of the tree was portentous of some disaster. Most of them wanted the tree cut down without delay. The chieftain stopped their talk and asked his daughter whether she had any idea about the mysterious appear-

ance of the tree. The maiden trembled within and replied that it was a puzzle to her and she had fears about its emergence. The chieftain consoled her saying that she need not be alarmed by its presence "Let the tree with the golden flowers remain a silent companion to you" he said and giving her the delicacies, he had brought from home, he wished goodbye and left. As soon as the huntsmen left Lord Skanda casting off his arboreal form appeared in human form again. Approaching Valli, he said, "Oh Gazelle-eyed lass. Do you imagine I can live separated from you? Is it possible for the body to exist without the soul? Sweet mistress, does it befit an angel like you to do this menial job of watching the millet copse? If you come with me I will enshrine you as the queen of the celestial world wherein the heavenly maids will be at your command eager to execute your orders." The maiden felt bashful and embarrassed as she listened to his words. Summoning her courage she said "I belong to a low class of humble folk whereas you hail from a royal lineage. Does it behove a noble person of your calibre to speak such amorous words to a lowly girl like me. I am afraid your intention is unbecoming."

At that moment the sound of drums and bugle blowing were heard. The maiden stood struck with fear because she knew well those sounds signified the coming of her father. "My relatives are fierce and dreadful and if they happen to see us in this delicate unsavoury situation that will be the end of our lives. Flee hence without delay", she implored. The cool and undisturbed lover immediately changed himself into a saffron robed Sannyasi with matted hair and bearing a water-pot on one-hand and a walking stick on the other. Approaching the hunter-Lord he blessed him saying, "May God's benisons go with you; let victory wealth and valour be always your hand maids". Pleased to hear these words the chieftain said Swamiji; I am really fortunate to have your darshan. What made you come to this place at your infirm age? Tell me what your desire". "My desire is to overcome this old age and get rid of my illusion. This I learn, I can achieve by bathing in the sacred

Kanyakumari waterfall.” “Well, Swami you can enjoy the bath in the lake everyday and keep protective company to my daughter” Then giving the edibles he had brought from home to his daughter he bade good bye and departed.

The moment the chieftain left, the old sage wailed, “Merciful God, I am terribly hungry what shall I do?” The maiden took pity on him and gave him some millet dough mixed with honey. He ate it with relish but complained of thirst. In order to slake his thirst she took him to a spring several hills beyond. Having appeased his draught he said, my “lovely lass. Grateful to you I am indeed for having relieved my hunger and thirst. But one more thing remains to be appeased; that is my irrepressible passion for you; if you could only satisfy my desire then I have nothing more to grumble.

Looking daggers, she cut in “you grey-haired decrepit old sage; does it suit your age and appearance to speak such lascivious words to a helpless girl of low birth; you sling disrepute and slur on our tribe by your indecorous behaviour. I cannot wait any more to listen to your prattle. I am leaving for the grove. Birds and animals might destroy the corn. Come if you wish leisurely.” So saying she proceeded towards the millet thicket. As he watched her going the young lover sighed with disappointment and thought of a plan. He made a mental request to his brother Lord Vinayaka to help him to bring her round. Vinayaka appeared like a wild elephant in front of Valli trumpeting aloud like the roaring sea. At the sight of the elephant Valli shivered with fear. Running back to the old sage, she cried, “Save me, kind Sire, from this wild animal I shall do as you please” and clung herself behind his back. Murugavel was pleased at her surrender. He thanked Vinayaga for his timely help and requested him to leave, Taking her to a secluded spot, Kumaravel clasped her form with gentleness ordained her with grace and then revealed his natural form.

முந்நான்கு தோளும் முகங்களோர் மூவிரண்டும்
கொன்னார்வை வேலுங் குலிசமுமே னைப்படையும்
பொன்னார் மணிமயிலு மாகப் புனக்குறவர்
மின்னாள் கண்காண வெளிநின் றனன்விறலோன்

He stood before her displaying his tall and majestic figure with six faces twelve arms and the resplendent peacock standing nearby. As Valli glimpsed the effulgent form she stood motionless with amazement and then shook with fear. She alternately prayed and praised the Lord, and then with slight tremor she spoke "My Lord why did you delay so long to reveal yourself to me. Had you shown your self at the very start of our meeting I would have enjoyed more of your grace. Forgive me for all my wrongs and accept me as your slave." The Lord embraced her with grace and told her to return to the millet coppice and that he would follow her soon. Accordingly she made her obeisance and left.

The millet had grown ripe and was ready for harvest. The chieftain's men told Valli that since they were about to reap the corn her services were no more needed and she could return home. Valli was highly worried; her returning home meant there was little chance of meeting her lover. Addressing the peacock, the pigeon and the parrot she said "I am going home; convey this message to my lover, Lord Muruga." Then she left the place with a heavy heart. She remained at home confined to it. The hill folk harvested the crop and took it home. Meanwhile Murugavel the lover, as promised earlier went to the coppice to find the place deserted. Valli was not to be seen though he searched high and low, over the whole mountainous track, but to no avail. Disappointed and grieved, he questioned the clouds, the peacock, the mynah, the elephant, the gazelle and even the thickets and the hills whether they knew the whereabouts of his Lover, He spent the whole day wandering through the millet fields, in search of the maiden and when night fell he went into the hamlet of the hill -men approached

the home of the chieftain and stayed outside the gateway. Valli perceiving his presence came out and said, "My Lord you are not aware of the dangers of this region, and the more dangerous disposition of its inhabitants. How sinful and venal I am to have tempted you to come overlooking the risks of this track?"

Mean-while Valli's confidante came up and addressed the lover thus "This area, replete with wild life, is full of danger and the inhabitants are an outrageous and arrogant lot. If they happen to see you the consequence will be disastrous. Therefore I earnestly entreat you to take this lady away with you to your place and keep her under your felicitous custody". The young Lord thanked the maid for her advice and expressed his gratitude for her cooperation and timely help. Then transcending the vigilance of the home guards and the alertness of the watchdogs he took the maiden with him to a love inducing safe and lonely spot.

Early in the morning the chieftain's wife woke up as usual but was started to find the daughter missing. She searched all over the place and enquired the maid. "We went to sleep yester night but I am not aware of her movements after that" she said.

The news of her disappearance spread soon and all the hill folk assembled at the chieftain's place. They sounded the bugle and armed with swords spear and lance ran in all directions. They searched the thickets; they inspected the dense woodlands; looked for foot prints and finally reached the park where the couple was resting.

Observing their approach Valli trembled with fear. She looked at her Lord with distress. "What shall we do now?" she moaned "Do not lose heart my love", replied Murugavel, "the lance that destroyed the mountain and took the life of Soorapathma is here with me. If your relatives dare to fight we will undo them; wait and see."

Nambirajan and his men roared like the swelling sea and encircled Murugavel. They bent their bows and rained arrows; they hurled various weapons which fell on the Lord like flowers. Watching the various weapons aimed at Skanda, Valli trembled with fear and requested the Lord to send the lance and destroy the hill folk, unmindful of the fact that they were her kinsmen. "If the lion is passive then even the boar, the elk and the bear would be tempted to fight against it. Therefore delay no more my Lord in your offensive" Before he could reply her a cock that stood beside him flapped his wings and crowed aloud. As soon as the triumphant cry of the cock was heard the chieftain and his men fell dead. However Valli felt afflicted as she saw her kith and kin lying dead. Murugavel watching her sad face told her to raise the dead to life. The maiden praying to the Lord said "Let the dead come to life". At once Nambirajan and his followers regained their life, got up opening their eyes as if waking from their sleep.

Lord Skanda then stood before the hill folk in his natural form revealing six graceful lotus like faces twelve arms bearing different weapons and Kadamba garland adorning his chest. As soon as they saw this amazing divine form they fell prostrate at his feet, got up, and sang songs of praise and devotion and then Nambirajan addressed the Lord thus "Oh Ever youthful Muruga the Lord of the hills and our God of protection! You stole away Valli, the apple of our eye trespassing the moral norm of our tribe and gave us irreparable calumny. Let by gone be bygones. To make amends for the past, be gracious to return to our place with our most beloved daughter and have your union regularized by a formal marriage and then you can take her at your will to your place".

Murugavel acceded to the request of the hill chieftain. He at once took Vallinayaki back to Nambirajan's residence accompanied by Naratha rishi who met them on the way. Valli and Seyon were seated on a nuptial pedestal. The bride groom cast a graceful look at the bride.

Now Valli's rustic appearance vanished and her face shimmered with divine resplendence. At the auspicious hour Nambirajan took the right hand of the bride and putting it into the hand of the bridegroom poured water beside signifying the giving away of his daughter into the safe custody of the bride groom.

At the hour of the marriage ceremony Lord Siva with Lady Uma surrounded by Vishnu, Brahma and Indira and other celestials appeared in the sky and blessed the couple with benign graceful look. Lord Muruga stood up and made obeisance. The celestials showered flowers and paid their homage to Murugavel and his consort.

Then Murugavel got up from his seat and informing Nambirajan of his proposal to have a sojourn along with Valli at Thanikasalam, proceeded to that mountain forth with. On arrival at Thanikasalam Valli requested her Lord to narrate to her the importance and greatness of the Mount.

'My fair beloved', he began in response "This Mountain is otherwise called Seruthani. It is to this Mountain I came to rest after the war with Soorapathma and my anger subsided here Lord Siva has made Mount Kailas his abode in preference to other great mountains like Manthara and Mahameru. Similarly I prefer this mountain to other beautiful mountains on earth. Those who worship this mountain will be free from sin; they will attain excellence of spirit. Those who come to his mount bathe in the lake in front of it and worship me with devotion, will attain my feet."

One day Murugavel and Vallinayaki set off to Skandakiri near Mount Kailas. Descending from the air vehicle they reached the golden temple and entered the shrine where Theivanayaki, the daughter of Indira dwelt. As soon as Valli saw Theivanayaki she fell at the latter's feet. Soon Theivanayaki picked up Vallinayaki and embracing her said,

“I have been living in solitude here and your coming will provide me pleasant companionship” and Valli replied, “In our previous birth as daughters of Vishnu I had been your younger sister. In our present life too, I have been fortunate to be your younger one”. Just as lord Vishnu is found to be seated with Srithevy and Boothevy on either side, so Lord Skanda rests majestically on the golden pedestal with Theivanayaki on the left and Vallinayaki on the right.

The consorts Theivayanai and Vallinayaki said to represent energy of action and energy of Volition respectively sat on either side of Lord Skanda partaking of his grace insuperably linked in thought, sentiment and love and bestowing beatitude and bliss on all beings of the world.

பாராகியேனைப் பொருளாகி உயிர்ப்பன்மையாகி
பேரா வுயிர்கட்குயிராய்ப் பிறவற்றுமாகி
நேராகித் தோன்றலிலதாகி நின்றான் கழற்கே
ஆராத காதலொடு போற்றி யடைதுமன்றே.

Let us attain by ardent and inexhaustible love and prayer the anklet girt feet of him (Siva) who manifests himself in the universe and in the things. (living and non-living) therein, who dwells in all souls as the inner soul, who is Absolute and who is without beginning or end.

