

[He Heard My Prayers](#)

Category : [October/November/December 2007](#)

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KERALA

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Elephant-faced Lord invites family back into Hinduism through a miraculous act of Grace

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George Kurien lives in a tiled house typical of the Syrian Orthodox Christian community, but there is no mistaking the ambiance. Passers-by are surprised by the fragrance of burning incense and the intermittent ringing of a brass bell like those used by Hindu priests. Arriving at 8:30 in the morning, I encountered a group of men, women and children coming from the house. Each held sandal paste, red sindoor powder and flowers wrapped in a banana leaf--all signs they had just attended puja at a Hindu temple. George's house has become an abode of Lord Ganesha.

For George, wife Alice, son Sanjay and daughter Meetu Mariam, there is only one God and that is "Ganapati Bhagavan, " Lord Ganesha. Alice told me that previously she prayed to Parumala Bava, a revered 19th century bishop of Kerala's Syrian Orthodox Church. "But now, " she said, "only Ganapati Bhagavan is on my tongue."

This transformation took place in October, 2003. George was facing a serious financial crisis. Looking for ways to increase his income, he became aware that soil had become a hot commodity: landowners were buying it to fill in their low-lying paddy fields and marshlands for the much more profitable residential and commercial construction. George realized that he could sell the soil from the small hill behind his house and once the hill was gone, he could sell the leveled land for residential construction. The decision was made.

While loading the earth into the lorry, the driver found a small panchaloka (five-metal) icon of Lord Ganesha. He handed it over to George, who decided keep it in his drawing room as an antique. "But, " he recounted, "ever since I did that I started hearing in my dreams at night, 'Don't keep it the way you are doing now. Either hand it over to a temple or build a temple and consecrate the Deity there and worship. You will become prosperous.' During the days when the Deity was kept unattended, my work was constantly interrupted and my financial crisis deepened. At the same time, my children's education was disrupted.

"I called two of my Hindu friends and we visited an eminent tantr--an expert on the Agamic rites governing Deity worship. He advised me to create a sanctified place for the Deity in my home. I entrusted Ganesha to a nearby temple while we built the sanctum." The tantr identified the room on the northern end of the house as ideal. The sanctum was built promptly and the consecration ceremonies were held on November 17, 2004.

The temple has prospered ever since. At first, puja was conducted only once a month, but now the income is sufficient to employ a priest who lives on the temple premises and performs the ritual worship twice a day. Once a month annadanam, a mass free feeding, is sponsored by the devotees.

George wept freely as he explained this momentous turning point in his family's life. "I surrendered before Him. He heard my prayers and helped my entire family. There have not been any financial constraints since. Everything goes on smoothly and joyously. Our daughter was accepted into a nursing course despite a lack of funds on our part. My son, who was a profligate during his dental mechanic course, totally changed and passed his dentistry exams with flying marks. He has been offered a position as a dental technician by the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences. He has become so dedicated to Ganapati that he has undergone training for priesthood and is now assisting the head priest. A Christian friend was saved by our Ganapati Bhagavan. Such are the lively testimonies to the miracles of our Lord Ganesha!"

George faced serious opposition and threats from the Church. "Having once been so actively involved in the Church, our former parish became furious with us, and we have been ostracized by the Church and even by our families, " George recounts. Alice then boldly interjected, "But, since our Ganapati Bhagavan is with us, we had no fear at all!"

And so the formerly Christian house of George Kurien in Mulanthuruthy has become a place of worship for devotees of "Lakshmi Ganapati " (called thus for having helped people solve their financial problems); and George, who once attended a Syrian Orthodox seminary, has become the custodian of a Ganesha temple.

George's family descendants of a Nair family which converted to Christianity a century ago now seek acceptance by the local, caste-oriented Hindu community. They are pleading to be formally accepted back into the Sanatana Dharma.