

HINDUISM TODAY®

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The Life and Songs of Saint Tayumanavar

SURESH MUTHUKULAM

NEWSCOM/IMAGEPHOTOS/DADFOTOS



(Cover) While Saint Tayumanavar meditates, Lord Siva draws close, silently inspiring the creation of a new sacred song;
(above) Bengaluru's annual peanut festival continues to be a major event in South India's high-tech city

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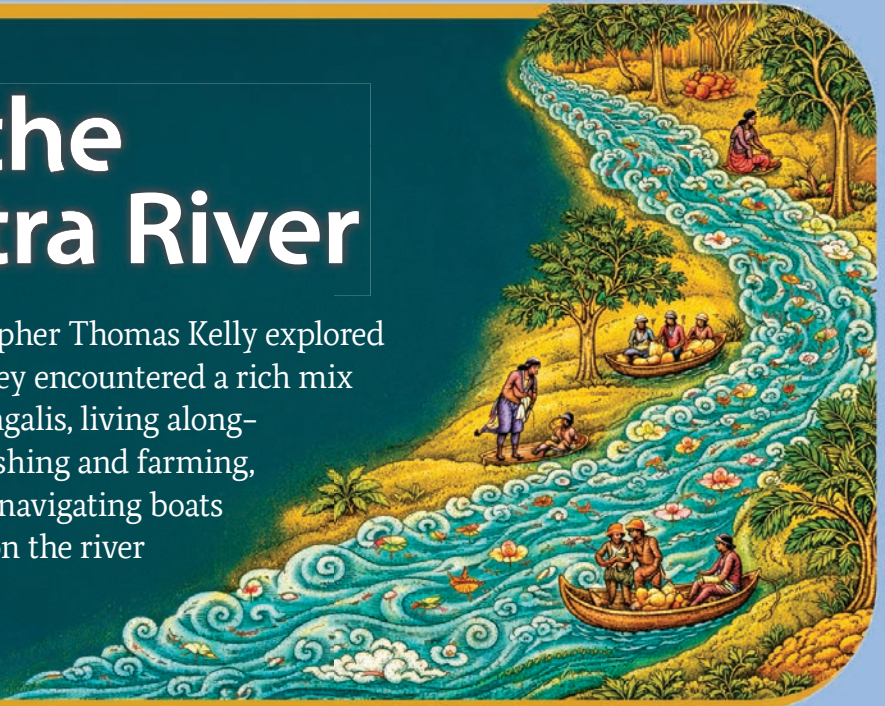


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Following the Brahmaputra River

As reporter Ellen Coon and photographer Thomas Kelly explored the vast Brahmaputra River basin, they encountered a rich mix of people including Tibetans and Bengalis, living along-side two dozen tribes. People were fishing and farming, weaving cloth and making clay pots, navigating boats small and large, their lives centered on the river they share. ... **Page 18**





GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

At 33 feet, It Is the World's Tallest Monolithic Sivalingam

IN A MONUMENTAL FEAT OF artistry, engineering and devotion, an astounding 33 feet tall, 210-ton Sivalingam was carved from a single piece of granite in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu. It was transported to East Champaran in Bihar State in November 2025 and placed on 17 January, 2026, according to *The Indian Express*.

As the sun rose over the sprawling grounds of the Virat Ramayan Mandir in Motihari, workers and engineers prepared for a long-awaited moment. Two cranes, each with a capacity of 750 tons, carefully lifted the colossal black-granite monolith and inched it towards a nearby pedestal. Guided by engineers, the monolithic structure was lowered inch by inch onto a base nearly twice its height.

The Sahasralingam, described as the world's largest Sivalingam, was placed amid Vedic chants at the under-construction temple complex in Kathwalia village on the auspicious day of Magh Krishna Chaturdashi. The monolith was carved over nearly a decade in Pattikadu village near Mahabalipuram by artisans overseen by Vinayak Venkatraman and his mother, Hemlata Devi. The Sivalingam bearing 1,008 smaller lingams on its surface reportedly cost around US\$330,000 to produce, and has been designed for structural stability over centuries.

At the base of the platform, a large billboard prominently displayed a photograph of the project's visionary, the late Acharya Kishor Kunal—an IPS officer and former chairman of the Bihar



Massive: Installation of 33-foot Siva Lingam at the Virat Ramayan Mandir in East Champaran district's Motihari

State Religious Trust Board—alongside a detailed image of the vast temple complex still under construction, offering visitors a glimpse into the scale, purpose and spiritual vision of the ambitious project.

For many devotees, the

moment was deeply personal, including Ramesh Verma, who travelled from Patna with his family. "I never thought I'd witness something like this in my lifetime. The Shivling being lifted, the chanting, it all feels spiritual beyond words," he said.



UNITED KINGDOM

Royal Couple Honors 30 Years of Neasden Temple

DISPLAYING CULTURAL HARMONY, Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla paid a royal visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London on October 29, 2025 according to *Republic*. The temple, commonly known as the Neasden Temple, was celebrating its 30th anniversary and the monarchs' presence added luster to the festivities. The event was a historic moment in the history of Europe's first traditional Hindu stone temple.

As the King and Queen arrived, they were warmly welcomed by members of the community, who were delighted by their presence. The visit was the King's fourth visit to the temple, showing his enduring interest in the Hindu community and its traditions. His previous visits in 1996, 2001 and 2009, when he was the Prince of Wales, had already established a strong connection with the temple.

In his welcome address, Sadhu

Yogvivekdas praised the temple as 'the home of God' and acknowledged its integral role in the UK's religious and cultural scene. He outlined the values upheld by the temple's spiritual leader, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, and noted the alignment with the King's own values of humility, sincerity and integrity.

During their visit, the King and Queen participated in the ceremonial pouring of water over a statue of the Deity, a moment that demonstrated the monarchs' respect for the Hindu tradition. The temple management expressed their gratitude, taking to their X account to thank the royal couple. "A heartfelt thank you to Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla for their



visit to Neasden Temple to commemorate its 30th anniversary. Your presence made this celebration joyous and memorable for the entire community."

The Neasden Temple, established in August 1995, has been a beacon of devotion, learning and service, embodying the values of compassion, respect and harmony. The temple's marble

Monarchs: King Charles III and Queen Camilla visiting Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

and limestone carvings, crafted by skilled Indian artisans, were shipped to the UK and meticulously assembled, standing as an example of dedication and craftsmanship.



Devotional bath: A pilgrim walks beneath the 108 ice-cold water spouts at Muktinath Temple—recent guidelines now forbid the use of raincoats and umbrellas during the ritual

NEPAL

Muktinath Springs Ban on Umbrellas and Plastics

THE 108 SPRINGS AT MUKTINATH Temple are a series of stone water spouts set into a wall behind the temple, beneath which pilgrims slowly walk, allowing the icy water to cascade over the head and body as a ritual act of purification. Ice-cold water, fed by mountain springs and glacial sources, flows continuously from each spout.

Recently—after videos went viral showing devotees donning raincoats and using umbrellas while performing the ritual—temple authorities imposed a ban on such protective gear.

Restrictions were also imposed on the use of the two nearby sacred ponds, Jala Kund, and Agni Kund—where pilgrims traditionally dip or splash water

on themselves for blessings. The ban here prohibits the use of swimming attire and diving in the ponds, according to *The Rising Nepal*.

Located in Mustang, Muktinath is an important pilgrimage site for Hindus and Buddhists. Annually, more than 800,000 pilgrims visit the temple.

Pramesh Gurung, Treasurer of the Muktinath Development Committee, said that devotees entering the temple area are being informed of the rules and encouraged to follow religious traditions. He added that infrastructure expansion and new facilities have been added to make visits easier for devotees and tourists.

MALAYSIA

Mass Devotion at Penang Temple Consecration

AFTER 12 YEARS, THE ARULMIGU SREE GANESHA TEMPLE ALONG Waterfall Road, Penang, came alive with colors and prayers as more than 5,000 devotees gathered to witness its long-awaited *maha kumbhabhishekam* (consecration ceremony) in December 2025, according to *The Star*.

The final day of the sacred ritual, which marked the purification and formal re-energizing of a temple and its Deities, came after five days of *homas* (fire rituals) and ceremonies on the temple grounds. Families with young children, youths and elderly devotees leaning on canes filled every corner of the temple compound to fulfill their vows after years of waiting. K. Kumarathiraviam, chairman of the Waterfall Shree Balathandayuthapani Devasthanam, said it was a defining moment for the temple's identity.

Hindu devotees thronged the temple during the consecration ceremony following the completion of a major restoration. From early morning, thousands of devotees, young and old, streamed in carrying puja trays and garlands as they made their way to the sanctum. Inside the hall of the temple, priests performed fire rituals and chanted mantras. Outside, priests climbed scaffolding around the gopuram and sprinkled sacred water over the crowd during the ceremony.



Majestic view: A priest with a tray of prayer offerings watches the crowd below



SOUTH AFRICA

Annapoorna Devi Temple Consecrated in Durban

IN DECEMBER, 2025, DIVINE HISTORY was made in Durban, South Africa, as the Chinmaya Mission inaugurated the world's first dedicated Annapoorna Devi Temple outside the Indian sub-continent. The event took place under the visionary leadership of Swami Abhedananda Saraswati, spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission South Africa, according to a press release by Chinmaya Mission South Africa.

The Shri Chinmaya Annapoorna Devi Temple is a sacred space of grace aimed at invoking the cosmic power of nourishment held by Devi Annapoorna

to help eradicate hunger and uplift the local communities of South Africa. The temple is linked to Chinmaya Mission South Africa's "Nourish to Flourish" initiative, which has provided over 250,000 meals to underprivileged families and schoolchildren in Durban since October 2024. The project provides 2,000 free meals daily from a state-of-the-art industrial kitchen at the Chinmaya Annapoorna Ashram in Durban. It was to propel the sustenance and widespread benefit of this project that Swami Abhedananda envisioned the invocation



Divine arrival: (above) Aerial view of the Annapoorna Devi Temple in Durban; (below) Prana Pratishtha by Swami Abhedananda

of the Goddess Annapoorna in South Africa.

In November, the temple gained global attention when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Swami Abhedananda during the G20 Leaders Summit in Johannesburg. There, he blessed and gifted a sacred Ashtalakshmi Kalasha containing Shree Anna (millets) from India and South Africa, to Swami Abhedananda for placing at the Devi Temple. The Prime Minister posted about this on his X account.

On the morning of December

1, the auspicious Mokshada Ekadashi, Swami Abhedananda led the *prana pratishtha* rituals, assisted by Vedic priests from southern India, inaugurating the temple in the presence of nearly 4,000 devotees. Abhishekam of the temple's shikhara and of Devi Annapoorna's endearing vigraha (image) was performed. In the presence of sannnyasins from across South Africa, Swami Abhedananda unveiled the temple's inaugural plaque honoring H.H. Swami Chinmayananda during Chinmaya Mission's 75th year celebrations.

BRIEFLY...

KARNALI RIVER IS ONE OF THE last major free-flowing Himalayan rivers, rising near Lake Mansarovar on the Tibetan Plateau and flowing through western Nepal into India, where it joins the Ganga. Unlike most large rivers in Asia, as noted in the *Nepali Times*, it has so far escaped major damming and continues to sustain fertile floodplains, recharge groundwater, support wildlife such as tigers and freshwater dolphins, and provide livelihoods for millions of people.

BHAJAN CLUBBING IS A GROWING trend among Gen Z in which traditional Hindu devotional singing is blended with modern music, ambient lighting and

informal social spaces to create a contemporary spiritual experience in India, according to *India West*. These gatherings are held in cafés, rooftops and open-air venues, where participants sing ancient songs with live instruments in a relaxed, uplifting atmosphere. It reflects a new way young people are embracing spirituality through community, creativity and devotion.

A BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION collapsed at a Hindu temple site in Verulam, north of Durban, South Africa, killing four people and injuring several others in December 2025. The multi-storey structure gave way without warning, sending concrete slabs and metal beams

crashing onto the temple below, according to *WRAL.NEWS*. Officials said early findings suggest the construction may not have followed approved plans, and an investigation is underway.

THE INDOONESIAN MINISTRY OF Culture recently inaugurated the Plaosan Temple Site in Central Java after its restoration in October 2025, according to *Voice of Indonesia*. Culture Minister Fadli Zon said the 9th-century temple symbolizes harmony and the cultural achievements of ancient Indonesia. The 11-month restoration preserved the temple's authenticity and began landscape improvements to enhance access, visitor comfort and community involvement.

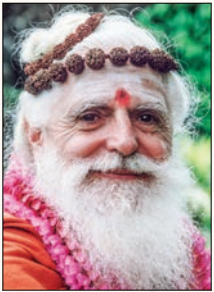
SECOND LIEUTENANT HARISH RAO, a Hindu soldier of Indian origin, was threatened with deportation during basic training in

the US Army after refusing to remove his sacred tilak, according to *MSN*. During his training at Fort Jackson, he was sidelined and told he might be sent back to India for wearing the religious mark, raising serious questions about religious freedom in the US military. Ultimately, permission was granted for his free use of the tilak, with precedent now set to allow others to do the same.

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PHOTOS: CHINMAYA MISSION SOUTH AFRICA



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IN MY OPINION

A Saint's Inspiration

How Arunagirinathar bridged suffering and Realization

BY LOSHINI RAJENTHARAN

ARUNAGIRINATHAR, THE celebrated 15th-century Tamil saint, is best known as the inspired composer of the *Thirupugal*—hymns of extraordinary rhythm and devotion dedicated to Lord Murugan. I grew up listening to *Muthai Thiru*, the very first of the *Thirupugal*, without ever realizing its significance. For many years, the man behind the music remained distant and abstract to me—more a name than a presence. His words existed merely as background sound, familiar yet unexamined, rather than as something that spoke directly to the mind or heart.

His name surfaced now and then in my life. My sister-in-law's uncle, a senior psychiatrist, bears the saint's name—a coincidence that once seemed incidental. Yet in Hindu culture, names are rarely accidental. They carry memory, lineage and aspiration. To inquire into a name is often to uncover a story far larger than its etymology.

My own inquiry began unexpectedly at a Muniswaran temple in Tampoi, in the southern Malaysian state of Johor, during a trip to purchase the marriage pendant for my brother's wedding. A mural on the temple wall depicted a brief account of Arunagirinathar's life. Intrigued, I paused to read and something stirred. That moment became the spark that led me to learn more about the saint whose words had quietly accompanied my childhood.

What moved me most, especially as a psychiatrist, was not merely Arunagirinathar's literary brilliance, but the recognition of a deeply human struggle. Standing before that mural and reading about his despair, I felt an unexpected stillness—the quiet acknowledgment that centuries do not lessen suffering, only change its language. His story does not shy away from darkness, yet it refuses to let suffering have the final word.

In Hindu tradition, spiritual narratives often acknowledge darkness as part of the soul's journey—not as moral failure, but



as a condition that calls for grace. Arunagirinathar's life stands as a powerful testament to this understanding. In his early life he lost his way through moral weakness and sensual indulgence, but through divine compassion and surrender to Lord Murugan, despair gave way to awakening. What emerged was

not the denial of pain, but its transformation.

The *Thirupugal* reflects this inner alchemy. Its verses pulse with humility, repentance, gratitude and awe—qualities that suggest deep reconciliation with the self. In clinical language one might say he found meaning; in spiritual language he found refuge. In either case the result was healing.

In our own time, conversations about emotional suffering often feel fragmented—divided between clinical treatment on one side and spiritual life on the other. Arunagirinathar's story gently reminds us that these domains need not exist in isolation. Spiritual practice, devotion and community can offer grounding, hope and a sense of being held during life's darkest passages.

Reflecting on his journey offers a timeless lesson for the modern world. Mental and emotional struggles are neither shameful nor insurmountable; they are part of the human condition. Spirituality and faith, alongside community and care, can provide solace, guidance and perspective, complementing other forms of support—an understanding modern psychiatry is slowly beginning to embrace.

Arunagirinathar's life reminds us that even in the darkest moments renewal is possible—a passage from despair to devotion, from inner turmoil to song. His hymns are more than poetry; they are living testimony that grace can lift the human spirit, and that light can be found even after the longest shadows when faith is placed firmly in the divine.

LOSHINI RAJENTHARAN, 33, is a Hindu woman, psychiatrist, and Malaysian-born Tamil writer now living in the United Kingdom



Religion Retreats as Yoga Rises

As houses of worship close, yoga schools provide new spaces for spiritual community and contemplative practice

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

YOGA MAY BE THE FASTEST-GROWING expression of human spirituality. There are an estimated 300 million yoga practitioners worldwide. If yoga were a religion (instead of a part of Hinduism), it would be the fifth largest in the world. According to Pew Research, the percentage of American adults practicing yoga rose from 5% in 2002 to 16% by 2022, with participation reaching approximately 18% (38.4 million) of the population in 2025. In Europe, France reports that about 10.7 million people (roughly 20% of the population) have practiced yoga in the past three years, with participation tripling over the last decade. Italy has about six million practitioners, tripling in six years from roughly two million, and is home to hundreds of yoga schools.

What is fueling this burgeoning of yoga practitioners? Certainly, one major societal factor is the advent of the International Day of Yoga—an annual global observance held on June 21, recognized by the United Nations since its proclamation in December 2014. The initiative was proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 2014 address to the UN General Assembly, emphasizing yoga as an invaluable gift from India's ancient tradition that embodies the unity of mind and body, thought and action.

The International Day of Yoga is celebrated worldwide by millions through free yoga sessions, workshops, demonstrations and online classes welcoming all ages and abilities, regardless of nationality or religion. The observance promotes yoga not only as physical exercise but as a path to self-awareness, balance, mindfulness and spiritual growth. In 2025, Guatemala hosted "the world's largest yoga gathering outside India," with over 10,000 participants, highlighting yoga's appeal across Central America.

A second factor fueling this growth of yoga practitioners is that modern medicine, psychology and wellness research have increasingly validated what yogic traditions articulated millennia ago: that disciplined engagement with the body, breath and mind has measurable effects on human well-being. Yoga schools have devised courses to benefit practitioners in these aspects of their lives. For example, The Art of Living Foundation offers breath, meditation and yoga programs that "find a solution for stress, mental health, weight loss, depression, anger, sleep, wellness, relationships, parenting, back pain, fatigue and immunity."



The Decline

When it comes to religious and spiritual areas in serious decline, the one receiving the most headline publicity is the closure and sale of Christian churches due to drops in attendance. It's estimated



that around 15,000 churches in the US could close their doors in 2025, a record number. This is part of a longer-term trend, with the National Council of Churches projecting that about 100,000 churches may close over the next several years, representing roughly a quarter of the country's estimated 350,000 to 400,000 churches.

Jewish synagogues in the US are also closing, with reports that many Reform synagogues have shut or are shutting their doors due to declining membership and demographic shifts. Though Hindu institutions in Western countries have not experienced this trend of closing, they do face difficulty in getting the younger generation to attend temple ceremonies, which could cause a significant drop in future attendance.

A Pew Research Center analysis by age group provides useful information. Fifty percent of adults born in 1940 or before attend religious services at least monthly, compared to twenty-five percent of adults born since 1990. Thirteen percent of adults born in 1940 or before identify as religiously unaffiliated, compared to forty-four percent of adults born since 1990. This trend of disaffiliation is also prominent among younger generations in Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

The shift in the religious landscape is most visible in the buildings that once defined it. As traditional attendance drops, we are witnessing a phenomenon called "adaptive reuse," where historic churches are being repurposed as secular "third spaces." In Pittsburgh, the former St. John the Baptist Church is now The Church Brew Works, a popular brewery; in other cities, grand cathedrals have been sliced into luxury lofts and boutique hotels.

A significant trend is the rebirth of these spaces as centers for wellness, such as Whole Sky Yoga in New York, which operates beneath the vaulted ceilings of a former church. This physical transition serves as a potent metaphor for the third factor fueling yoga's popularity: youth today value direct experience over inherited belief. When a yoga school replaces a chapel, it signals a shift from a "gatekeeper" model of spirituality to a "gateway" model, where seekers use the tools of Hindu tradition to experience the Divinity within themselves.

The shift has not gone unnoticed by traditional leadership. In 2001, the Reverend Richard Farr famously banned yoga from his Essex church hall, labeling it an "un-Christian" gateway into Eastern mysticism. Ironically, this is precisely what many seekers now desire—a



DALL·E

Spirituality reimagined: As church pews grow emptier, yoga school attendance blossoms, providing new sanctuaries for seekers of the Divine following ancient paths

The Yoga School

As the physical landmarks of Western faith transition into new roles, the yoga school is emerging as the modern equivalent of the church, synagogue or temple. For a growing number of seekers—including Hindu youth—the studio has become their primary "sacred space." While many instructors focus on physical asanas, an increasing number of schools are reclaiming yoga's deeper roots. They are evolving into centers of Vedic study, integrating meditation and the *Yoga Sutras* into their core curriculum through dedicated philosophy workshops, rigorous teacher training programs and immersive retreats focused on classical scriptural foundations.

Some yoga schools even maintain shrines to Hindu Deities and perform regular ceremonies. Two examples are Eddie Stern's Broome Street Yoga in New York with its adjacent Ganesh Temple, and the Yoga Vidya Ashram, located near Bad Meinberg, northern Germany, which maintains multiple shrines, performs arati and conducts a traditional daily Vedic homa.

The Yoga Sutras

While various Hindu scriptures present the teachings of yoga, the most widely studied is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. This system, known as Classical Yoga, is built upon eight progressive "limbs" (ashtanga) that guide the practitioner from outer ethical behavior to inner spiritual absorption. In the West, the third limb—physical postures (asana)—receives the most attention, often overshadowing the vital ethical restraints (yama) and religious observances (niyama) that form the system's foundation. Significantly, Patanjali emphasizes Ishvara-pranidhana—devotion and surrender to God—as a direct means to attain the deepest states of meditation. By engaging with the full breadth of all eight limbs, practitioners find that yoga is far more than a wellness trend; it is a comprehensive religious and philosophical system that addresses the totality of human existence, including the

worship of a Supreme Being.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the decline of institutional pews does not signal a retreat from the sacred, but rather a migration toward it. We are witnessing a historic pivot away from "gatekeeper" systems of belief and toward mystical faiths of direct experience. As seekers move from the pulpit to the yoga mat, they are trading dogmatic membership for personal realization. This burgeoning interest in yoga's spiritual depths suggests that while traditional religious structures may be fading, the human thirst for an authentic encounter with the Divine is stronger than ever—making the ancient wisdom of Hinduism more relevant today than perhaps at any time in the modern era.

direct gateway into the mystical experience and personal realization found within the yoga school. The "gateway to Hinduism" argument pioneered by Farr in 2001 remained a central talking point for conservative Christian groups for decades. This culminated in high-profile legal battles, such as the 2013 lawsuit against a California school district and a long-standing ban on yoga in Alabama public schools that was only partially lifted in 2021.

Most of the religiously unaffiliated still hold spiritual beliefs. In the US, 83% of the unaffiliated believe in God or a universal spirit and 70% believe in some form of afterlife, even though they do not identify with organized religion. This data supports the conclusion that religion and spirituality remain strong in Western countries, but their nature has radically changed.



LETTERS

Siva Prasadam

My humble pranams to His Holiness Sri La Sri Kauai Aadheenam and all the Siddha Purushas. With all your blessings all the activities are going on well here at Bharatham. I received the HINDUISM TODAY January issue. It is purely the prasadam of Lord Siva. Every page is filled with dharmic messages presented after deep research. We are greatly indebted to your satsang for all your work done so meticulously. The Hindus around the world are guided by this Siva Prasada. I appreciate you and the dynamic Gana for all your dedication. Hara Hara Mahadeva!

SHANMUKHA SIVACHARYAR
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Deforestation

"Badrinath's Trees" (May, 1999) was a very good article. Unfortunately, when I visited Badrinath on October, 25, 2025, I found complete deforestation and a concrete jungle everywhere. The temple is surrounded by shops and a shopping complex and is completely hidden. In the name of development and tourism, the government has destroyed the sanctity, piety, pilgrim feelings and the natural beauty of Badrinath. I visited Badrinath in 1999, 2005 and again in October 2025. Badrinath now feels like a leisure resort for honeymoon trips, trekking and tourist entertainment. The government is preparing for boating facilities, a swimming pool, a mall and a DJ complex. On the day I visited, a high-volume DJ was playing around 9 pm near the center of Badrinath, within 800 meters of the temple.

Trees behind and in front of the temple and in Mana village are being cut. The temple is no longer visible, covered on all sides by shops, hotels and restaurants. Plastics and polythene waste are flying everywhere. A pilgrim site should not be treated as a source of income. If the government collects resources from the temple, they should be used for restoration, not for expanding a concrete jungle.

DR.SRIDARI DUTTA
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The Workings of Karma

The article "Karma and Reincarnation" makes it quite clear what karma is about (Jul/Aug/Sep 2019). It is interesting to learn about Hindu philosophy and its beliefs. Body, spirit and mind must be in balance and harmony. It is true that bad actions eventually come back to us. It is very important to always believe in God.

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Hinduism in Nigeria

Thank you for the article "How to Formally Enter Hinduism" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2016). In my country, Christianity was the colonial religion, and it prevented many populations from knowing the light and truth of the Hindu faith, which I now see as a humble path of worship. Only now, through the web and social communication, have I learned more. I want to convert, learn, grow and help teach Hinduism in Nigeria.

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Yoga Ashram

I recently came across your article "Yoga Vidya: A Living Hindu Ashram in Germany" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2025). Even through photographs and descriptions, it appears serene and inspiring. The ashram seems to uphold authentic yogic traditions: hatha yoga, raja yoga, havan, seva and disciplined practice are all clearly emphasized. The environment looks peaceful and dedicated to spiritual growth, which left a strong impression on me. My respectful pranam to Swami Sivananda, Swami Krishnananda and Sukadevaji. May their teachings continue to guide and inspire many seekers around the world.

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Why the Term Sanatana Dharma?

Visitors in the Mini Mela gift shop here at the Kauai monastery sometimes ask why Hinduism is called Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Truth. Hinduism is known as Sanatana Dharma because it is not just one individual's teachings but rather humankind's evolving recognition of the eternal laws governing the way everything works—how the mind works, how karma works, how reincarnation works, how the soul evolves, how astrology works, how the Three Worlds work, how the Gods and devas work, how the universe itself—time, form, space, all souls, devas and other Gods—is created by the Supreme God from His/Her own essence, and how it all evolves through the yugas to eventual complete harmony, indistinguishable from God Himself.

I apologize to Shaktas for using the male pronoun for God, whom in our tradition we call Siva. We recognize no gender differentiation at that level of existence, considering Siva/Shakti as one Being who appears to different people in different forms.

CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN
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Racism

Racism works in two directions—not only when white people look down on darker skin,

but also when black and brown people look up to white skin. Although colonial rule ended long ago, I wonder whether we are still mentally colonized. Consider the Queen Victoria memorial in Kolkata. As a child, I visited it. Yet she symbolized the empire that presided over mass starvation and economic exploitation, leaving India impoverished. Why do we preserve monuments to that legacy?

My main concern, however, is a different form of domination which I have encountered in the United States: being told that unless I convert to Christianity, I will be condemned to Hell. This raises troubling questions. Do our character and actions not matter? Are kindness, honesty and service irrelevant? If belief alone determines salvation, then entire communities are condemned in advance.

Reducing human beings to one characteristic—religion—is similar to racism, which reduces people to skin color; sexism, which reduces women to gender; caste discrimination, which reduces individuals to birth; and anti-Semitism, which historically targeted Jews simply for their identity. We know the horrors such reductionism led to in Nazi Germany, where families, including children and infants, were exterminated solely because of their religion.

Yet some proselytizing doctrines imply that billions of Hindus, Buddhists, atheists and others will endure eternal suffering for the same reason. These ideas are publicly preached without critique. Racism, casteism and sexism are condemned in the public sphere, but religious exclusivism that consigns innocents to eternal torment receives almost no scrutiny.

I fear this silence reveals a lingering mental colonialism—a hesitation to question dominant Western religious frameworks. In the twenty-first century, no faith community should be threatened with eternal punishment for following its own tradition. I have attempted to publish these concerns in several Western newspapers without success. I hope your publication will help bring this discussion into the open. Let us affirm the dignity of all sincere spiritual paths.

VANAMALI THOTAPALLI
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Nandinatha and Panini

Hello, dear representatives of HINDUISM TODAY magazine. I study Vedic culture and translate scriptures from Sanskrit. In the article about Saiva Siddhanta on your website, it says:

"The first known guru of the Shuddha, 'pure,' Saiva Siddhanta tradition was Maharishi Nandinatha of Kashmir (ca 250 bce), recorded in Panini's book of grammar as the



teacher of rishis Patanjali, Vyaghrapada and Vasishtha." I tried to find Sanskrit sources where this verse could be found, but I couldn't find any. Please tell me which source, chapter, and verse I should read to find confirmation of this statement?

VIKTOR KOCHERGIN
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EDITORS' RESPONSE: Namaste Viktor, thank you for your thoughtful inquiry. Upon review, we recognize that the statement on our website conflates textual evidence with lineage tradition (parampara) and also mistakenly includes the legendary Vasishtha among Nandinatha's disciples. Maharishi Nandinatha's metaphysical insights on the *Maheshvara Sutras*—the fourteen sounds traditionally said to have emerged from Siva's drum—are captured in the *Nandikesha Kashika*. According to tradition, both Panini and Nandinatha were present at this revelation, with Panini employing the sounds to formulate Sanskrit grammar in the *Ashtadhyayi* and Nandinatha conveying their metaphysical and tantric meaning. The association of Patanjali and Vyaghrapada as disciples of Nandinatha belongs to the Kailasa parampara and is reflected in South Indian temple iconography, such as at Chidambaram, but it is not stated explicitly in Panini's grammatical

text. We will revise the original passage to clarify these distinctions and correct the error regarding Vasishtha.

The Lofty Teachings of Ramana

In Tiruvannamalai, where I live, there are many teachers of non-duality. Most of them know Sri Ramana Maharshi's teachings very well and often assume that having this knowledge means the goal has been reached.

Yet Sri Ramana speaks from the standpoint of the jnani—a position that lies beyond the grasp of most teachers. His words arise from realization, not from instruction.

My aim has therefore not been to interpret or explain Ramana, but to rewrite his vision from the viewpoint of the devotee: one who has not yet arrived, who still lives within identification, memory and effort, and for whom Ramana's silence remains a direction rather than a condition already fulfilled.

PETER SWAMI
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The Great Kanchi Saint

The article "Kanchi Saint Attains Maha Samadhi at 99" (Mar/Apr/May 1994) gives a brief but full biography of Mahaperiyava. Congratulations to the author.

His Holiness, Sri Chandrasekharendra

Saraswathi was born in 1894, and became the 68th Acharya in 1907 at the age of 13, not 18—not a huge mistake, but this correction will avoid unnecessary criticism.

R.VENKETARAMANY
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A Timeline of Humanity

I came across a timeline of human history from the Dec. 1994 issue of HINDUISM TODAY. It is truly a "tour de force." I have never seen such a superb summary anywhere else. May I humbly suggest that you bring the article up to date? It is time to rewrite the timeline!

I have been a subscriber for a couple of decades now and renewed last month. Truly, there is no magazine across the whole world so excellent as HINDUISM TODAY.

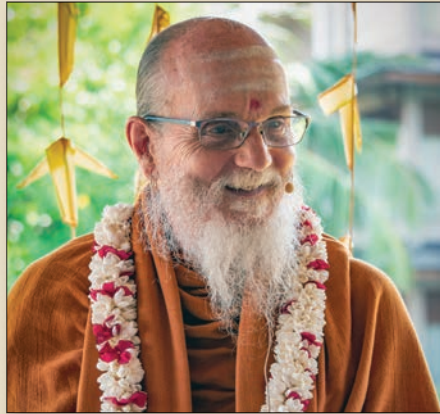
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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Informing the Mind and Elevating the Hindu Spirit



By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

One of HINDUISM TODAY's five purposes is "To nurture and monitor the ongoing Hindu spiritual renaissance." This resurgence is reflected in the increase in Hindu pride and participation in events such as India's 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela. Another expression is the extent to which yoga institutions are presenting Hindu teachings in Western countries. We showcased an example in our article "Yoga Vidya: A Living Hindu Ashram in Germany." This institution,

Europe's largest yoga ashram, provides a daily routine of meditation before dawn, traditional fire ceremonies, satsang, scriptural study and voluntary service.

Globally, Hindu leaders and parents alike are actively seeking ways to inculcate the noble truths of our faith in today's youth. At HINDUISM TODAY, we let youth speak for themselves—to inspire and uplift others through opinion pieces and narratives about their own spiritual experiences. In "A Legacy of Faith and Courage," Loshini Rajentharan, a Malaysian-born Tamil devotee of Rama and Hanuman, tells how her grandfather's example of unwavering devotion to Lord Rama instilled a profound bhakti in her that is the anchor of her life.

The Indian systems of health and medicine are also burgeoning, with ayurveda facilities now established around the globe. To complement this knowledge, our October 2025 educational Insight section informed our readers about the lesser-known siddha system of medicine.

The article is written by Dr. Kulreet Chaudhary, a neurologist, neuroscientist, ayurvedic practitioner, sound medicine expert, author and advocate for integrative healing. Her

journey began in the world of conventional medicine but her approach was different. She sought to understand why her patients were suffering and how they could heal at the root. That search led her into the ancient sciences of ayurveda and siddha medicine and the eventual founding of Sri Narayani Holistic Centre, a sanctuary dedicated to reviving ancient healing practices.

Dr. Chaudhary writes, "Siddha medicine is not just a way to treat illness—it is a sacred science passed down by our siddhars, showing us how to live in alignment with nature and the universe. When we follow these ancient teachings, we understand that true health is the balance of body, mind and soul, guided by the wisdom of those who came before us."

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QUOTES & QUIPS

There is no physical world for me. All I see, I see as the glorious manifestation of the Almighty.

Swami Sivananda (1887–1963)

Truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kali Yuga. If a man clings tenaciously to Truth, he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for Truth, one gradually loses everything. **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

God defined is God denied. To define is to limit. Yet, the deepest of my consciousness calls on Him as pure love. **Sadhu Vaswani** (1879–1966), founder of *Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

Gross utility kills beauty. We now have all over the world huge production of things, huge organizations, huge administrations of empire—all obstructing the path of life. Civilization is waiting for a great consummation, for an expression of

its soul in beauty. This must be your contribution to the world. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *mystic poet*

Until we have begun to go without them, we fail to realize how unnecessary many things are. We’ve been using them not because we needed them but because we had them. **Seneca** (4 bce–65 ce), *Stoic philosopher*

When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you. **Lao Tzu** (4th or 6th century bce), *author of Tao Te Ching*

Hinduism especially in its oldest, Shaivite form, never destroyed its past. It is the sum of human experience from the earliest times. Nondogmatic, it allows everyone

to find his own way. **Alain Daniélou** (1907–1994), *French Indologist*

Fall down seven times, get up eight. *Japanese proverb*

I shall not make my body a tomb for other animals. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519), *Italian polymath, Renaissance luminary, a vegetarian*

If you’re scared of escalators, there are steps you can take.

Most persons are so absorbed in the contemplation of the outside world that they are wholly oblivious to what is passing on within themselves. **Nikola Tesla**



completion of family and social duties, usually after age 72. The shastras also recognize diverse motivations for entering sannyas—such as spontaneous spiritual realizations, philosophical yearning, refuge from worldly sorrow or final withdrawal at life’s end.

At its core, sannyas preserves a living ideal: the liberated soul who, freed from personal ambition, serves as a spiritual exemplar. Through his peace, wisdom and illumination, the sannyasin uplifts humanity while standing as guardian of the eternal truths of the Sanatana Dharma.



Progress is not achieved by preachers and guardians of morality, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels and skeptics. **Stephen Fry**, *British actor, comedian and writer*

Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities. **Voltaire** (1694–1778), *French author and philosopher*

He who takes medicine and neglects diet wastes the skill of his doctors. *Chinese proverb*

Divisions are imaginary lines drawn by small minds. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952), *founder of Self-Realization Fellowship*

Even in search of extraordinary gains, the wise will never speak trivial or useless words. *Tirukkural 198*

I salute the light within your eyes where the whole Universe dwells. For when you are at that center within you, and I am at that place within me, we shall be one. **Crazy Horse** (1840–1877), *Oglala Lakota Sioux Native American*

The mind cannot know what is beyond itself; but the mind is known by what is beyond, that essence of timelessness and spacelessness which makes everything perceivable, yet itself is beyond perception. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *Hindu sage*

We cannot change anything until we accept it. **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist*

There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children. **Nelson Mandela** (1918–2013), *South African anti-apartheid activist and statesman*

Karma is movement in the mind. When the mind remains motionless, there is no karma. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *Sri Lankan mystic*

An imperfect world goads us to improve. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *HINDUISM TODAY*



“No. That’s not the God of Wifi, that’s Lord Śiva”

The most important rule of honesty is to be honest to oneself, to be able to face up to our problems and admit that we have been the creator of them. To be honest with oneself brings peace of mind. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

Sannyas: The Path of the Renunciate

SANNYAS IS THE ANCIENT HINDU TRADITION of monastic renunciation. The word itself comes from the Sanskrit root meaning “to throw down” or “to abandon,” signifying the conscious relinquishment of worldly life in pursuit of God Realization. A sannyasin is not merely one who withdraws from society, but one who has been formally initiated by a realized guru into a life wholly dedicated to the Divine. Far from being a rejection of life, true sannyas is understood as its highest fulfillment: the abandonment of the transient in favor of the eternal.

Sannyas has always represented a decisive turning inward, a break with mundane obligations and a binding unto the Divine. The sannyasin renounces the dharma of the householder and accepts an even more exacting discipline: lifelong chastity, poverty and obedience to his tradition. Through austerity, daily spiritual practices, meditation and inner worship, he undertakes the purification of body, mind and emotions, restraining the

restless movements of thought and unfolding an ever-deepening love of God. His worship is predominantly internal, seeking Truth within, culminating in the realization of the transcendent Absolute.

Saivite monasticism predates recorded history, with references in the *Vedas* to *munis* and *yatis*—ascetics clothed in ochre, living in seclusion and contemplation. For centuries, renunciation was a distinctly Saivite phenomenon. Later Vaishnavism developed parallel monastic forms, often with extra emphases on devotional *bhakti*. Despite subtle differences, modern Hinduism includes sannyas in all major sects, including Saiva, Vaishnava, Shakta and Smarta traditions.

Initiation into sannyas traditionally follows *brahmacharya diksha*—vowing a lifetime of chastity and entering a path of service and self-reflection. There is a classical distinction between lifelong sannyas, ideally entered before the age of twenty-five, and the later-life renunciation that follows

PUZZLES

Word Search

Instructions: in the word cloud, find and circle the words given below. They might be horizontal, vertical, diagonal and even backwards.

T M X V G Z G O L Y C W B Y P L F C I T T A - V R I T T I I
F N C K A L A W L A G A A N U G R A H A O R K B A U A R J C
T W N C H C Y E O H H C K Q I R J G D G M A T D V V C E B N
X R L P D G H Z V W F T L H U P A D H I Y K N O I X T S Z A
Q R S M B T Q L D G E V R J Q V F U S S L S B L D A P K L D
N S A S A D H A N A S V T I H M D N N M I M D S Y E A R E N
X A J M R A A V A H B O R I T J L L X Q H A G X A B N S A A
O T A I A G B O G A X B J C C V E R Y T S S X Z B I C U U P
W T R N R A O V V I E I T H S I R D E H K C P W N I H X W S
U V N W P M D A W A T T I H C M H A R K A H C - A L A K R T
T A I H Z I H O H S R H A A N A P F H C S M V B Y N B U G A
S E N C G B A C S I N L V Y O R R U D R A A A W A K H I R M
A C D A S Y K H P S D S Y A K S O G Q I G S S R E Y U H V A
V A A H H N Y U K M I W X L X H M Q F E N J A Y T S T C B S
A G H U A S R L H Z E E K A N A M A Y I R K N Y A S A R S G
F F S Z K A R W A X Z M U R V Q Z Z L T H E A B H Y T Z N D
D G E K T D E A X L G L L P G W N Y X A S J I T I D O G Q G
M M D H I T X N D L E V W X N L T P T H D K R M F X A Z O M
M N J A V E D A H A M W D L H S X N X A D H I K A R A B X K
L B Z K Z Z Y S O Z O M A H A V A K Y A Q F C I W Q N V G O

ADHIKARA TRIPURA
ADHYASA KALA
AVIDYA SHAKTI
BODHA SPANDA
CHITTA VIMARSHA
CITTA-VRITTI PRALAYA
DRISHTI UTSAVA
SAKSHI TIRTHA
VASANA DESHA
SAMSKARA KALA-CHAKRA
PRARABDHA PANCHABHUTA
AGAMI ANTAHKARANA
~~KRIYAMANA~~ MAHAVAKYA
RASA UPADHI
BHAVA ANUGRAHA
SATTVA TIROBHAVA
RAJAS SADHANA
TAMAS DARSHANA
RUDRA
MAHADEVA

I Want to Be a Monk

Life at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii is profound, spiritually demanding and richly rewarding. If you or someone you know feels called to a life of selfless service and meditation, we welcome the discussion. Candidates must be male, under age 25, single and ready to embrace a strict and traditional Hindu way of life. E-mail: monklife@hindu.org



More details about the Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order can be found by scanning the QR code.



Join Us at 4 Dharmic Temples in L.A.



These four ten-minute videos capture class visits to a Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sikh temple. They were developed by Hinduism Today for use in California sixth and seventh grade social studies classes in which the history of these four Indian-origin faiths is taught. Each visit was hosted by a member or clergy of the temple and approved by the temple management. By these tours, students learn the basics of the related faiths and experience their sacred spaces.

HINDUISM



JAINISM



SIKHISM



BUDDHISM



See the videos at: bit.ly/TempleTourPlaylist



YOGA SUTRAS

Part 1: What Is Yoga?

Rishi Patanjali Explains How the Mind Is Restrained and Awareness Revealed

The following excerpt is drawn from Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami's recently released translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Chapter One, verses 1-29.

-
- 1.1 Now, the exposition of yoga.
 - 1.2 Yoga is the restraint of mental activities.
 - 1.3 Then awareness abides in its essential nature.
 - 1.4 Otherwise, awareness identifies with the mental activities.
 - 1.5 The mind's activities are of five types and can be detrimental or non-detrimental.
 - 1.6 They are valid cognition, misapprehension, conceptualization, sleep and memory.
 - 1.7 Valid cognition arises from direct perception, inference and authoritative testimony.
 - 1.8 Misapprehension, having no basis in an object's nature, is false knowledge.
 - 1.9 Conceptualization arises from verbal knowledge and lacks an actual object.
 - 1.10 Sleep is the mental activity based on the awareness of absence.
 - 1.11 Remembering is the retention of things experienced.
 - 1.12 Through practice and dispassion, these are restrained.
 - 1.13 Practice is exertion to achieve steadiness in that.
 - 1.14 This indeed becomes firmly grounded when cultivated with devotion for a long time without interruption.
 - 1.15 Dispassion is the masterful consciousness of one who is free of desire for objects, whether perceived or heard about.
 - 1.16 The supreme state of that is the non-craving for the guṇas arising from the realization of puruṣa.
 - 1.17 Differentiated samādhi involves cogitation, subtle reflection, bliss or I-am-ness.
 - 1.18 The other is preceded by the practice of focusing on cessation and leaves only saṁskāras.
 - 1.19 Those who are unembodied and those who are



- absorbed in prakṛti remain focused on becoming.
- 1.20 For others, it is preceded by faith, energy, mindfulness, samādhi and mystical insight.
- 1.21 Samādhi is near for the intensely ardent.
- 1.22 Even among these, there is differentiation in degrees of ardor, whether mild, moderate or extreme.
- 1.23 Or, this is gained through devotion to Īśvara.
- 1.24 Īśvara is a special puruṣa, untouched by afflictions and karma, with its results and residue.
- 1.25 In Him is the peerless source of omniscience.
- 1.26 Unbounded by time, He is also the guru of the ancients.
- 1.27 "Aum" is His signifying sound.
- 1.28 Repeat it while contemplating its meaning.
- 1.29 Then follows the attainment of inner consciousness and also the elimination of obstacles.

You can read the full version of Himalayan Academy's Patanjali's Yoga Sutras online for free at nall.ai/sutras-online or you can buy the physical book here: nall.ai/yogasutras



SPECIAL FEATURE

Exploring East India's Mighty Brahmaputra River



From its origins near Manasarovar Lake and Mount Kailas, the world's 9th largest river flows 1,900 miles through Tibet, into India, then Bangladesh, to the Bay of Bengal. Join our correspondent and writer as they meet people of various faiths and ethnicities along the India portion, all of whom view the abundance-giving and sometimes destructive river with great devotion.

BY ELLEN COON, NEPAL

A WIDE SILVER RIBBON GLITTERED BENEATH US AS WE flew into Dibrugarh, in Northeast India's Assam province—the mighty Brahmaputra River. “We call it the Brahmaputra because it is the son of Lord Brahma,” explained the young Assamese woman sitting next to me.

Photojournalist Thomas Kelly and I were interested in the Brahmaputra as one of four sacred rivers that emanate from Mt. Kailash, the mountain in western Tibet that is holy to four religions. In January 2025, we followed the river from where it enters India in northern Arunachal Pradesh, to Guwahati, about 180 miles downstream in Assam, where it exits into Bangladesh. It is known as the Tsangpo in Tibet, Siang when it enters Arunachal Pradesh and Brahmaputra from the confluence in Assam of the Siang, Lohit and Dibang. We flew in from Kolkata to Dibrugarh, Assam's northernmost airport.

All along the way, we met people living next to the river who consider the Brahmaputra to be a Divine Being, a living Deity to be respected. This reverence for rivers, which has always been the norm in India, is now being tested by increasing economic exploitation and pollution of rivers, including the Brahmaputra. This is much in the news these days due to large-scale hydroelectric dams planned on both the Indian and Chinese sides of the border. We wondered, how exactly do people experience the river as sacred? And what could be lost when a river is viewed as a commodity to be turned into money?

Our River Pilgrimage

We arrived on January 14, which happened to be the traditional birthday of the Brahmaputra. It is Makar Sankranti, the first day of the holy month of Magh, when pilgrims and saints from all over India come to bathe in the Lohit River at Brahmakund, in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. In mythic time, Lord Brahma, the Creator, gave a son to the Himalayan rishi Santanu and his wife, a beautiful celestial apsara (nymph) named Amogha. Instead of conceiving Lord Brahma's child in human form, Amogha gave birth to a divine water being whom she put safely down as a lake, called Brahmakund. Later, an avatar of Vishnu named Parashuram came with an axe and sliced open the bank, releasing the son of Brahma into a roaring torrent.

The Brahmaputra's origin story has multiple strands that come together, diverge and reunite—just like the river itself. Look at a map of Arunachal Pradesh, and you'll see that three major tributaries come together to form the Brahmaputra: the Lohit, in eastern Arunachal, the Dibang, and to the west, the Siang, each fed by innumerable named rivers and streams. They merge near Sadiya, in upper Assam, to form the Brah-

Holy river: (main image) the upper reaches of the river near the border with China; (inset, upper left) rare view of Mt. Kailash with Lake Manasarovar; (inset bottom right) it is several miles to the far shore at the Bogibeel bridge at Dibrugarh;





maputra, often referred to as “the braided river.” We followed the Siang because it is the continuation of the Yarlung Tsangpo, originating near Mt. Kailash and flowing due east across Tibet before it makes a dramatic turn into Arunachal Pradesh.

Heading North

On the first day, we drove 25 miles north-east over a flat floodplain from Dibrugarh until we came to the Bogibeel Bridge, which would take us over the Brahmaputra and into Arunachal Pradesh. We stopped before crossing the bridge to marvel at it and the vast expanse of river it spans. It’s a new bridge, opened at the end of 2018, and at 3.1 miles is the longest combined road and rail bridge in India. Normally the river is about three quarters of a mile wide under the bridge, but during monsoon the entire 3.1-mile width is flowing water. Muted shades of sand and steel, pewter and stone shimmered to the horizon, as though we were in a wet desert. The river was huge.

Along with the Bogibeel Bridge, great changes are coming to this remote, sparsely populated area—part of a national project of strategic importance to open the Northeast to trade, development and population flows. As we drove north toward the border with China, the construction of a four-lane highway was ripping apart the thick forests. Many times, we waited for an hour or more, as dynamite blasted the hillsides and hundreds of men from other parts of India drove massive earth-moving equipment.

While we chatted with occupants of stopped vehicles, we met all different kinds of people. Arunachal Pradesh and Assam are

ethnically and culturally diverse. There are over 26 tribes in the area, along with Assamese, Nepali, Tibetan and Bengali settlers, to name only a few. “We call ourselves *tarkari*, like a mixed vegetable curry,” one man told us. “A little bit of every kind of vegetable makes it tasty!” We encountered religious diversity as well, meeting Hindus, Tibetan and Tai Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and animists, who rather than emphasizing their differences, identified with this place they shared, most importantly the beautiful and powerful river that runs through it.

Though they look forward to economic benefits, most of the people we met worry about how dams and other development projects will affect the Brahmaputra. As we looked at the bridge, Jyoti Pego, a Hindu from the Mishing tribe, told us fish stocks were already decreasing in the river. But even if his people left their traditional occupations of fishing and ferrying, their “soul” centered on the river; their cultural and spiritual identity would remain inseparable from “Our Lord Brahmaputra.”

We spent our first night in Pasighat, in Arunachal Pradesh, about 125 kilometers from the Assam border. Our lodge was right above the Siang, the major tributary of the Brahmaputra, which originates in Tibet as the Tsangpo. Walking down a sandy path through elephant grass early the next morning, we emerged to a wonderland of gem-colored boulders—purple, jade, maroon and pink. Up here, the river was different, fast and eager, rushing around rocks, often colored a mineral green from glacier melt. Steep hillsides were covered with wild banana trees and, farther up, old-growth forests with

large numbers of unique species. Arunachal is one of the world’s biodiversity banks. During the two-day journey north to Yingkiong and then Tuting with the river beside us, a powerful vitality made itself felt. That palpable vitality of the natural world was described in religious terms by the people we met, all along the river, whether Hindus or adherents of other faiths.

Hindu poet Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize in 1913, wrote, “Indian civilization has been distinctive in locating its source of regeneration, material and intellectual, in the forest...India’s best ideas have come where man was in communion with trees and rivers.”

Into the Heart of the World

Surrounded by an abundant, pristine landscape, Tuting is the gateway into a sacred geography that, until recently, could only be reached on foot. On the eastern flank of the Himalayas, Hindus call it a primordial manifestation of Adi Shakti, or Divine Mother. According to Tibetan Buddhists, this is a beyul (a hidden holy land) called Pemakö, located partly in Tibet and partly in Arunachal Pradesh. And our host in Tuting, Gelong Medo, an Adi man in his seventies, told us that according to his Adi Donyi Polo religion, the forests, mountains and the rivers up here are alive, sentient beings who birthed the Adi people.

Gelong Medo lives with his wife and 102-year-old mother, down the street from a large Hindu temple. Also nearby are a Tibetan monastery, a Catholic church and a long-established Indian Army outpost. We stayed in a cement hostel he had built in



The river route: (main image) The Siang River (Tsangpo in Tibet) enters at the northern tip of Arunachal Pradesh, joining the Dibang and Lohit rivers just above Dibrugarh to form the Brahmaputra, which flows southwest past Guwahati to join the Jamuna before reaching the Ganga delta

One Spectacular River and the Marvelous People Who Live Along It



Northern reaches: (left to right) author Ellen Coon on the riverbank near Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh; village man with his dog and kukri knives for cutting bamboo; field storeroom with solar power in mustard seed field; the new highway being built along the upper reaches serves both local and military purposes





front of his comfortable wooden house surrounded by lush gardens of vegetables and greens, banana and tangerine trees, a pigpen and a chicken coop. Adis are subsistence people blessed by plentiful food from small plots, the rivers and forests, he said.

Our guide offered us pancakes made with white flour, peanut butter and jam. "Eat that, and you'll get sick," Gelong told us. "Eat this,"—he handed us plates of steamed fibrous roots with a chutney made of fresh cilantro, onions and lemons, all from his garden—"and you'll be strong!"

A little way up the road, we encountered another young man, who was shooting birds. He told us that since Adi were created by forest Deities, "we need wild food."

Soon, the road narrowed. Following the river, we passed several small Adi villages with dense forests on either side of the road—Jedo, Kuging, Yortung—before we reached Manko-

ta, in the Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, close to the border between India and China. The village was spread out over an open area of fields on either side of the river, punctuated by clumps of bamboo and fruit trees.

Just before we reached Mankota, we stopped at a Tibetan monastery, where we met Rinpoche Ugyen Phuntsok, a reincarnated lama who usually lives in California. He explained to us that we were entering a secret realm known in Tibetan Buddhism as a *beyul*, a hidden Himalayan valley where Tibetan Buddhist teachings are concealed to be discovered in the future. It is both a place and a state of mind, accessible only by perseverance. Beyuls are associated with Guru Padmasambhava, the 8th century Indian yogi and tantric master revered by Tibetans as "the second Buddha."

In this area, he said, three holy mountains



Upper Siang: (left to right) terraced wheat fields are common; terma are treasure stones in which Guru Padmasambhava concealed Buddhist teachings for future times

give rise to three holy rivers, which come together, conveying potent blessings, at the base of the hill called Devakota. Devakota can also be called Devikota, he continued, because it is a female power spot, and for centuries has attracted wandering yogins, whose meditation is charged by the divine feminine energy in its caves. This is the Hindu view of Devikota, and, as is common in such sacred sites, has been adopted by Buddhists largely unchanged except for the overlay of Guru Padmasambhava.

In Mankota, we stayed with Dato Kham-pa, a lady in late middle age who identified as—and spoke—Tibetan, even though she



had been born in Mankota and lived there all her life. Adi and Tibetans have long relationships based on trade, with waves of Tibetan migration into this border region. Dato lived in one of three wooden houses in her compound, with a big hearth for cooking and an orange cat who liked to sit in her lap. Her second husband stayed in a separate house a short walk away, while the third structure held a shrine room and an outer room, with a portrait of her first husband, who had been killed in the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

In the morning we walked four miles through fields, over a river, and up a forested hillside to Devakota. Our guide, Alister, said, "You have no idea how remote this place really is—always has been, until the road and, I guess, cell phones. Until recently, you had to walk four or five days from Tuting, carrying everything—let alone if you were coming from Tibet or Bhutan."

Halfway up the hill, we heard voices and came upon a wooden homestead carved out of the forest. There we met a remarkable woman, Ujjen Chochi, who was married to the caretaker of the Buddhist shrines on Devakota, and, it turned out, was Dato's niece. Holding my hand to help me past the rough spots, she took us on a path lined with prayer flags to Devikota's most important holy place—a cave that was the womb of Dorje Phagmo, or Vajravarahi. "Dorje Phagmo is Adi Shakti, the Mother of Guru Padmasambhava and all Buddhas," Ujjen Chochi said.

Inside, the walls of the cave oozed a moist, reddish substance, which we applied to our foreheads as a tika, or mark of blessing. Drop-lets formed and fell one at a time off the end of a stalactite into a tiny plastic jug, for us to

put on our tongues. When I remarked on the tridents outside the cave, Ujjen Chochi answered that Hindus come here on pilgrimage to worship Divine Mother, too. The trident is the symbol of Lord Siva. She told me that she has felt safe in the jungle ever since she saw the pawprint of a leopard, signifying the Goddess Durga or Parvati's protection. The hill was dotted with other caves, often occupied by Saivite saints, she said, for meditation and austerities.

Ujjen Chochi said that Devikota was like Sanjivani Hill, because rare medicinal plants grew here, including the plant that Lord Hanuman brought to revive Lakshmana when he was wounded during the epic battle of the Ramayana. The hilltop shrines, though, were Tibetan Buddhist, with a large new cement *lakhang* (shrine) under construction, with some workers from as far away as Nepal. In front of the shrine, silk scarves and flowers had been offered to oddly shaped stones, some held in a cement base. These were *terma*, or treasure stones. Terma are teachings concealed for future times by Guru Padmasambhava in different ways, often in rocks or caves. These can only be discovered by rare, adept "treasure revealers" (*terton*), who sometimes find the stone before the teaching is ripe to emerge.

Hearing some huffing and puffing, we saw a group of Tibetan students who had come from Tuting, jogging around the lakhang with some of the heavier stones in their arms. "Increases merit!" one called back over his shoulder, in English.

At Singa, the road ends, just a few miles from the border with China. From Singa, pilgrims may walk for several days to the three

holy mountains in the area: Padma Shri, Citta Puri and Riwo Tala. We came to know that a few years ago Adi people removed a large golden statue of Chenrezig that Tibetans had erected on one of the mountains. Interestingly, this incident occurred because of a subtle difference in how Tibetan Buddhists and Adi view the mountain, which both agree is sacred. For the Buddhists, the mountain is an auspicious dwelling place for an abstract divine being; for the Adi, the mountain itself is the divine being.

Selon Mello, 21, a college student at home for his winter break, explained that each mountain and river is an individual Deity, as unique as a person; its divinity can't be abstracted from its physical form. "The mountain is the Owner," he said. "The Owner of Itself. Don't we have to ask Its permission before we do something that affects it?"

This story brings to light an interaction repeated throughout the Himalayas. It is based on a narrative of how Guru Padmasambhava has "subdued" the local Deities of place. Then follows triumphal Tibetan Buddhist architecture that can cover entire hilltops with monumental statues, temples and monasteries.

Hinduism is local, and in these holy places, we saw small and simple Hindu shrines, mostly to Lord Siva, that seemed to be a part of the landscape without trying to dominate it, seeing Deity as immanent in, not in conflict with, the natural world.

Returning Downstream

Having reached the northernmost portion of the river in India, we headed back to our starting point at Dibrugarh to explore the immense river's southern reaches. A gateway

In the Upper Reaches is a Mix of Several Religions



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Adi Shakti Cave

(left to right) Gelong Medo and family in Tuting; old-style foot bridges like this are being replaced with more modern engineered suspension systems; a Hanuman temple on East Siang Highway; Ellen with guide Ujjen Chochi at the cave of Dorje Phagmo, also known as Adi Shakti and mother of Guru Padmasambhava; a Buddhist monastery above Mantok in the Reautala Mountains





stands on the highway between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, but it's hardly necessary. The landscape flattened almost immediately once we crossed back into Assam, the road dusty with fields alongside. Temples began to appear more frequently. Census data claims that less than a third of the population of Arunachal Pradesh identifies as Hindu, while in Assam it's closer to two thirds or more.

We stopped at a vivid Hanuman temple, to be greeted by Pooja Singh, who told us that her father-in-law had constructed the temple after being ordered to do so in a dream. He was a Bihari migrant to Assam who had worked as a healer, she said, using massage and ayurvedic medicines to cure the sick; but the real healing came from his devotion (bhakti) to Lord Hanuman, who bestows physical health and power on those who serve Him faithfully. Those he had cured still come from all over Assam to worship at the temple, converts not to a different religion, but to a Deity-focused Hinduism more typical of the rest of India.

Majuli Island

We were on our way to Majuli Island, in the middle of the Brahmaputra, where the river protects a distinctly Assamese form of Hinduism. At Nemati ghat, near the town of Jorhat, we inched our vehicle onto a motorized ferry crowded with two cars, lots of motorcycles, and more people than seemed possible. As we leaned against the railing, watching the water slip past, the man next to us explained that he belongs to one of the *sattras* (religious centers) on Majuli, one that preserves both wooden masks and illuminated manuscripts of Krishna's life story that are



centuries old. Sattras are intentional communities founded by the Assamese Vaishnavite saint Sankardeva, who started an egalitarian Hindu reform movement in the 16th century called Ekasarana. Some are celibate and others are family lineages, but they all focus on simple devotional worship of Krishna. The sattras and the *namghars*, community halls of worship in every village, emphasize the arts, especially religious dance-dramas. (See HINDUISM TODAY, July 2017 issue.)

Jyoti Sharma, our host on Majuli, had danced the role of Krishna for over a decade in his youth in these village plays. He said, "Krishna is all about emotion, about feeling, about love, about playfulness, like a little child. So our prayer is with art, singing and dancing. When they would paint my body blue, I would feel something inside myself very special."

Majuli Island is itself something very spe-

cial. It is the largest inhabited fresh-water river island in the world, a fluvial island made entirely of silt and sediment deposited by the Brahmaputra. It has 144 villages and 150,000 residents. The river's currents, velocity and volume are constantly changing; it snatches away a big bite of land from one shoreline, only to deposit it on another. Little sandbars and islets around Majuli appear and disappear from one year to the next. The island is less a fixed landform than a moment in the river's continuous act of creation. Despite the Indian government's efforts to stabilize the banks with sandbags and other measures, Majuli Island has eroded to less than half its size, from 480 square miles in the 19th century to less than 193 square miles today. Unpredictable but regular floods cover the roads, enter houses or wash them away entirely. Wouldn't people living near such a violent and mercurial force fear the



Brahmaputra and dread its moods?

We visited Begenati Sattr for a delicious vegetarian lunch, cooked almost entirely from produce grown in the sattr's fields. Farmer Ritu Katonia told us that since its founding in the 17th century, the sattr had been forced to move and rebuild twice, after floods not only obliterated its buildings but dissolved its land. But still, he loves and reveres the Brahmaputra as a Deity. "Brahmaputra is our Father, just like Siva," he explained. "He gives equally to everyone." The floods drop rich silt on the fields, making them so fertile they support an unusual diversity of organically grown crops and vegetables with no other inputs needed.

Tending the fields with love is part of his religious practice, the farmer continued. Even though the sattr's daily and yearly schedule is organized around the worship of Krishna, the members worship other Deities as well. "I say a prayer to Mother Earth at dawn every day. Earth is part of Lord Brahma's holy Creation (Srishti), and so is our Lord Brahmaputra. It is our duty to care."

Near Salmora, at the southern end of Majuli, we saw several mud kilns in which pots were being fired, and a little farther down the road, met a family of potters. Atul Bora told us the Brahmaputra's divinity infuses the clay dug from its banks. They offer puja to the river and keep a lamp burning while collecting clay, and the vessels they make—including *diyas*, lamps and yogurt-offering pots—are especially for temple use.

"People think we fear the floods, but actually, we love them," he said. "The floods are when Mahababu Brahmaputra, our Mighty Father Lord Brahmaputra, lavishes gifts on us. The flood brings whole trees and big fish that



we can sell for a lot of money. Wherever Our Lord washes over us, He renews our gardens and restocks our fishponds. If He should take our house, he has already helped us to get what we need to build another."

Another woman laughed when I asked if she was afraid when the river flooded her house. "Why should I be afraid of Our Lord? If the water rises up to my knees while I'm eating my rice, that's nice, I can just lower my hand to clean it! I don't even have to get up."

A community health worker, Jadu Moni Hazorika, reminded us that not only people depend upon Our Lord Brahmaputra—He supports whole communities of fish, birds and animals. Those living on outlying ephemeral islands made of silt deposits,

called *chapori*, are used to seeing river dolphins playing in the water, and herds of elephants and rhinos swimming from one island to another to graze. "We all pray to the river, He is a God," he said. "Not just people. Every living thing, praying in its own way."

Kaziranga

After we left Majuli on another ferry, our next stop was 62 miles downriver, at Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve—a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985, and home to the world's largest population of one-horned rhinoceros, along with tigers, elephants, wild water buffalo and great flocks of migratory birds. Here, extraordinary biodiversity flourishes on a floodplain created by the Brahma-

Visiting Majuli Island



(clockwise from above left) Krishna dances on Majuli Island; fishing is a main occupation of the local people; (foreground) pot making with a "slump bowl" and not a potter's wheel; (background) weaving on a simple hand loom; at the kiln; loading the ferry to Majuli Island; ritual prayers for deceased parents being done on Majuli Island by their son in traditional Assamese dress



ALL PHOTOS: THOMAS KELLY

Local Arts and Crafts





putra's restless wandering: 31 miles of the river's southern bank and more than 386 square miles of wetlands, grasslands for grazing and forest sustained by its annual floods.

We explored this part of the Brahmaputra on elephants, by jeep and by boat. Usually, one must strain to catch a glimpse of a rhinoceros; in Kaziranga, there were dozens in plain view at once, standing as placidly as cows, their heads down munching the rich grass.

We met two farmers on adjoining plots on the north bank of the river, at Golaghat-Bokakhat. One, Kiran Phukan, showed us the government-funded solar panels that drove his irrigation pump. The other, Imran Ali, waved his hand over extensive rice fields shimmering with water and vegetable plots; some he owns, others he leases. A mixed group of workers was planting watermelon seeds in sand-filled cups. He told us that growing food was a way to restore his community. "Boys are going far away to work at a low job for money. Religion is neglected, family is destroyed, boy loses his identity. Why not come home to farm, feed the whole family and sell some for money, too?" Floods fifteen feet deep fertilized the fields, he said, and continued, "Brahmaputra River makes every Assamese rich. I love my Brahmaputra, see, he is God, son of Brahma." Since Imran Ali's name indicated he was a Muslim, we found this a remarkable testament to how the river brings diverse communities together.

Healthy biodiversity and cultural diversity feed each other. Assam has been home to several Hindu reform movements. While we



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were returning from the farms, we passed a saintly old man with four bright green bottle gourds propped on a bench for sale. He was ninety years old. He turned out to be the father of Kiran Phukan, one of the farmers we'd met, and he led us to their simple home. Near the house was a separate little prayer house, which, inside, was spare to the point of severity, furnished just with a tiny altar with no icon, an offering lamp and a clock. He told us that he followed the Krishnaguru sect of Ekasarana Dharma, a more recent tributary branching off the headwaters of the Assamese Vaishnavite bhakti tradition started by Sankardeva and his disciple, Mahadab, on Majuli during the 16th century.

We sat with him in his prayer house in silence first, then as he began to chant "Jai Krishnaguru! Krishnaguru Prabhu, Krishnaguru, Krishnaguru, Jai Krishnaguru!" He explained that God is inside each person, to be met through silent meditation timed by the

clock, twice a day. In the prayer house, we bow to one another, in recognition of the divinity we all embody.

Siva and Shakti Everywhere

Throughout our journey, people in India's Northeast saw the pairing of Siva and Shakti manifested in the natural world, even in the absence of temples. The many major temples that do exist are almost all on the banks of the Brahmaputra. One lovely example we heard about is an ancient shrine built so that the river washes the Lingam inside during the monsoon, so that the son of Brahma worships Lord Siva when the Brahmaputra's waters rise.

There's a long story in Assam of a bloody battle between Siva and Krishna at Tezpur, which ends amicably with the two Gods declaring the whole thing to have been a misunderstanding. In that story, the son of Brahma is present, but doesn't take sides. We ended our Brahmaputra journey with a trip to two major Siva/Shakti temples in Guwahati.

The Umananda temple sits on a rocky outcropping known as Peacock Island in the middle of the Brahmaputra. As we got off the ferry, we met a Nepali family who told us this is the place where Lord Siva and His consort, the Goddess Parvati, were married. Parvati is a form of Devi/Durga and the reincarnation of Siva's first wife, Sati Devi. For many Hindus, Siva and Parvati, with Their sons Lord Ganesha and Karttikeya model the perfect family.

At dawn on our last morning, we descended into the inner sanctum of the Kamakhya Temple, which overlooks the river at a Shakti Peeth, or female power spot, where a piece of



Sati Devi's body dropped to earth. Out of 51 Shakti Peeths in India, Kamakhya is said to be one of the four most powerful. A seeping spring wells up in a dark cave; priests told us that one sip can manifest your heart's deepest wish. But Kamakhya's most powerful blessings are conveyed by the Brahmaputra. Once each year, during the full moon of June/July, pilgrims gather to bathe at the place where water from the spring flows into the Brahmaputra.

We had followed the Brahmaputra from Adi Shakti's unadorned cave to an elaborate temple complex built over Her spring; from slim headwaters to one of the mightiest rivers in South Asia, and indeed the world. Only the Ganges and Indus rival its cultural and ecological importance, but the Brahmaputra is the widest, the deepest and the most forceful.

Perhaps that is why everyone we talked with mentioned that the Brahmaputra is one of only two male rivers in India (nobody could remember the other one; apparently a likely candidate is the Son River, a tributary of the Ganga). When I asked why this river is male, it was because He behaves like a king or a landlord—lavish in generosity, unpredictable, violent in anger; creative and destructive by equal measure. People revere the river as a God because He cannot be controlled; His agency exceeds that of humans. They relate to Him as water both in its material aspects—drinking, irrigation, flooding, fertilizing—and its spiritual aspects—a force larger than themselves on which they are utterly dependent.

"Brahmaputra is the Lord of this land," Atul Bora, the devout potter on Majuli, said. Despite the benefits brought by hydroelectric-

ity, damming the river could have unforeseen consequences because "we should never try to control our Lord; He is the boss (*malik*) of us, not puny humans the boss of Him, and only when we recognize that will we be kept safe."

"He knows each one of us personally, what we are thinking," Atul continued. Up in Pemako, the Rinpoche said, "We must cultivate our hearts, to learn from rivers. If we learn to listen, the river can bestow religious teachings or even give us a mantra. Each river is an individual."

The people we met along the Brahmaputra and its headwaters live as part of a spiritual ecosystem. For them, the river's individual

self is composed of many selves, a braided community of sentient water, forests, Deities, fish, animals, people, plants and insects who all contribute to a greater consciousness (Brahman), a sense of the self as being more than the individual self (atman). This expanded view of self could model a way out of the alienation brought about by an extractive world view, in which the river is no longer alive but a commodity.

Jadu Moni Hazorika, the Majuli Island community health worker, said "Brahmaputra weaves all the different kinds of people along His way into one. All of us share a single heart—our Lord Brahmaputra."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Thomas Kelly is a freelance photojournalist who has lived in the Himalayas for four decades. Journeying seven times to Mount Kailash, he visually chronicles the Brahmaputra, Indus, Karnali and Sutlej, honoring rivers as divine beings and the Wisdom Keepers living in communion with them, amid rapidly transforming traditions globally today. www.thomasluskellyphotos.com



Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve



The Great Shakti Peeth of Kamakhya Temple

(clockwise from upper left) Majuli Island during low river flow; the famed Kamakhya Temple for Shakti; in Kaziranga, this old farmer meditates twice daily as a member of the Vaisnavite Krishnaguru reform movement; elephants for rides in the Kaziranga National Park; twilight on the lower Siang



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HISTORY

Afghanistan's Hindu Antiquity

Sanatana Dharma flourished for millennia before Arab and Persian invasions

BY INDERJEET SINGH, UK

WHEN YOUNG MANU LAL FLED MOUNTAINOUS Afghanistan in an exodus in the early 1990s and took refuge in the US, it was with a heavy heart. Amidst rapidly escalating internal war after the Soviet invasion ended, he—and most of his Hindu and Sikh brethren—reluctantly left behind a millennia-old presence of Hinduism and Sikhism that was nearing extinction. “Even in a small town like Kandahar, we had 5,000 Hindus, and many beautiful temples,” he told HINDUISM TODAY at the time. “There were temples to Shiv Parvati, Devi Mata, Satyanarayan and also many gurdwaras. There were four big gurdwaras which even people from India came to see.”

Most people are only familiar with Afghanistan as an Islamic nation, so in this article I trace some of the documented history of Hindus in Afghanistan from the 7th century ce until today. It also serves as a rebuttal to those who contend that the British brought Hindus into the country for the first time in the 19th century.

The mighty river Indus and its tributaries flow in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Tibet. The ancient Greeks called it Indos, and the land of Indos was known in Latin as India. In South Asian languages the river is called Sindhu (or Sindh). The neighboring Persian pronunciation replaced “S” with “H” and called the land Hind, eventually length-

ening to Hindustan. In the Indus River basin, there are three major western tributaries—Kabul, Kurram and Gomal—that flow from Afghanistan. In ancient times this region was deemed as part of India, as Indus was synonymous with India. Pakhtas are mentioned as a frontier tribe in the *Rig Veda*, the oldest Hindu treatise, and they are usually identified with the Pashtun (or Pakhtun) ethnic group of Afghanistan.

Sadly, ancient Hindus and South Asians (including Afghans) did not write their history, so we rely on the accounts of others for the earliest centuries.

The Earliest Period

The great traveler Hiuen Tsang left China in 629ce and wrote that he reached India when he entered Nangarhar province of present-day Afghanistan. He stated that the ruler of Kapisa (part of Kabulistan) was a Kshatriya.

The Zunbil dynasty resisted invasions from Arabs and Persians from the west for almost 200 years until 873ce. They fought and at times used diplomacy against their adversaries. Professor Andre Wink (1991) in his book *Al-Hind, the Making of the Indo-Islamic World: Vol 1*, states that the dynasty got its name from the famous temple of the solar Deity Zun, situated on top of a sacred mountain in Zamindawar (“Land of the Justice Giver”) in the present-day Helmand province. The religion of Zun was primarily

Hindu, not Buddhist or Zoroastrian. He adds that there may be a link between Zun and the Deity Sharva—associated with a fierce form of God Siva—in Kafiristan (now known as Nuristan).

The excavation of statues of Deities from ancient archaeological sites proves that Hindus resided in these regions for centuries. A statue of Sri Ganesh dated to the fourth century ce was found in the 1960s at Sankar Dhar, 30 miles north of Kabul. This corresponds to the Kidarites dynasty, who ruled this region and were contemporaries of the Gupta dynasty in India. Three centuries later, when Hiuen Tsang visited the area, he mentioned the worship of an elephant God.

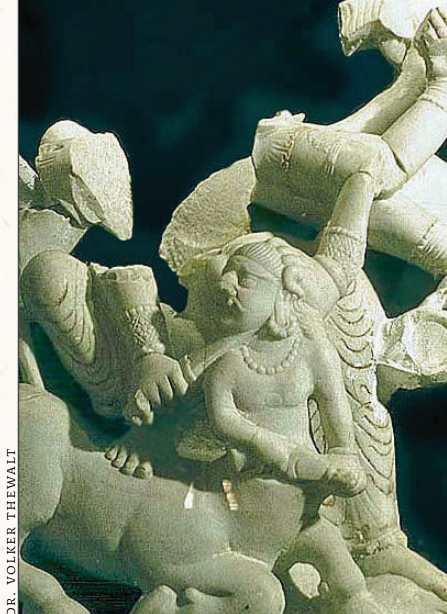
Another image of Ganesh was found in Gardez by an Italian archaeology team in the 1960s. The marble statue is intact, except for broken forearms, and is 24 inches high by 14 inches wide. The inscription in the Proto-Brahmi script at the base of the statue states that this “great and beautiful image of Mahavinayaka” was consecrated by the Turk Shahi King Khingala, who ruled Kabulistan in the late 8th centuryce.

The 10th Century

The book *Hudud al-Alam* gives us an indication of the Hindu presence alongside Islam at this stage. The anonymous geographical work, which means “Regions of the World,” was compiled in 982–83ce, dedicated to a



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Muslim ruler in what is now northern Afghanistan. The work briefly summarized many cities in Afghanistan, some with a non-Muslim majority at that time. Some excerpts below:

The king of Ninhar (in modern Nangarhar province) “makes a show of Islam” and had over thirty wives that included Muslims, Afghans and Hindus. The people worshiped Deities and there were three large murtis in Ninhar.

Kandahar is described as a pleasant, large town, with numerous murtis of gold and silver, where hermits and Brahmins resided. Laghman was a town situated on a river bank and described as an “Emporium of Hindustan” and residence for merchants. It had temples to Deities.

Wahind (in present-day Pakistan) was the capital city of Jayapala, the Hindu Shahi ruler, and the town had few Muslims. Merchandise from Hindustan such as musk and precious things regularly came to this city.

Kabul city had a solid fort that was known for its strength. The inhabitants were Muslims and Indians (Hindus), and there were temples with Deities in the city. The ruler of Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh, India) made a pilgrimage to the temples of Kabul.

Hindu Shahi Dynasty

Alberuni, the great scholar and writer of the book *Tarikh al Hind* (History of India) accompanied Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi to India, who ruled the Ghaznavi Empire from 998–1030. To distinguish the ruling dynasty of Kabulistan and Punjab from the previous Turk Shahi dynasty (predominantly Buddhist), Alberuni named them Hindu Shahis. That dynasty ruled from 873 to 1026. The neighboring Ghaznavi commanders gained strength, capturing Kabulistan in 986 and Peshawar in 1001. They allowed Hindus to live within the Sultan’s empire as *dhimmi* (protected people) with some restrictions



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and obligatory payment of the *Jizya* tax.

The book *Tarikh-i-Sabuktigin*, by Abul Fazl al-Baihaki, refers to Hindus working in responsible positions under the Ghaznavi rulers in their capital Ghazni. Baihaki writes that fifty days after the death of Sultan Mahmud, his son and successor Masud dispatched Sewand Rai, a Hindu chief with a large Hindu cavalry, to pursue the nobles who were supporting his rebel brother for the throne of Ghazni. In the subsequent battle, Sewand Rai and the majority of his troops perished, but they managed to inflict heavy losses upon their opponents. Five years later, Tilak, son of Jai Sen, was the commander of Hindu troops in the service of Sultan Masud. He was sent to chastise the rebel chief Ahmad Nialtigin. Tilak chased the rebels and managed to capture thousands of them.

Alberuni also wrote that Hindu physicians

were employed by the Ghaznavi rulers. For instance, when the chief of Gardez was suffering from chronic piles, their Muslim physician, despite using several medicines, was unable to cure it, but a Hindu physician was able to effect a cure using an Indian aconite (buttercup plant).

The 13th through 15th Centuries

The Mongols under Genghis Khan formed one of the biggest empires in the Middle Ages and by 1220 ce had captured most of Afghanistan. Although Hindus are not specifically mentioned in historical accounts of this time, based on the tolerant rule of the Mongols, one can assume that Hindus survived, if not flourished, in this period.

Timur the Lame (1336–1405) was one of the greatest conquerors and founder of the Timurid Empire which included Afghanistan, Persia and Central Asia. Persian accounts mention many military expeditions by Timur made against the Jat country (or Turkestan) where the majority of the population were infidels and deity worshipers. The British translators seem to suggest that they were Jats of India, hence Hindus.

Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire, recorded the old temple of Gor Hatri (in old Peshawar, which still exists) in his autobiography *Baburnama*. He writes about the place which was considered holy by the Hindu ascetics “who came from long distances for pilgrimage and got their head and beards shaved.” *Babur* refers to Kabul city as an excellent trading center and Hindustan’s own market. He mentions that almost 8,000–10,000 horses would come to the city along with 15,000–20,000 caravans from Hindustan with household stuff, slaves, white cloth, refined sugar candy, common sugar and aromatic roots.

The 16th and 17th Centuries

In 1558, Anthony Jenkinson visited Bukhara (now in Uzbekistan but part of then



AFGHAN HINDU SOCIETY, LONDON

Khurasan), writing that the city was an annual resort of merchants, to which great caravans from India, Persia, Balkh, Russia and other countries routinely arrived. Indians brought dye, cotton and coarse linen to Bukhara and took away silk, red hides (for leather), horses and slaves.

After winning the battle of Panipat in 1526 against the Lodi dynasty (which incidentally was Pashtun), Babur joined Kabulistan with Northern India. For the next two hundred years (until 1738) eastern Afghanistan—including Jalalabad, Ghazni and Kabul—remained part of Mughal India. Throughout this period, European travelers visited Isfahan and Delhi/Agra, which were the capitals of the Persian and Mughal Empires, respectively. They all mention Hindu traders and merchants doing brisk business in Isfahan and other major cities of Persia.

Following the visit of Guru Nanak—founder of Sikhism—to Afghanistan around 1521, some Hindus became his followers and came to be known as Nanakpanthis. Sikh manuscripts *Mahima Prakash Vartak* and *Gurbilas Padshahi Chhevee*, written in the first half of the 18th century, record the visit of Nanakpanthis from Kabul and Peshawar to Punjab to pay their respects to the Sikh gurus.

The 18th Century

Ahmad Shah Durrani (ruling from 1747–1772) is considered a national hero in the country. He combined various tribes and regions and officially named the country Afghanistan. He is infamous in India, as he invaded North India nine times during his reign. He appointed Kabuli Mal, a Hindu from Kandahar, to govern Lahore from 1762–

1764. Sikhs in Punjab were proving to be a headache for Durrani rule and Ahmad Shah may have thought that a Hindu at the helm of affairs would be better suited to forge a diplomatic solution with the Sikhs who were defending their homeland.

George Forster (1752–1791) was a traveler, writer and civil servant of the East India Company. He traveled from Bengal to England in 1782–83 disguised as a Muslim merchant. He writes that the Hindus of Kabul were ensured of “security of person and property” as a Hindu (unnamed) controlled the revenue of the Timur Shah, the ruler of Afghanistan, and was favored by him. Forster mentions a helpful Hindu who pleaded on his behalf to the Afghans who were harassing him at “Dickah,” a small village on the southern bank of the Kabul River. In addition, he writes about the presence of Hindus in major towns and cities of Afghanistan.

The 19th to mid-20th Century

In 1808, Mountstuart Elphinstone was sent to Afghanistan by the British East India Company to study and possibly make an alliance, lest the Russians decide to invade the subcontinent. There is a wealth of information on Hindus in the country in the accounts and travelogues of Mohan Lal, Alexander Burnes, Arthur Conolly, G.T. Vigne and Charles Masson among many others.

Mohan Lal visited the Gorakhnath Temple in Jalalabad around 1834, which still exists. He writes that there were 2,000 Hindus in Kabul and “many of them are the first inhabitants of Kabul.” Alexander Burnes, who traveled along with Mohan Lal, mentioned two types of Hindus in Kabul: those who are mer-

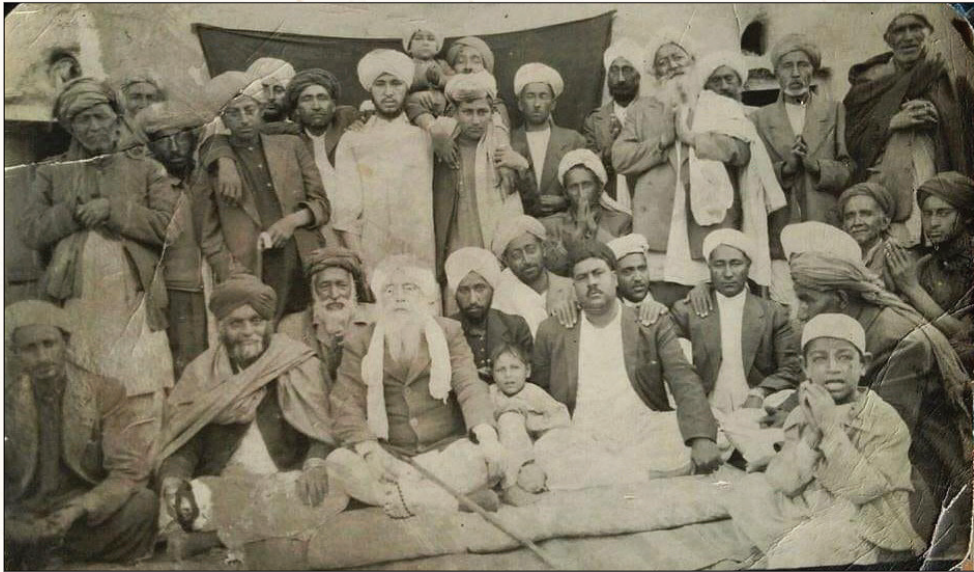
Tight-knit communities: (clockwise from above) *Afghan diaspora gathers for satsang at the Asamai Hindu Temple in London, 2013; Hindu and Sikh homeopathic doctors in Khogyani, Nangarhar, Afghanistan, 1965; author Inderjeet Singh's book on Afghan history*

chants, coming to the country without families and living in caravanserais, and Hindus who live in tall houses (signifying wealth) with large families.

Afghan Hindus, especially those in the Kabul region, were an enterprising lot and later attained modern education. There were doctors, professors, engineers and pharmacists among them. Until 1990, all hospitals in major cities had their share of Hindu and Sikh doctors. In modern times, Diwan Niranjana Das held an important ministerial position during the reign of Amir Habibullah Khan (ruling 1901–1919) and his son King Amanullah Khan (1919–1929). The Hindus and Sikhs were part of the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly of the Tribal Elders) and Parliament until very recently. Eminent Sikh historian Ganda Singh visited Afghanistan in 1951 and wrote in his travelogue that there were a few Hindus here who have been living in Kabul since the olden times, even before the advent of Islam, and were racially pure Afghans.

Last Several Decades

In the 1970s the government of Afghanistan became very liberal and most mandirs were rebuilt and renovated by Afghan Hindus. Sadly, the photos of the mandirs before 1970 are lost, unless an Afghan Hindu has



RAM KISHAN

them in a private collection. The mandirs in Afghanistan do not have a *shikhara*, the rising tower found in the architecture of North Indian temples. From the outside, they look like a house or a building. The mandirs are spacious and carpeted, unlike those in India, as winters are very harsh in Afghanistan.

India Today reported in 1989 that there were 50,000–odd Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan. The Sikh population overtook Hindus only in the 1970s when Sahajdharis (those who believe in Sikh gurus and *Guru Granth Sahib* but do not keep unshaven hair) in Kabul region became Khalsa Sikhs.

Afghanistan was conservative but tolerant during the reign of Amanullah Khan and Zahir Shah till the 1980s. The struggle of Mujaheddin (freedom fighters) against the Russian occupation (1979–89) was supported by the USA, Pakistan and other allies. This was the era of the Cold War, and as India was very friendly with the Soviet Union (Russia), the Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan were dubbed as Indians, infidels and traitors.

The Human Rights Watch Report, *Blood-Stained Hands*, focuses on April 1992 to March 1993 and calls it “The Battle for Kabul,” stating that by May 30, 1992, civil war broke out between various factions of Mujaheddin. A major part of Kabul was destroyed, and this civil war led to tens of thousands of civilian deaths and injuries and caused hundreds of thousands to flee Kabul to safer areas. During the chaos, the houses of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus were looted and a few people were killed. To make matters worse, on December 6, 1992, the Babri Masjid in India, built in the 16th century on the site of a famous Hindu temple, was demolished. This gave the fundamentalists an excuse to loot, harass and in a few cases kill, Sikhs and Hindus who were “Indians” in their eyes.

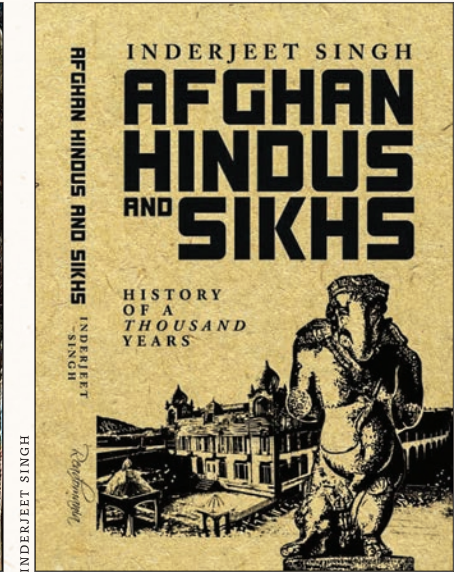
The Indian Embassy in Kabul stated that between 1992–94, almost 75,000 Indian visas were issued. According to London-based historian Dr. Joginder Singh Tej Khurana, around 50,000 people—out of a total popu-

lation of 60,000 to 65,000 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus—left Afghanistan. Some men left their families in India and came back to sell their houses or continued to work in Afghanistan for a few months of the year. Almost 10,000, mostly Afghan Sikhs, decided to remain in the country. However, by the end of 2001, when the first Taliban government was replaced, this number had dropped to 3,000. Hindus and Sikhs were now confined to only three cities: Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni. There were about 40 mandirs in Afghanistan till the early 1990s. The vast majority of mandirs (and gurdwaras), if not all, are now under illegal occupation by the miscreants from the majority community. By late 2022, Hindus and Sikhs had reduced to 40–80 people, including only 15 Hindus.

The remaining Hindus and Sikhs were mostly caretakers of temples in Kabul and a few other provinces. Despite the Taliban’s more positive public messaging after returning to power in 2021, as of late 2024 only a few individuals remained due to new, ongoing difficulties, based on Indian Parliamentary statements and European Union assessments. In 2025 over two million Afghans were deported from Iran and Pakistan back to Afghanistan, and it is currently unknown if any of them are Hindus or Sikhs.

Present & Future of the Heritage

On a positive note, Manjeet Singh Lamba, a representative of the Hindu and Sikh community in Afghanistan, told *Pajhwok Afghan News* in August 2025 that living conditions are now “better and safer than in the past.” He applauded the Islamic Emirate’s Ministry of Justice for publicly supporting restitution of their usurped properties, and stated that a number of Hindus have returned to pursue this and invest in the country. Lamba, who himself is among those who returned from India, says that currently around 100 Hindus and Sikhs



INDERJEET SINGH

live in Afghanistan, and if India resolves their visa issues, more families will return to the country. According to him, Hindus living in Afghanistan celebrated Vaisakhi Festival 2025 in Kabul, Nangarhar and several other provinces in a secure environment.

According to Dr. Khurana, there are about 100,000 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus around the world and 40% of them are Hindus. The Afghan Hindu diaspora has built mandirs in London, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and the USA. The largest community is in Germany where there are about 3,000 to 3,500 Hindu families. Frankfurt-based Jagannath Gardezi informed me that there are eight mandirs in Germany run by Afghan Hindus: two in Cologne, two in Hamburg, and one each in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Kassel and Essen.

Like all South Asian people who migrated to the above countries, the worry that the new generation is losing their traditional language is profound. In Afghanistan, the Hindus would cover their heads in the mandirs. However, the new generation is increasingly questioning it, as it does not seem to be an essential tenet of the wider Hindu religion. On the positive side, Afghan Hindus are now part of the global community and have left old practices of marriage among cousins (a necessity due to low numbers). Similarly, they are now discarding aversion to matrimony based on caste and regionalism, which existed in Afghanistan. It is hoped that the new generation will take an interest in the past and embrace their history and heritage in the coming years.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Inderjeet Singh, based in Nottingham, UK, wrote the book *Afghan Hindus & Sikhs: History of a Thousand Years*. He is passionate about Punjab and Sikh history.



Afghanistan Hindus Struggle to Persist

Afghan Hindu refugee Sena Pati Lund reflects on how the dwindling Hindu and Sikh community adapted to mounting pressures in their homeland

By RUTVIJ HOLAY, CALIFORNIA

EVEN AFTER CENTURIES OF ISLAMIC rule and conversion attempts, there were still thousands of Hindus in Afghanistan by the late 20th century, some of whom had embraced the teachings of Guru Nanak and become Sikhs. While in the villages there were incidents of murder and torture, in the city the community was generally well-respected and well-educated. In 2023, I interviewed historian and Hindu refugee Sena Pati Lund, who was born in Kabul and now lives in New York. “Hindus and Sikhs have always felt connected to Afghanistan,” he reminisced. “The Muslim community considered the Hindus and Sikhs as the pride of the community. They trusted them and allowed them to participate in all aspects of life, including banking, medicine and business.” This is because educated Muslims knew that Hindus were the original inhabitants of the land, having lived there for at least 5,000 years.

Aside from the ancient greats like Panini and King Anandapala, many notable Afghan Hindus came from the modern era. Atma Ram, for example, was a Hindu minister who was said to have dominated trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia in the mid-1900s, while Sham Lal Bhatija was the economic advisor for President Ashraf Ghani in the late 2010s.

Effects of the Exodus

As the Soviet Union invaded in 1979, many educated people, Hindus and Muslims alike, left, fearing the political instability that was to follow. As a result of this loss, Afghanistan was left with mainly fundamentalist Muslims. They lacked their educated religious brethren’s respect for their Hindu neighbors, thus leaving the community in a more vulnerable position.

As the political situation worsened, so did the condition of Hindus in the nation, with the majority of them leaving in the 80s and 90s. As Lund put it, “Our first choice was to go to our religious motherland, India. However, India was not very welcoming at the time, so even though 90% of Afghan Hindus went to India, 90% of that group ended up going to Europe or the US.”

A small minority chose to stay. Some were

families, but many were businessmen who, according to Lund, “were simply more comfortable selling their wares in a country and language that they knew, rather than having to start over in a foreign land.” It was these Hindus that suffered under Taliban rule.

After the Taliban’s first takeover in 1996, they made Hindus wear a yellow armband, much like Jews had to wear the Star of David



FACEBOOK/AFGHANSIKHSANDHINDUS (UPSCALED BY AI)

in Nazi Germany. The law drew worldwide condemnation, with many lawmakers, including in the US Congress, wearing yellow badges with the inscription “I am a Hindu” and passing H.R. 145, condemning the Taliban for its actions against Hindus. While the law on yellow armbands was the only rule publicly announced, Lund said, “we [Hindus] were not allowed to perform religious rituals or to send our kids to school. Even though, in the past, our community was famous for its education, I don’t know of a single Hindu or Sikh who has graduated in a long time.”

Yet, throughout the takeover and beyond the Taliban’s toppling in 2001, this tiny population was somehow able to remain Hindu. When I asked how they did it, Lund shared multiple factors. “During that time, people were just trying to protect themselves, and

didn’t think it was that important for their kids to go to schools. All that mattered was saving them, protecting them and their Hindu culture, and so they weren’t sent to colleges or universities even after 2001.”

Also key were relationships that had been forged. In Lund’s words, “We stuck close to each other. We had family relations living together, businesses together and religious practices together. Of course, that isn’t to say people didn’t convert—there were both willing and forced conversions, but those things always happen in this part of the world. For a majority of us, our community kept us and our culture strong.”

The Temple as Refuge

As of the early 2020s, there were still a few temples left in Afghanistan. The most notable one, where the remaining tiny community came together—much like Indian Hindus may visit Varanasi—is the Asamai Temple in Kabul, home to Asha Mai, a local form of Durga, and an Akhand Jyoti (eternal flame) which has been kept lit for the past 4,000 years. The mandir, until December of 2021, still ran its own Facebook page, and in many ways was similar to any mandir in North India. The language spoken was a mix of Hindi, Punjabi and Farsi, with regular singing of “Om Jai Jagadish Hare” at satsangs. Devotees were dressed much like Muslim Afghans, showing the connectivity to the land that Lund referred to.

Lund explained there was a school attached to the side of the temple, in which religious texts were taught. In Kabul, these texts were taught in Hindi so children could have a deeper connection with their Hindu brethren. However, he continued, “In other cities, like Jalalabad, Khost and Kandahar, Hindu religious books were written in local languages, so that became the medium of instruction. Due to this, a lot of people grew up being Hindus, but not knowing Hindi or Sanskrit at all.”

Local dialects aside, Afghan Hinduism has lost many of its distinguishing factors. Lund explained, “Since we grew up as a minority, our activities were defensive in nature, try-



HAMID REZA RAHMANI



YOUTUBE/DEEPANSHU SANGWAN

Steadfast: (clockwise from above) Kabul city, with the sacred Asamai mountain on the right as backdrop; Priest Rajesh Kumar, right, next to his Mahabeer Siva Temple in Kabul, 2025; Sena Pati Lund speaks at Asamai Mandir in Hicksville, New York in 2021

ing to simply survive and practice our faith.” In fact, Lund argues that what distinguished Afghan Hindus from some other Hindus was their openness to other faiths. Due to the geographical location of Afghanistan, there was a heavy Sikh influence on Hinduism. Inter-marriage, mixed dwellings—many Hindus and Sikhs moved into local temples and gurdwaras for shelter following the Taliban takeovers—and even mixed prayers were not uncommon. “We would do our prayers, and we would also have our *Guru Granth Sahib* text. We never thought of Sikhism as a different religion, and they never thought of Hinduism as different. We were fully interconnected.”

Looking at the current situation in India, where Hindus and Sikhs have become divided to the point that many Punjabis will take offense to being mistaken for a follower of the other religion, there is a certain wisdom in Lund’s words. In the eyes of other faiths, as seen in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there is no

difference between a Hindu and a Sikh, or a Buddhist or a Jain, for that matter—as we are all *kafirs*, non-Muslims. If Afghan dharmis had refused to accept this, chances are they would have been unable to survive, and only because they chose to unite in their commitment to following a dharmic path, were they able to pass on their traditions to their children despite centuries of Islamic rule.

The Early 2020s

Interestingly enough, according to Lund, this community bond was left alone by the Taliban after its resurgence in 2021. Granted, even their unity may not be enough to keep Hinduism alive in Afghanistan. The second Taliban takeover caused many more Afghans to flee. Only one Hindu priest, Rajesh Kumar, chose to remain. Lund explained how “Initially, the Hindus there were a little skeptical. Six hundred people left, and the rest [around 100] assembled in a Gurdwara. Given what

had happened the last time the Taliban was in power, we were not sure how they were going to react. Yet, till today there has been no confrontation. The Taliban has said that Afghan Sikhs and Hindus are the original people of Afghanistan, and hence will be allowed to do whatever they want.”

Indian travel vlogger Deepanshu Sangwan visited Afghanistan in November 2025 and was able to meet priest Rajesh Kumar at the historic Mahabeer Siva Temple he maintains in Shor Bazaar, Kabul. The entire temple was recently clad in Afghan marble, a significant upgrade. Apple trees, fig trees and grapevines are cultivated around the main building. Rajesh Kumar, whose family currently lives in India as refugees, said he stayed because “This is my motherland.” He visits his family annually. He echoed Lund’s comments that the situation for Hindus has greatly improved under the latest Taliban government. He explained that his temple is funded by 18 shops it owns in the surrounding bazaar. Rajesh told Deepanshu that there are currently only 20 Hindus and Sikhs living in all of Afghanistan. Deepanshu’s vlog of this temple visit, titled “Last Hindus of Afghanistan—Life of Hindus under Taliban Rule,” can be found at his YouTube channel, called Nomadic Indian. Since the information flow out of Afghanistan is sparse, the situation could have changed since November without our knowledge.

THE POET SAINT TAYUMANAVAR

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

The Mystic Songs, Life and Profound Philosophy of a Tamil Sage



Main text by Dr. B. Natarajan • Art by Suresh Muthukulam

Decades ago, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, the founder of HINDUISM TODAY, was introduced to Dr. B. Natarajan, an economist, writer and scholar of Saiva Siddhanta, while traveling through Tamil Nadu. Dr. Natarajan had spent years translating the poems of Tayumanavar into English. In time they grew close, and Dr. Natarajan gifted his work to the Satguru from Hawaii, knowing it would be shared with the world. For the past three years, Subramuniyaswami's monks have been preparing an illustrated book of the saint's 1,452 songs. That book, called *Tayumanavar's Songs to Siva*, is excerpted here. We also recorded all the songs, sung by an odhuvar. (They can be listened to here: nall.ai/tayumanavarsongsaudio). We begin with Dr. Natarajan's first encounter with these marvelous songs.

The world was my open book, and inner quest my deep study. "Who am I in the vastness of cosmic phenomena? The mystery car of time takes me round the changeful seasons; destiny leads the play of life, blindfolding me in self-oblivion. Who am I? What am I? Whence am I? What is beyond the entry and exit in this amphitheater of existence? Who feels in the senses and thinks in the mind and dreams in my fancy?" Such were my reflections during my school days. I kept aloof from home, society and noisy crowds, taking delight in inner communion. Home and school resented my dreamy mood and crazy solitude. One day when I was treated harshly by my kith and kin, I ran for refuge to the temple and there hugged the feet of God, surrendering my life into the hands of Divine Grace. "O Grace, I take refuge at Your feet. Lead me to light from this dark vale of tears. Reveal to me the mystery of life and its mission. Keep me here to fulfill that mission, and call me back to be with You." Sobbing in a frenzy of spontaneous fervor, I felt a warm current traversing my heart and brain and a descent from above which continues to this day. I was reborn in the Grace and could now understand the meaning of life and the language of the soul. I sat in a dark corner of the temple, forgetting body and world, when a song attracted me to the lotus tank nearby. There, in the bright moonlight, some monks were singing together a song in Tamil that touched my soul. "The Silent One possessed me in silence and poured into me a speechless word that was the seed of wisdom. That word, O friend, had a magic effect on my life. It hushed up the mind and opened my heart to the silent embrace of the Divine." So on went the song which brought me peace and joy. I learned from the monks the song, and for the first time came to know about its author, Sage Tayumanavar. I secured a copy of his works and treasured it in my bosom. The hymns of Sage Tayumanavar became the guiding light of my life.

Worshipful forms: *The songs of Tayumanavar primarily worship Siva as Father, Mother and Vastness. Here the poet holds his hands aloft to worship the immensity depicted by the Sivalingam, surrounded by unimaginably vast space. Many of the songs are addressed to the green parrot held by Goddess Shakti, the parrot being a traditional channel to the Divine, one to take messages to the Gods.*



I still believe that Divine Grace gave a silent friend to my pilgrim soul. These hymns removed my gloom and solved my mental problems. They unraveled the riddle of existence. Each line was a message, and each message a vision of Truth. Each Truth was a spark of intuition, and each intuition had a transforming force.

The style of Tayumanavar was limpid, simple, straight, bright, profound and sweet. It flowed from the abundance of the soul's delight in rapturous union with the Beloved. Every hymn is a gem of divinity—an enchanting flute-voice of the soul that touches all souls. The

poet was the song, and the song the poet. This is the message of the Seer-Poet:

The unique One pervades all beings. All are one in That. It is the Life of lives, the One that moves in many names and forms. It is beyond the mental conceptions of caste, creed and religion. Ascetic or householder, all have a right to live in its consciousness. Come collectively to enjoy the bliss of life in the Divine Grace. Call with deep love; the Grace shall pour itself from above. Now let us see the evolution of Tayumanavar's life toward divinity.

A DEVOTIONAL PORTRAIT OF TAYUMANAVAR'S LIFE

By Dr. B. Natarajan, 1978

The Rock Temple at Trisirapuram (modern-day Tiruchirapalli) is a marvel of Indian architecture. It enshrines the image of Siva as the God of Motherly Love, Sri Tayumanavar—the poet-saint's namesake. The temple is busy with crowds of devotees singing devotional songs and dancing in ecstasy. Among them, we see a brilliant boy, fair in color, tall in stature, with phosphorescent eyes beaming with grace and rays of knowledge. The boy contemplates upon the Divine for a while and then leaves the crowd. He quickly climbs the many steps to the topmost temple on the hill. There Ganesha stands. The boy sits self-immersed, meditates a while, and then sings: "Rare is human birth. While yet I live on this earth, in this body,

with heart and soul, I must revel in the ecstasy of Divine Grace."

The boy seeks a spiritual teacher to initiate him in the secret of the divine art. He stands again before Lord Tayumanavar and pours out his soul's aspirations into songs. He becomes silent in meditation, tears gushing out of his eyes in pearl drops of ecstasy.

The Pious Parents

A tall, stately man comes in haste. He looks here and there and catches hold of the boy, saying, "Come home; how long are you to be here? Come!" That is his father, Kediliappa. This saintly boy is our Tayumanavar. He was named after the Deity of the Rock Temple.

சுந்தர இரு

Be Still

சுந்தர இரு

Be Still

King's accountant: *Tayumanavar, carrying royal account books, walks barefoot to the palace, where King Chokkanatha Nayak has appointed him overseer of the treasury. Days later, two men examine the footprints he left in the sand, astonished to find they have not disappeared as one would expect. They take it as a miraculous happening. Above, Siva uses His trishula to row a divine Moon Boat through the heavens, watching the events below. On the left, a family of toddy tappers walk the aerial ropes between palmyra palm trees, gathering the nectar for making jaggery and toddy. Below, a woman sells the palm nuts.*

Kediliappa Pillai, a Chola Vellala, was an administrative officer of the Nayak Kingdom. He originally lived at Vedaranyam, a famous pilgrim center, where he was the trustee of the local temple. He was a learned man, high in intellect and wide in heart. His wife, Gajavalli, was a pious lady humming devotional songs while attending to housekeeping. Their home was surrounded by a divine aureole. His elder brother, Vedaranyam, a great scholar well placed in life, had not been blessed by children. Kediliappa gave his own boy, Siva Chidambaram, in adoption to the brother. The brother's face glowed with joy and there was sunlight again in his life.

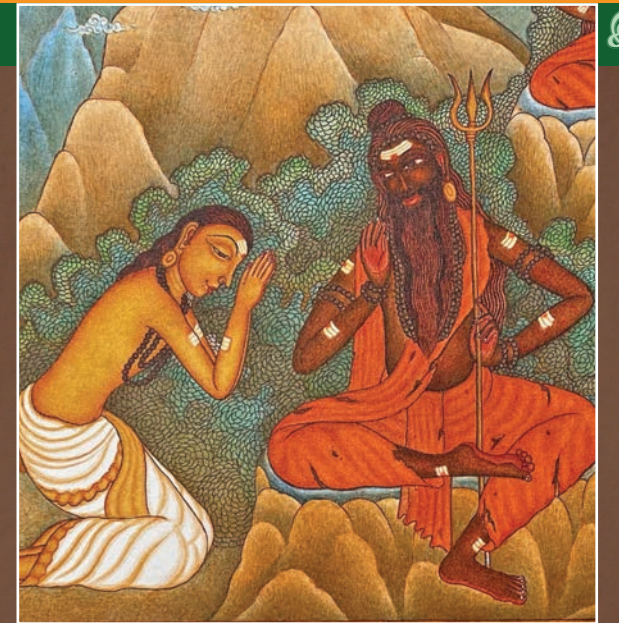
The King's Favor

Those were days of the Nayak kings. The Pandya dynasty had declined. The Nayak chiefs of Vijayanagar ruled the Madurai Kingdom (1559–1736). Visvanatha, Tirumalai and Mangammal were noteworthy rulers of Madurai, great patrons of art and poetry. The grandson of Mangammal was Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha. He set up his residence at Trisirapuram. He was a pious man, but not a statesman. He ruled for twenty-seven years (1704–1731). His kingdom was often attacked by the Marathas and the Mussalmans. His minister, Govindappa, one day came to Vedaranyam. Kediliappa received the august guest with temple honors and entertained him under his hospitable roof. They spoke on religion and politics. The minister said, "Kedili, you are a scholar, a devotee, an astute statesman, a clever diplomat and a keen accountant. You are just the man we are seeking. Come with me and serve the King." Kediliappa promptly shifted his family to Trisirapuram. King Chokkanatha, pleased even at the first sight, took Kedili into his council and gave him a free hand in the management of his household. Kedili was faithful to the King, alert to his duty and timely in advising him against enemies. There was only one gloomy spot in his life; that was the absence of a child to cheer his home.

He and his wife went daily to the Rock Temple and prayed to Swami Tayumanavar for a child. They fed saints and made gifts to scholars. Kedili chanted holy songs and arranged for Vedic recitals before the sanctum of Tayumanavar. His wife Gajavalli became enceinte. Gajavalli spent her days in prayer and holy hearing. One day devotees were chanting the soul-thrilling psalms of Manikkavasagar when Gajavalli delivered the gifted child. That child was named Tayumanavar, for it was born by the grace of Tayumanavar Swami. Kedili was overjoyed at the sight of his luminous son, radiant in beauty.

Learning and Yearning

He studied the *Upanishads*, side-by-side with *Tiruvachakam*. He was a clever logician whom none could rival in discussions. But he was not satisfied with booklore. Books did not reveal the Blessed One cradled in his heart. Words did not quench his thirst. From sunrise



The ten themes in the next five sidebars outline Tayumanavar's contribution to Tamil mysticism: a path of silence, surrender, grace and synthesis, grounded in direct experience and universal compassion. These are interpretive syntheses drawn from the ideas and themes articulated by Father Thomas Manninezath, CMI, in his book, *Harmony of Religions: Vedanta Siddhanta Samarasam of Tayumanavar* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1993—available on Amazon).

1. The Guru as a Silent Presence

In contrast to traditions where the guru instructs through speech or scripture, Tayumanavar venerates the silent presence of the realized teacher. His verses speak of the guru, whose mere glance or presence dissolves the mind's turbulence and awakens the soul's innate knowledge. The relationship with the guru is a silent communion of hearts. For our poet, the highest form of teaching is beyond words, resonating instead in the stillness shared by teacher and disciple.

2. Grace: Agent of Liberation

Tayumanavar repeatedly insists that no amount of personal effort, ritual precision, or intellectual understanding can by itself lead to liberation. Rather, it is *arul*, divine grace, that is the true liberator. Tayumanavar emphasizes surrender over striving. Grace is not earned, but received when one lays down the burden of ego and surrenders completely to God. This teaching radically democratizes spiritual awakening, making it accessible to the humble and sincere over the learned and powerful. In Tayumanavar's verses, grace flows like rain, touching all, but pooling in the hearts prepared by surrender.



to sunset, he was seeking for something within, for somebody who could lead him to the fount of Self-conscious bliss.

He had a rich home. He had free access to the King's palace. He was welcomed in royal circles. But the born sage preferred solitude to company, reflection to reading and introspection to speaking. Words were loads to him, and books burdens. He went often to the Rock Temple and spent his time there in meditation and prayer. In the bosom of purified calmness, in the silent seclusion of inner peace, he sought Self-reality with all the fervor of his faith. His eyes flowed with tears of yearning. His lips throbbed with songs of spiritual melancholy. He had the sagely mind of Pattinattar, the contemplation of the Buddha, the inspiration of Vedic seers, the fervor of Manikka-vasagar, the humility of Appar and the faith of Sambandar. The boy saluted and contemplated upon the Supreme. Learning yielded to yearning.

Tayumanavar saw the hatha yogins controlling breath and twisting their bodies. He saw religionists in hot discussion. He saw verbomaniacs quarrelling about the God whom they could not even imagine. He sought solace in the Unique One who is All and All in all. He invoked His grace day and night for a guiding light.

Royal Service

Kediliappa did not live to see the brilliant manhood of his son. He joined the majority while yet Tayumanavar was in his teens. His father's death intensified the son's yearning for spiritual freedom. "With this body, I must attain liberation." This was his resolution. But

the King would not leave him to himself. "Dear Tayumanavar, serve me in your father's place," he decreed. Tayumanavar had to obey the King. He became the Chancellor of Exchequer of the Nayak Kingdom. He fulfilled his state duties to the entire satisfaction of the King. People liked his gentle manners and benevolent heart. He did his duty for duty's sake; but his heart was aloof from the distractions of state affairs. He saw what the world was and took lessons from what he saw.

Those were troubled times. Trisirapuram was a field of conflicting forces. The throne was shaken by invasions and revolutions. Political butchery, local treachery, social animosity, royal indolence and religious pretense disrupted the harmony of life everywhere. Tayumanavar saw with open eyes the danger of royal courts disrupted by flippant pleasures. Tayumanavar did not like being caught in this political turmoil. He despised the mere life of carnal desires and sex indulgence. Yoga was his deep aspiration. A master sought the seeker.

The Master

One day Tayumanavar climbed the Rock Temple for his daily worship. There he met a sage who belonged to the order of saint Tirumular. The master and the disciple discovered each other. The disciple fell at the feet of the master, shedding tears of joy and poured out his heart in sublime hymns.

The master blessed him graciously, took him alone and accepted his devotion. "Master," said the disciple, "I shall follow you, renouncing home and royal service." "Wait, good soul!," admonished the teacher. "Be a householder until you beget a child. Then I shall come to initiate

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Be Still

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Early life: The middle part of Tayumanavar's life is summarized here in four scenes. Seated at a desk, he works as the finance minister for King Nayak. Having been sent back to the world by Maunaguru, he marries. Shortly after the birth of his son, his mother passes away, and not much later his wife makes her great departure. After conducting their funeral rites, the sage ponders the fleeting nature of life. Drawn to the renunciate's life, he determines he is not fit to raise his young son. With difficulty, he gives his possessions and the boy's care to his brother and his brother's wife, leaving the world behind. He adopts the life of a wandering sadhu. In the center the artist shows him seated in his simple hut, practicing yogic sadhanas. After guru diksha, he experiences Self Realization, shown here as Siva's divine body merging with the sage. That final step on the spiritual path to perfect unity must be a gift of grace from God Siva.

you in meditation. Be silent. Rest in peace; keep quiet; have faith. You will reach the supreme state of bliss." Having said this, the master went away. Tayumanavar shed tears of joy and gratitude at the love of his gracious master who had opened his inner eye.

Liberation

Tayumanavar would make his life a song-offering to the Divine of his heart. He would live in the Divine, for the Divine. He remembered God in all the changing phases of life. He aspired for grace and never for gold.

As knowledge dawned upon the aspirant, a dynamic peace possessed him. His heart widened into a deep compassion for all. His equal vision saw one soul in the King and in the subject. His brain thought, his heart loved, his life force sought nothing but the Divine.

The invincible grace heard his heartbeat. King Chokkanatha was a devotee of Siva and lover of saints. "Tayumanavar," said the King one day, "Your pilgrim soul seeks the inner temple. Your soul hungers after the Supreme Reality. State service is a hindrance to your aspirations. Waste not your days in politics and diplomacies. You are no more the King's servant; the King is your servant. Come, I shall raise a peaceful ashram for you, and you can fix yourself in yoga there."

"I am grateful to you, O King; God has heard my prayer from your heart. I am liberated. Thank you," said the saint, who then repaired to the banks of the Kaveri River to continue his meditation. The King raised a fine hermitage on the river bank and served the saint devoutly.

A Gift for Mother

The saint was self-absorbed. Like burnt camphor, the mind was nullified in the flames of self-consciousness. Body-consciousness was lost in the infinite spirit. The saint realized the Self of all throbbing in his heart. He felt the pinch of hunger when anyone was hungry. He shivered when a poor man had no clothes for the winter.

Silence Meets Silence

The great silent sage Sadasiva Brahmendra sanctified the atmosphere of India in those days, a *parama-jnani* who wandered naked, steeped in samadhi. The sky was his roof and earth his home. To see him was to know the Real. His songs were already popular among the learned. On his way to Pudukottah, Sage Sadasiva met Tayumanavar. Their meeting was like the meeting of Vedanta and Siddhanta. "Silence is peace; silence is bliss; silence is knowledge," wrote the sage. Tayumanavar, already a lover of silence, became yet more silent.



3. Samarasa: The Synthesis of Vedanta and Siddhanta

Tayumanavar's spiritual genius lies in his experiential reconciliation of Saiva Siddhanta, which affirms a real distinction between God and soul in devotion and practice until grace ripens, and Advaita Vedanta, which also proclaims non-duality as the ultimate truth. Tayumanavar does not choose sides in this historic philosophical tension but realizes samarasa—a state of harmonious blending. In his realization, the soul worships as distinct, yet awakens through divine grace to perfect identity with Siva. He expresses this synthesis through lyrical poetry as a mystical knowing born of direct experience.

4. The Universal Accessibility of the Divine Path

Tayumanavar speaks not just to scholars and monks but to householders, women, laborers and seekers of all walks of life. He affirms that the Divine is not confined to caste, gender, education or social status. What matters is longing, sincerity and surrender. This universality aligns him with Tamil bhakti saints, yet Tayumanavar couples it with profound advaitic insight, making his songs intimate and philosophical. He opens the gates of realization to all hearts tuned to love and silence. In his songs he expresses the real moods of every seeker: love, disappointment, doubt, gratitude, peacefulness, confusion, depression, joy, uncertainty, fulfillment, surrender. He is, in himself, all of us.



The King Perishes

The time was troubled by plots of enemy chiefs and open skirmishes. Now the Maratha cannon thundered and now the Musalman powder exploded. King Chokkanatha was a good man, but not a good ruler. He called to his help, anybody and everybody. The only true helper was the Tondaman of Pudukottah, a brave prince who guarded the Trisirapuram fort with the help of his Marava heroes. But a double-dealing lagoon sent a secret spy to the saber-rattling Marathas. The Marathas had politics in their brain and courage in their heart. One night when everything seemed quiet, the fort entrance opened, the main door swung aside, trumpets were heard, guns reported, cannons boomed. The Marathas were in the heart of the city.

King Chokkanatha was choked with grief. He must either become his enemy's prisoner or die, shedding blood in fighting an overwhelming force. Chokkanatha would do neither. He shouted aloud the name of God: "Siva, Siva, how false is the world! How dangerous sovereignty and how heavy the crown! Man has a treacherous tiger in him. How can I trust human nature? I take refuge at Your feet, Siva! Siva!" The king died of a broken heart.

The tragic scene inspired the Nayak army with new courage. Raghu

Natha Raya Tondaman, the famous king of Pudukottah, took charge of the task of guarding the fort. Vigilant swords and cannons kept the Maratha hordes at bay. The Tondaman crushed the enemies whose plots were leading to a conflagration. Rani Meenakshi, the widow of Chokkanatha, assumed sovereignty (1731-1736).

The Love Noose

The first man to attract the queen was Saint Tayumanavar. "Holy sir," implored Queen Meenakshi, "I am helpless and alone. You are the only wise man whom I can trust. Your head and heart alone can save the kingdom. Its welfare depends upon you. Come and help me, in the name of my husband who loved you so much!"

The saint took pity upon the helpless queen; he felt obliged to do his best to maintain peace and restore order in the realm. The Rani was all regard for him. But her regard carried passion into her youthful heart. Regard turned into affection, affection into love. She approached him alone one night with a pining heart, with passion-lost modesty.

Tayumanavar asked, "What has brought you here, Queen, at this hour?" The Queen replied, "My heart has brought me to you, sir. I

Meeting Maunaguru: Here Tayumanavar worships at the Sivalingam shrine at the bottom of the Trisira Hill below the Ucchi Pillaiyar Temple at Rockfort in Trisirapuram (Tiruchirappalli). Soon after, he meets and falls at the feet of Maunaguru for the first time, an encounter that will change the course of his life. On the right, Maunaguru, concluding that the youth is not yet ready to renounce the world, sends him back to continue his service as the accountant to King Nayak. Below, in four panels, the artist depicts a central idea in the poet's Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, the ascending path of charya, kriya, yoga and jnana.

offer myself to you in surrender. I love you." Tayumanavar responded, "But I love none but the Divine in my heart." She pleaded, "Sir, consider me as your wife." To this he said, "I consider you as my mother. Mother, do not test me. I am your simple child." The Queen continued, "My lord, I dedicate my life to you; embrace me now, or I shall embrace death." Tayumanavar cried out, "That shall not be, mother. At last, she demanded, "My man, it is the Queen's order. Obey me." Tayumanavar answered with finality, "I obey only the King's order. The King of my soul is God." The Rani departed like storm-driven lightning.

The next day, she was determined to force him to her will. She ordered one of her ministers, Narayanappa, to bring the saint to her private apartment. The minister went, saw, came back and reported that the saint had escaped; his whereabouts were not known! She sent out spies. But before she could avenge herself, civil war raged in the kingdom; Chanda Saheb assailed her capital; conspirators and opportunists shattered her peace and the minister himself rebelled against this woman of intolerable pride and suspicious conduct.

How Did He Escape?

Where was Tayumanavar? How did he escape the guards and the spies? Silent, aloof, meditative, Tayumanavar had watched the play of the egoistic forces in the royal court since the sudden death of the King. They knew that the Queen loved him. They made her believe that Tayumanavar was an impostor.

The saint knew the nature of the worldly. He heeded not the dagger-look of jealousy, the frown of insolence, nor the nuisance of talebearers. With calm, self-gathered inner strength, he was prepared for what lay ahead. Each day, he quietly made ready to leave the capital. He had two trusted disciples. Arulayya, the first, had the gift of clairvoyance: "Master, the talebearers are working out a plot that could cost you either your sainthood or your life. So I am moving the family property to Vedaranyam. It lies under the Maratha King of Tanjore—these people cannot reach you there." The saint nodded his assent. Arulayya quietly removed all valuables and merchandise to Vedaranyam. Everything was arranged outside the fort. That night, Tayumanavar disguised himself as a Nayak soldier and slipped past the palace guards. Arulayya was waiting with a horse. They quickly crossed the boundary of the kingdom.

Tayumanavar, now garbed as a wandering sannyasi, joined a party of monks bound for Rameswaram. In those days, the Maravas of Sivaganga and Ramnad had raised the banner of national independence against the foreign powers who had usurped the Tamil throne.



5. The Limits of Language & the Power of Intuition

Again and again, Tayumanavar confesses the failure of words to capture the Divine, stating truth is not found in dialectics or scriptural debate but in *anubhava* (direct perception). Language, for him, is a finger pointing at the moon—useful, but not the moon itself. He urges the seeker to move beyond the intellect to the intuitive core where silence speaks and knowing dawns. His poetry, while exquisite, ultimately serves to escort the reader beyond poetry into the stillness where God alone is.

6. Symbolism and Inner Imagery

Tayumanavar's verses are rich in symbols and inner imagery: oceans, lotuses, skies, mirrors, fire, wind and light. These are not decorative flourishes but integral to the poet's spiritual instruction. The image of a clear mirror represents the purified mind reflecting the Divine, while the boundless sky symbolizes the unconditioned Self. These metaphors act as gateways for meditation, helping the seeker to internalize abstract truths through vivid inner pictures. Tayumanavar's symbolic language is both aesthetic and instructive, bridging the gap between the expressible and the ineffable. He makes many references that are part of Tamil culture, the green parrot as God's messenger and the ocean of bliss to express the vastness of the joys of the soul.



Even into the late eighteenth century, the brave Maravas fought for freedom and gave refuge to political outcasts. Tayumanavar, sensing safety there, made haste to Ramnad, where the Rani's reach could not follow. The King of Ramnad welcomed the saint with due reverence and offered him a garden retreat for his practice of yoga.

The Silent Sage

Tayumanavar went to Rameswaram and there dedicated thrilling psalms to the Universal Mother who saved him from the dangerous lust of the Rani. Now he had to guard himself from spies and traitors.

Tayumanavar remembered the words of Sadasiva Brahmendra and practiced inner silence as well as outer. The mouth would not open for words, nor his mind for thoughts. At this juncture, in 1743, he met the silent sage once again, near Mana Madurai, and received his blessings. The Brahmin wrote a famous book called *Atmavilas*, which pleaded for perfect silence and solitude and aloofness in utter renunciation. This book was explained to Tayumanavar, who wrote many poems in the light of *Atmavilas*. Sadasiva Brahmendra said in it, "Live not in the crowd of men; run away to solitude. Shun the lure of the opposite sex as if you were a eunuch. Treat sense pleasures as poison. Seek lonely places for self-reflection. Wander freely in the hall of God, sky-roofed." Tayumanavar steeped himself in meditation and in writing his spontaneous hymns, which Arulayya copied and gave to the world. Silence opened the psychic centers, meditation absorbed cosmic energy and awakened divine knowledge so that the sage lived

in tune with the Self and wove his realizations into sublime verses.

He scarcely saw the people. The few that sought him were satisfied with hearing his hymns sung by Arulayya every evening. The garden where Tayumanavar lived is marked today by a small temple where his image is adored. There, too, an offer came to him from the royal court, but he refused it. He forgot the past in self-immersion. He opened his heart to divine love. He entered inner solitude, plunged into inner silence, and settled in the deeper Self.

The Sage as a Householder

In the meantime, the political turmoil in Madurai and Trisirapuram ended in a tragedy for the Queen. Rivals joined the Nawab and brought about her downfall. Chanda Sahib ravaged her kingdom and imprisoned her. She drank poison and died. Tayumanavar saw the tragedy of selfish pride, greed, vanity, ambition and treachery that made a hell of human life. His way was now free from the Queen's spies.

Just at this time, his elder brother, Siva Chidambaram, came to Ramnad and persuaded him to return to Vedaranyam, where he could live conveniently and carry on his yoga. Tayumanavar left with Arulayya, visited Madurai and other pilgrim centers on the way and reached Vedaranyam. The village received its sage with temple honors. Tayumanavar entered his ancestral home. A bride awaited his arrival. His relatives entreated him to marry her and to show the world how one can be yogin and a householder at the same time. There was

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Three principles: Here are the three principal concepts of the poet's verses: self-discipline depicted by a tightrope walker crossing a mountain valley; yoga and meditation shown by the yogini in bound lotus pose; and control of desires shown here as a woman resisting sex, money, food and clothes. The lower part of the canvas illustrates one of the poet's famed verses about the difficulty of stillness. He writes: "It is easy to tame an elephant in musth and bind the mouth of the bear. It is easy to ride on the back of the lion and take a cobra in your hand and make it dance. It is easy to place mercury on blazing fire, alchemize the five base metals into gold and sell them for a living. It is easy to roam about in the world invisible to others. It is easy to command the celestial beings to serve you and to live young eternally. It is easy to transmigrate into another body, to walk on water, sit on fire, acquire all knowledge and attain siddhis incomparable. But it is rare and difficult to control the mind and sit in stillness. O You, the Reality that eludes all seeking, the God of knowing dwelling in my thoughts! You, Bliss Refulgent!"

the word of his master, too. The brahmacharya life of Tayumanavar was so disciplined, he was physically and spiritually so strong that he could live in communion with God, wherever he might be. So, the saint married the chosen bride, the fair and chaste Mattuvarkuzhali, meaning "lady of flowing fragrant tresses." The two lived together like life and body. She bore a child whom they named Kanakasa-bhupati. After the birth, Tayumanavar initiated his wife in yoga and meditation. Together, they lived a life of sensual purity and meditation. He read to her ancient books of wisdom. He dedicated song flowers to the Divine every day and explained them to his companion in life. They lived a simple life and gave liberally to the needy. Tayumanavar, like his father, supervised the local temple. He made it thrill with the songs of saints and Vedic hymns.

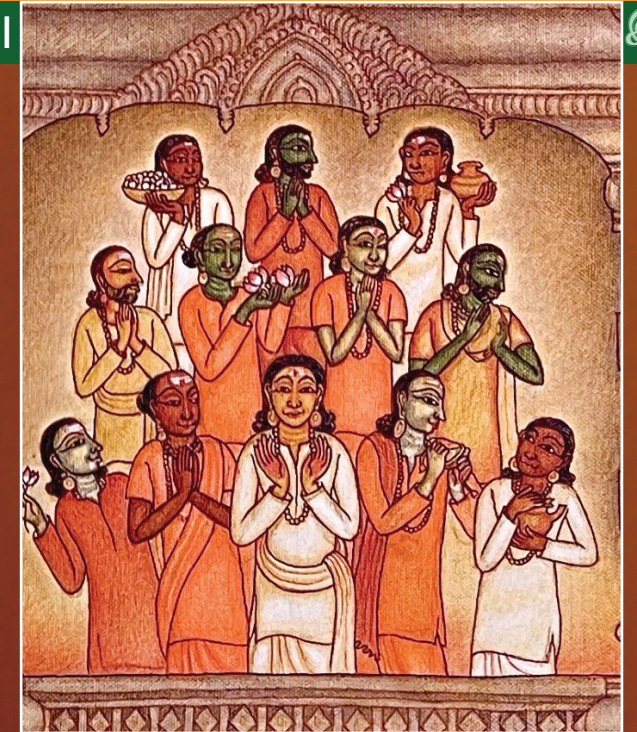
Unfortunately, Tayumanavar's wife passed away, saying, "Lord, renounce the world after educating my boy and placing him well in life and not before. Let my soul rest in you!" The sage Tayumanavar was faithful to his duty as a father. He educated his son, placed him with his elder brother and waited for the next command from his master.

Thus Spake the Master

Having attained freedom of the soul, Tayumanavar lived apart from all domestic entanglements. He gave away a part of his wealth to his son, another part to charitable endeavors and a third part to the temple, keeping for himself the wealth of divine grace. The time was ripe; Maunaguru came one day when he was meditating before the vast sea near Vedaranyam. Tayumanavar fell at his feet, crying: "Master, by your grace, I am free to follow you. Bless me with your grace. Let me enter the high plane of superconscious trance. Let my being thrill with the nectar of immortality."

The words uttered by the Master were woven into hymns and became the philosophy of the silent sage. "My darling, your psychic being is ripe enough to receive that yoga. My son, hear from me the ancient wisdom taught by Tirumular and Satyadarshi and sing it to humanity."

Tayumanavar was steeped in trance for a month or two at Chidambaram and then went on a pilgrimage to Arunagiri, Kanchipuram, Tiruvotriyur, Tiruvarur, Madurai and other places before he finally reached Rameswaram.



7. Annihilation of the Ego

At the heart of Tayumanavar's path lies the need to refine our nature, especially to uproot the ego (*ahankara*), which he sees as the veil separating the soul from the Divine. He uses striking metaphors to describe the ego: a thief in the temple, a shadow that hides the light, a ripple disturbing the ocean of stillness. Yet, he also acknowledges that ego can take subtle forms, even masquerading as piety or wisdom. The annihilation of ego is not a one-time event, but an ongoing inner battle. Only when the last trace of self-will dissolves can the soul merge with the Supreme. He notes that realization flowers naturally as humility, compassion, freedom from pride and caste consciousness, and a tender responsiveness to the suffering of all beings.

8. Mystical Experience Over Ritual Formalism

Though born into a deeply ritualistic Saiva culture, Tayumanavar does not reject ritual outright but critiques its empty repetition without inner transformation. He calls seekers to move from the outer to the inner, from mechanical performance to living experience. He warns against being caught in temple routines while forgetting the temple within. Mystical experience—the direct encounter with the Divine—is the true goal of all religious effort. For him, realization is not escape from the world but transformation of one's way of being within it.



Final Beatitude

The world's life depends upon rain. Rains failed and famine raged fearfully. Tayumanavar meditated before Lord Ramanatha at Rameswaram for the good of the land. He looked up and prayed. "Pour down, O Blessed heavens, if it is true that God is one and His blissful path is the path."

Heavens heard his prayer. The clouds gathered, lightning flashed, thunder roared, and rains poured and poured until the tanks were full, the fields were green and famine was no more.

Tayumanavar rejected all royal honors and preferred to spend his life in a garden hut in Lakshmipuram, where he entered into deep trance. From that highest state of divinity, he poured out his spiritual intuitions in sublime verses, writing them on palm leaves. His disciples Arulayya and Kodikkarai Jnani copied and sang them to the public. The songs spread like wildfire.

The sage did not like publicity. He wrote in silence, lived in silence and steeped himself in Divine Silence. His mission was fulfilled. The purpose of his embodiment was over. He had prayed for a strong body only for Self Realization. He was now in perfect union with the Divine, immersed in That-Consciousness.

The body was dead to him. So he willed to shed it off. He entered his samadhi room and closed the door. The disciples meditated outside. Later, Arulayya gently called, but there was no answer. He went inside. The body lay there; the face was smiling as usual; but the soul that was the real sage had flown away like a bird from its cage.

It was on a full moon day in the month of January 1742, at age

thirty-seven, that Tayumanavar entered the final beatitude. January 15 is observed each year as the saint's day. The disciples, the Raja and the local worthies adorned the body, took it in procession, paid their last honors and buried it, singing his hymns. Tayumanavar—his spirit—still endures and shall ever live in his soul-thrilling hymns.

The Sage's Message

The hymns of Tayumanavar bring high solace to life; to hear them is to elevate life and soul. To live them is to enjoy the highest bliss in spiritual consciousness. They are dynamic song-thrills that spark out of the bliss-center. Even a song a day will do to elevate human life towards Divine transcendence. Tayumanavar is an out-and-out scripture for saints and yogins. It covers the entire field of yoga and jnana. It brings high solace to householders, purifying their mind and heart. It feeds the flames of inner communion in real yogins. There is not a single Tamilian who does not sing Tayumanavar and find joy in it. Every home cherishes it. Every mother puts her child to bed with its sweet symphony. The hymns of Tayumanavar are sublime music of the soul, the song of the inner spirits and sparks of divine essence. It is very difficult to render them into another language. Despite this, I have ventured to do it during my silent hours of inner communion with the immortal spirit of the saint. Now readers, imagine that the saint is sitting in your heart while reading these rhythmic lines in deep ingathered tranquility. They will exalt your thoughts and emotions to supernal heights of peace and bliss.

Dr. B. Natarajan, Chennai, India, 1978

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God, soul and world: The artist depicts one of the fundamental concepts in Saiva Siddhanta, called *pati*, *pashu* and *pasham*. These three represent all there is, all that exists: God, soul and world. Tayumanavar sits before a Siva Lingam, representing *Pati*, God. Behind the saint, Siva as *Ardhanarishvara* cradles a devotee in His right hand, depicting *pashu*, the soul. In Siva's left hand is the Earth, representing the cosmos, the manifest world, *pasam*. Our sage is writing intently on a palm leaf, as he did all his life, producing an astonishing body of holy songs, indicated by the sea of palm leaves at the bottom of the canvas. He lived 37 years, indicated by the 37 clouds in the sky.

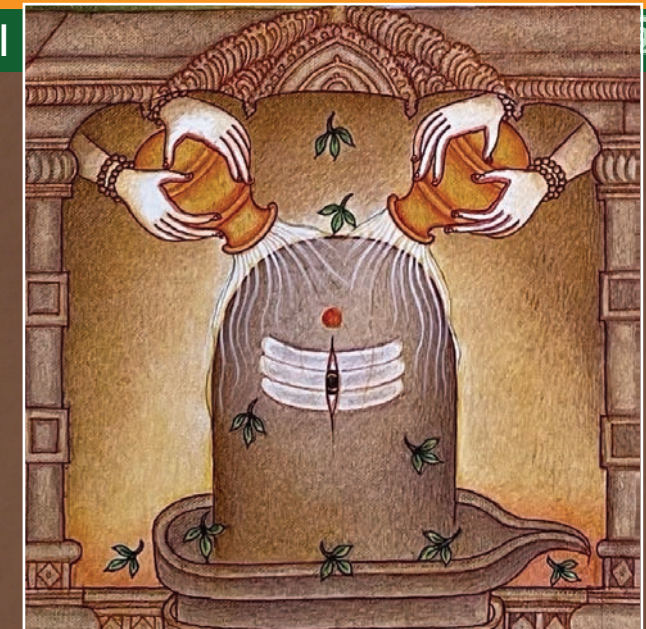
Editors' Historical Context and Dating

Tayumanavar's life is not preserved in a formal historical record in the modern sense. The earliest Tamil accounts are brief devotional notices, capturing only a small core of biographical information concerning his realization, his guru, Maunaguru, his pilgrimages and his hymns. Much of what is known arises from the poet's own songs, which contain personal and geographical allusions that later generations naturally read in biographical terms. As a result, later narratives weave together autobiographical hints, oral tradition, temple histories and hagiographic elaboration.

Dr. B. Natarajan's biography follows this devotional stream. Born of a profound personal encounter with Tayumanavar's hymns, which he regarded as a saving grace in his own life, it presents a poetically expressive portrait of the saint's inner journey. His account places Tayumanavar in the era of Vijaya Ranga Chokkanatha Nayak (1704–1731), dating his life approximately from 1705 to 1742. This dating, widely cited in modern editions, rests primarily on literary references, royal associations and later devotional tradition.

Father Thomas Manninezath's 1989 master's thesis and subsequent book include a brief biography that approaches the subject from a different angle. Drawing on South Indian monastic sources, including palm-leaf records associated with the Dharmapuram Aadheenam and the Maunaguru Matha tradition, as well as early disciple traditions, his study proposes an earlier chronology, placing Tayumanavar between 1602 and 1662. Within this framework, Tayumanavar is presented not only as a realized mystic and poet but also as a historically situated figure within the Maunaguru lineage, eventually revered as Maunaguru's spiritual successor and, according to tradition, head of the Maunaguru Matha at Trisirapuram from 1644–1662.

Despite these timeline differences, the two biographies converge strikingly on the essential contours of Tayumanavar's life: his birth into a devout Saiva household at Vedaranyam, his mastery of Tamil and Sanskrit learning, his administrative service in the Nayak court (under a different ruler in the two accounts), his profound encounter with Maunaguru, his periods of renunciation and pilgrimage, his marriage and household life undertaken in obedience to his guru's instruction, his later ascetic withdrawal and his lifelong immersion in silence, yoga and song. Both accounts recognize his deep rootedness in the Tirumular lineage, his synthesis of Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta and his transmission of realized wisdom through hymns rather than formal treatises.



9. The Role of Devotion and Surrender

Tayumanavar's path is deeply emotional, marked by yearning, tears, gratitude and devotion. Bhakti is not a lesser path compared to knowledge (jnana) but its twin. Tayumanavar weeps before the Divine, not from weakness, but from the soul's deep recognition of its source. He sings with abandon, praises with joy, and surrenders with trust. His fusion of bhakti and jnana reflects his broader integration of seemingly opposite paths—logic and love, silence and song, knowing and feeling.

10. The Voice of Saiva Siddhanta

Tayumanavar's hymns do not arise from abstract speculation or private reverie. Taken as a whole, they constitute a coherent summary of Saiva Siddhanta teaching, expressed in poetic form. As court official, renunciate and disciple within an established Saiva community, the poet absorbed the doctrines of God, soul, bondage, grace, initiation and liberation as taught in the lineage of Tirumular. His verses give voice to what he had absorbed from scripture, guru and tradition, while also bearing the stamp of direct realization. His hymns function as both testimony and transmission—preserving the philosophical framework of Saiva Siddhanta while revealing its truths through personal experience. Tayumanavar is not inventing a system; he is embodying one, affirming Tirumular's philosophy in a more accessible form.



A SUMMARY OF TAYUMANAVAR'S TEACHINGS

Key excerpts from Tayumanavar's Songs to Siva, The Devotional Outpourings of a Tamil Mystic, translated by Dr B. Natarajan

1. Ultimate Reality

Eternal, pure, groundless, untouched by birth and death, pervasive, ever immaculate, distant, near, the enveloping effulgence of void, the support of all, the fullness of bliss, the spirit beyond thought and speech, that which thus stood, the expanse vast that engenders bliss—let us contemplate. (Canto 3, song 1)

As the thought behind whatever thought the mind thinks, filling all things in undifferentiated accord as their Life of life, gushing forth the ambrosial waters of divine bliss for devotees true, revealing itself by giving itself as formless and attributeless, that great Siddhanta light that is the benevolent Paraparam—let us contemplate. (Canto 3, song 2)

The maya into which the elements subside is the origin of all, so some say. The substance into which the sense organs merge is the reality, so some say. Where the cognitive organs, the karanas, end, is the ultimate reality, so some say. Where the gunas find their home is the ultimate reality, so some say. Nadam it is, some say. Bindu it is, others say. The self it is, yet others say. Formed it is, some say. Formless it is, if you search deeper, so some say. The state where jiva merges, losing identity

in full, is the reality, so some say. Divine grace is the ultimate reality, so some say. The void that has neither beginning nor end is the final reality, so some say. And thus and thus, yet other things they say. Sorely troubled by all of these, my mind is in turmoil. Will I ever attain the bliss of transcendental samadhi? O You who fills all visible space in unbroken continuity! You, the bliss that is perfectly full! (Canto 3, song 6)

2. The Human Condition

This body that lives by food decays even as it stands. Sickness comes without warning. Death waits not for old age. Seeing this, my heart trembles. My Lord, when will Your grace ripen in me? (Canto 4, song 5)

Wandering in delusion, I sought the senses' pleasures and was bound fast. My mind, like a drunken horse, plunged me again and again into suffering. When will I taste the peace that comes from knowing You? (Canto 10, song 2)

Through countless births I roamed, knowing not my own nature. I gathered the fruits of karma, I suffered, I rejoiced, I fell again. My Lord, when will the day come that I wake from this long dream? (Canto 20, song 1)

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Many moods: *Tayumanavar's songs contain many moods experienced by a seeker, from the highest to the lowest. Here the artist has Siva listening attentively and lovingly to His poetically expressive devotee, showering the saint with grace no matter what mood he is in on that day. One of the powerful things about his songs is the utter humanness of his words. He wrote of the things that all bhaktas feel; sometimes he was up and often he was down. But Siva was always at the center of his life, no matter what he was going through. Clockwise from the upper right: Tayumanavar is expressing gratitude and adoration to Siva; surrendering himself to Siva; scolding Siva; pleading with Siva to free him from the world; worshipping Siva; feeling miserable and unworthy of Siva's love; weeping for Siva's grace; doubting Siva is listening and rejoicing at Siva's presence in all the universe.*

3. The Path of Yoga

Grant me the strength to conquer the senses, restrain the mind, and stand firm in the path of yoga. Your grace alone can make the wandering mind turn inward to its source. (Canto 4, song 10)

I strive again and again, yet the mind slips away. Only by holding fast to Your feet does the mind become steady, like a lamp in a windless place. (Canto 4, song 11)

The mind wanders like a restless monkey. It grasps this, drops that, and grasps again. You alone can steady it. You alone can make it turn inward to its own source. (Canto 24, song 3)

4. Summa Iru: Sacred Silence

When the mind subsides and all its movements cease, when thought dissolves and the senses fall silent, when the Self alone stands revealed within—this is the perfect stillness I seek. Grant me that state, O Lord of silentness. (Canto 4, song 8)

As waves subside into the sea, as camphor melts in fire, so let my mind dissolve in You. Let me know that stillness where knowing and knower are one. (Canto 4, song 9)

When Your grace brought me into the ocean of silent bliss, the mind vanished, the senses vanished, the world vanished. Only the One remained. (Canto 30, song 5)

In that state where even the sense of 'I' does not arise, where no thought stirs, where bliss wells up without cause, I saw the truth directly. What words can describe it? (Canto 7, song 1)

5. God as Guru

You raised me as a jnana elephant of towering presence! O Mantra Guru! O Yoga Tantra Guru! Maunaguru who comes in the line of Tirumular! (Canto 5, song 1)

'Seek not the position I or You, but be inbetween. That is the position true, true'—thus with Your gesture, as Maunaguru, You taught me. And yet my I-ness sprouted again, and my mind began to wander at will. (Canto 31, song 32)

Bounty, tapas, jnana and indescribable siddhi and mukti—all,



His Life and Travels

Born in the coastal pilgrim center of Vedaranyam to a pious Saiva family, Tayumanavar was named after Siva as the "God of Motherly Love" at the Trisirapuram Rock Temple. As a youth in the capital, he was a brilliant boy who sought the solitude of the hilltop temple over the crowds of the city. Following his father's passing, he was thrust into statecraft, serving as Chancellor of the Exchequer for King Chokkanatha Nayak (reigned 1704–1731). Though a gifted administrator, his heart remained aloof from royal distractions.

While in royal service, he encountered his master, Maunaguru, who recognized his spiritual ripeness but instructed him to remain a householder for a time. Following the King's death, Queen Meenakshi romantically pursued the saintly official. Steadfast in his devotion, he viewed her only as a mother and eventually fled the capital disguised as a soldier. Seeking safety in Ramnad, he encountered the naked sage Sadasiva Brahmendra.

Obedient Maunaguru's earlier command, Tayumanavar returned to Vedaranyam to marry and raise a son, proving spiritual purity is possible within family life. Following the sudden passing of his mother and wife, he gave his son's care over to his elder brother's family and renounced the world, receiving final initiation from Maunaguru. He spent his final 10 to 15 years as a sannyasi, leaving a trail of "song-flowers" at shrines in Chidambaram, Kanchipuram and Madurai. After performing a "rain miracle" in Rameswaram, he retreated to a simple hut in Lakshmipuram and after a time entered mahasamadhi.



all will appear by the one word the silent guru spoke. Be calm, O heart! Why are you still in doubt? (Canto 31, song 70)

6. Siva's Grace

O Father! You who are sweetness itself, You who made me Yours by Your grace, You who removed all my faults and bestowed on me the bliss of liberation—how shall I ever forget You? (Canto 4, song 1)

By Your grace, my Lord, the bonds of past deeds are cut away; the sufferings born of delusion vanish; the cloud of ignorance is dispelled. You have made me taste the nectar of silentness. (Canto 4, song 2)

Grace is the light that shines even when the mind fails. Grace is the hand that lifts me from the abyss. Grace is the fire that burns away impurity. Grace is the fullness that fills my heart. (Canto 9, song 1)

7. The Play of Maya and Ego

This ego that rises as 'I'—subtle, ancient, hard as diamond—this is the impurity anava. So long as it stands, who can see the truth? The moment it dies, the Supreme stands revealed. (Canto 8, song 1)

Maya spreads its net of forms; karma tightens its cords; anava stands as the knot within. These three together have made me

wander without knowing my own nature. (Canto 8, song 2)

The stains of egoism, lust and delusion cling to embodied beings. Bound by the fruits of good and evil, they wander... As husk encloses rice, as dirt dulls copper, as salt abides in sea water, so the three stains inhere in the soul. (Canto 4, song 3)

8. Samarasam: Truth Transcending Distinctions

In the state of oneness, there is no high or low, no two, no division at all. The mind that sees difference has disappeared. What remains is the silent fullness beyond all thought. (Canto 31, song 1)

Seeing all as one, seeing the One as all, seeing difference nowhere—this is samarasam. In that vision, the heart rests without movement. (Canto 31, song 5)

When the mind became level, steady, unshaken by anything, when all opposites balanced and vanished, I entered the equality that is samarasam. (Canto 31, song 12)

9. Final Realization and the State of Perfect Silence

When the mind subsides and all its movements cease, when thought dissolves and the senses fall silent, when the Self alone stands revealed within—this is the perfect stillness I seek. Grant me that state, O Lord of silentness. (Canto 4, song 8)

In that state where even the sense of 'I' does not arise, where

சுந்தர் இரு

Be Still

சுந்தர் இரு

Be Still

இரு

Samarasam: Perhaps the most consoling message in all the songs of Tayumanavar is his call for unity, his insight that there is no real difference between Vedanta and Siddhanta. During his time, there were contentious debates between Hinduism's two primary philosophical schools. Tayumanavar sought to reconcile these perspectives through his concept of samarasam. Tayumanavar saw samarasam as a state of consciousness that transcended both duality and non-duality, seeing them as complementary rather than contradictory, emphasizing the common goal of spiritual union with the divine. Here the artist shows a Vedantin on the left, with Vedic scriptures which are a major sadhana for that school. On the right is a Siddhantin, with a Sivalingam before him to indicate his devotional sadhanas. From Siva's divine chalice, light and love are flowing equally into the heads of the two, bestowing on them illumination and grace. Above the Vedantin is a tree of ripe mangos and behind the Siddhantin is a tree heavy with limes. Thus the artist has shown us that the philosophical fruits, both abundant, are indeed different. Importantly, the roots of both trees intertwine, drawing their life from the same earth.

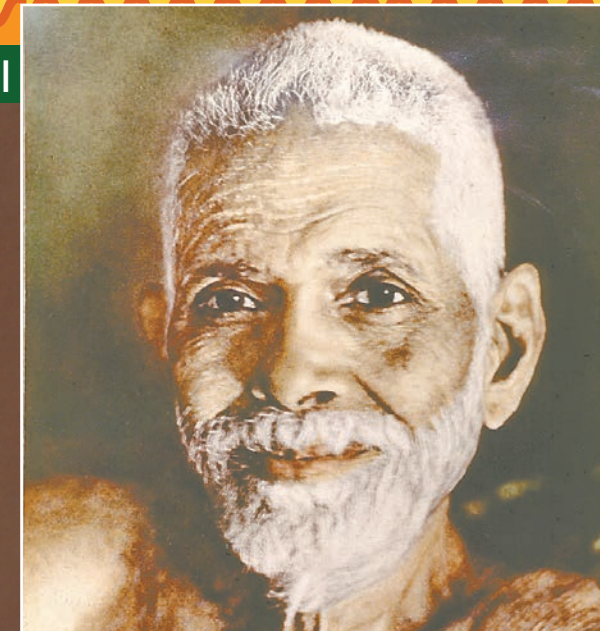
no thought stirs, where bliss wells up without cause, I saw the truth directly. What words can describe it? (Canto 7, song 1)

In a moment of perfect silentness, He appeared within me as all-pervading light. Seeing Him, I became still; becoming still, I became Him. (Canto 26, song 1)

10. The Essential Teachings of Maunaguru

With meeting and parting none, with attachment none, with contracting and expanding none, with attributes none, with coming and going none, with permanent form none, with malas none, with seeking none, with divisions none, with bindu and nada none, with diversity none, of the elements five none, with knowledge none, with knower none, never withering, with one and two none, with searching none—having drunk deep in the sea of bliss of perfection fullness, that state indeed is the state eternal. Thus You taught me, O Mauni! O primal source of Siddhanta mukti! O Chinmayananda Guru! O Dakshinamurti, seated high on the Sivagiri hilltop!

O Mauni, You granted me the Grace rare. You showed me loving compassion, as would a mother. You planted Your feet on my head—my knowing not that the samadhi devoid of consciousness is the permanent, exalted state, thinking not the mantras sacred, speaking not that the states of mukti are one and two, knowing not that it is light, void, form and nada sound. To envision thus, seeing and not seeing, this alone will lead to the infinite grace that has neither cause nor effect—this You taught me! Grant me Your grace to be like Your devotees on whom grace descended of itself. O Father! O primal source of Siddhanta mukti! O Chinmayananda Guru! O Dakshinamurti, seated high on the Sivagiri hilltop! (Canto 4, songs 8–9)



Ramana's Esteem for Our Poet

Perhaps the most prominent among those influenced by Tayumanavar is Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), the sage of Arunachala, whose own teaching of mauna (silence) and Self-inquiry echoes many of Tayumanavar's core themes. Ramana frequently quoted Tayumanavar's verses to visitors and devotees. In particular, he admired Tayumanavar's ability to balance profound metaphysical insight with simplicity of expression. One of Ramana's favorite verses was:

"There is a state where words cease.
Where the mind dissolves,
And the self, no longer seeking,
Is found to be That."

Ramana would point to this as the distilled essence of his own path. In Tayumanavar, he saw not a theologian, but a rishi—a seer who had known the formless directly and returned to speak of it with compassion.

Another admirer was Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, founder of the Divine Life Society. In his lectures and writings, Sivananda praised Tayumanavar for his synthesis of bhakti and jnana, urging students of Vedanta to read his verses to awaken the heart alongside the intellect.

Yogaswami of Jaffna, the 20th-century Saivite sage of Sri Lanka, saw him as part of his own spiritual lineage. Yogaswami's insistence on "Summa iru" (Be still)—his most repeated instruction—was a direct inheritance from Tayumanavar's encounter with Maunaguru. In fact, the phrase became a mantra in Yogaswami's movement, carried forward by his disciple, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami of Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii.



Krishna's Festival Month

Saint Andal's famed hymns, *Tiruppavai*, are the focus of our daily observances and disciplines

BY DIVYA SRINIVASAN, USA

AS SCHOOLS PAUSE FOR WINTER BREAK and even workplaces close for the holidays during late December and early January, slow and relaxed mornings are the norm. But for my family, this is when we aim to wake up earlier than ever. This wonderful time of year means it is Margazhi, the special Tamil month when the Srivaishnava saint Andal composed her *Tiruppavai* verses.

To understand why we value waking up so early—or even to grasp any of our other traditions from this month—we have to delve into the history of Margazhi and the *Tiruppavai*.

In the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna reveals to Arjuna that among all the months of the year, He is embodied most significantly in the month of Margazhi, which fell this year between December 16, 2025, and January 13, 2026, per the Tamil solar calendar. Krishna's divine presence during this month is felt quite strongly.

It was during Margazhi that Andal, a renowned 8th-century ce Srivaishnava saint (regarded as an incarnation of Sri Mahalakshmi) composed *Tiruppavai*—30 heartfelt verses expressing her yearning to see Krishna. To this day, members of the Srivaishnava community across the world, including my family, celebrate Margazhi with grandeur. Each one of our small traditions and unique dishes ties back to Andal's *Tiruppavai*.

Members of the Srivaishnava Sampradayam, a sub-sect of Hinduism from South India, follow the teachings of Sri Ramanuja, with an emphasis on wholehearted devotion and surrender to Sriman Narayana.

The very first Srivaishnava saints were the twelve Alvars, who collectively composed 4,000 devotional verses, known as *pasurams*, in praise of Sriman Narayana. Among these, Andal's *Tiruppavai* are the best known. Each of Alvar's 30 *pasurams* is believed to have been composed on one of the 30 days in the month of Margazhi.

For Srivaishnava families like mine, the month of Margazhi is centered entirely around Andal and her *Tiruppavai*. Every morning, we gather as a family to chant the entire *Tiruppavai* together. During the chanting, we recite twice the specific *pasuram* that was com-



posed on that particular date. For example, on the 12th day of Margazhi, we would repeat the 12th *pasuram* twice. It is a great way to tangibly emphasize the parallel between our own celebration and Andal's experience.

Even as a young girl, Andal grew up with an intrinsically strong devotion for Krishna. To be united with the Lord, she handpicked the month of Margazhi to undertake a month-long *vrata*, or vow of penance.

In *Tiruppavai*'s second *pasuram*, Andal invites her friends to join her in the *vrata* and outlines her plans for the month. One of the first things she highlights is the importance of waking up early and taking a bath before starting that day's observance. And that, of course, is why my family, and several other Srivaishnava families, aim to chant *Tiruppavai* early in the morning.

After chanting, we offer a serving of pongal—a creamy and savory lentil-based rice dish popular in Tamil cuisine—to Krishna and Andal at our home altar. The reason we make pongal specifically can also be traced back to the *Tiruppavai*.

As the second *pasuram* continues, Andal explains the various restrictions she and her friends follow during the *vrata* to direct the entirety of their focus to Krishna. These constraints included not eating any ghee or milk. Pongal is an optimal dish because it doesn't require either of these ingredients. It is also easy to make and eat quickly, so it is perfect for a *vrata* where you would not want to

Traditional offering: *pongali* is presented to Krishna on the 14th day of Margazhi

spend much time focusing on food.

Nonetheless, as time has passed, many of us often end up adding ghee to the pongal we offer. This perhaps defeats the initial purpose of making the dish, but also goes to show how traditions change and even lose some of their meaning over time.

Our daily celebrations remain quite similar for most of the month: we chant *Tiruppavai* and offer pongal. When we reach the 27th day of Margazhi, however, it starts to take a turn.

If *Tiruppavai* is like a story, the 27th *pasuram* can be considered the climax. At this juncture, Andal and her friends have achieved the purpose of their *vrata*, and they rejoice in the divine company of Krishna Himself. Up until this point, Andal had given up material enjoyments, but now, the material pleasures are simply a means to celebrate the joy that Krishna's presence brings. In this *pasuram*, she discusses partaking in a sweet version of pongal containing tremendous amounts of ghee and milk, two of the items that she had given up during the time of the *vrata*. In fact, Andal describes it as containing so much ghee that when you pick up a handful, the ghee drips down to your elbow.

In celebration of Andal's union with Krishna, my family treats this 27th day each Margazhi like a joyous festival, named Kudarai after the first word of the *pasuram*. On that day, in addition to regular pongal, we offer the sweet version made with milk and jaggery and drenched (to a realistic extent) in ghee, recreating the scene Andal lived in the way we can.

After Margazhi concludes, Srivaishnavas celebrate Andal Kalyanam, her wedding with Krishna. After all, Krishna is one of Sriman Narayana's incarnations, and Andal is the incarnation of His consort, Sri Mahalakshmi. Temples in South India, and also in the United States, conduct the ceremonies and rituals of a traditional Hindu wedding for Andal and Krishna on this day, and the festivities of Margazhi culminate with splendor.



THE AUTHOR

Divya Srinivasan, 16, is a high school junior from the Greater Seattle area. She is passionate about journalism, linguistics, puzzles, research and connecting to her Hindu roots.



HEALTH

Listen to Your Body

When "doing everything right" still leaves you unwell

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

PEOPLE DON'T COME TO ME BECAUSE THEY'VE DONE NOTHING—they come because they've tried everything. They've cleaned up their diet. They take their supplements. They follow routines they read about online. Some even feel guilty when they miss a step. And yet, something still feels off. They're tired despite sleeping. Inflamed despite eating "clean." Anxious despite doing all the right things for their health. This isn't failure. It's information.

Over the years, I've noticed a quiet pattern. Many well-intentioned health habits today ask the body to work harder, not heal deeper. More pills. More rules. More tracking. More control. But the human body doesn't heal under pressure. It heals under safety. This is something ancient systems understood intuitively—and modern biology is now confirming. A few months ago, someone sat across from me with a notebook full of supplements, protocols and schedules. They looked exhausted, not ill. When I asked how their body felt, they paused and said, "Honestly, I don't know anymore."

One of the most common things I see isn't deficiency—it's excess. Too many supplements taken together. Too many "support" products competing for absorption. Too many signals hitting the liver, gut and nervous system at once. The digestive system, especially, wasn't designed to process handfuls of isolated nutrients daily. When digestion weakens, absorption drops. When absorption drops, symptoms rise. And when symptoms rise, people add more. This cycle looks like discipline. But biologically, it's stress.

Another quiet shift I've observed: Many people are no longer listening to their bodies—they're monitoring them: heart rate, blood sugar, sleep scores, inflammation markers. Data can be helpful. But constant vigilance keeps the nervous system on alert. And a body in alert mode prioritizes survival—not repair. Healing requires the parasympathetic state: calm, warmth, regularity. No supplement can replace that.

The body doesn't heal with trends. What cools one person may inflame another. What energizes one system may exhaust another. What works in summer may harm in winter. Traditional medicine always asked:

Who is this for?
When is this appropriate?
What state is the body in right now?

Modern wellness often skips those questions. And the result is confusion—not clarity. Healing usually begins when we remove, not add. Some of the biggest improvements I see happen when people simplify:

Fewer supplements, taken intentionally
Warmer meals, eaten at regular times
Less stimulation before sleep
Fewer rules, more rhythm

The body doesn't need to be forced into balance. It remembers balance when the environment allows it. Real wellness is quieter than social media portrays it to be. It feels like:

Digestion that doesn't demand attention
Energy that lasts through the day
Sleep that comes naturally
A mind that isn't constantly managing the body

This isn't optimization. It's restoration. Tonight, before you sleep, try one small experiment. Put your phone away, place one hand on your chest, and take three slow breaths. Ask your body one simple question: What feels like too much right now? Healing often begins not when we add the right thing—but when we finally stop forcing. Health is not a project to complete. It's a relationship to rebuild. When we stop asking, "What else should I take?" and start asking, "What does my body need less of?" something shifts. Often, the body does the rest. If this perspective resonates with you, you're not behind—you're early. If you feel like sharing, I'd genuinely like to hear from you.



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SAVITA TIWARI

PILGRIMAGE

Peanut Festival, Anyone?



My first-time visit to the Big Bull Temple in Bengaluru finds me exploring the sights, rituals and crowds of the annual groundnut fair

BY SAVITA TIWARI, MAURITIUS

SAY “BENGALURU,” AND MOST PEOPLE picture a modern Indian metropolis of glass towers and tech campuses, a place of traffic, coffee shops and lap-top-toting professionals. Yet right in the heart of this Silicon Valley of India stands a temple unlike any other—a living reminder that beneath the city’s velocity lie centuries of faith and the origins of the Kadalekai Parishe, the city’s iconic annual peanut festival. Here, in Basavanagudi, the oldest quarter of the city, which takes its very name from the bull, rises the Big Bull Temple, locally called Doddabasavana Gudi. It is the only temple in the world where Basavana Nandi, the sacred mount of Siva, presides as the main Deity. The temple’s centerpiece is a single colossal stone: a granite Nandi that ranks among the largest anywhere. Fifteen feet tall and twenty feet long, carved from one monolith, the bull sits in *virasana* with front legs folded, projecting power, serenity and guardianship all at once. For five centuries, Basavana—the beloved bull of Bengaluru—has watched over this growing city. Though the temple is today

associated with the Lingayat saint Basavanna, that link is symbolic and devotional; Basavanna himself lived nearly four centuries earlier.

The temple’s origin is tied to an old legend that still circulates in Basavanagudi. When this area was all farmland, especially peanut fields, a bull began to appear on full moon nights. It rampaged through the crops, then vanished by morning. This continued until the farmers finally gathered on a full moon, chased the animal up a hill and cornered it—only to find that the bull had turned to stone. As the shocked villagers watched, the statue began to grow. They ran to their head priest, who advised them to vow the first harvest of peanuts to the bull, Basavana, and to place a trident on his head. With that promise, the stone stopped growing. Under the night sky, the farmers celebrated a new festival right there on the hill, offering their first crop to the bull. The Kadalekai Parishe—the peanut fair—was born.

Five centuries later, the promise is still kept. Each year, on the last Monday of the Kartika month, farmers and families flood

the neighborhood to present their first peanuts to Nandi. I arrived in Bengaluru just in time to see it with my own eyes.

Before leaving Mauritius, I did what I always do when visiting a new place: opened my maps, searched for the city’s sacred heart and made a list. I typed “Nandi” into Google Maps and watched a nebula of pins explode over southern India, then contract around Bengaluru. The city is dotted with Nandi shrines: Basavana Nandi Temple, Bhoga Nandeeshwara, Yoga Nandeeshwara and many others. Businesses carry His name, too—Nandi Mobiles, Nandi Café, Nandi Saree Shop, Nandi Automobiles—as if the bull’s steady strength had become the city’s informal logo. I have always adored Nandi, Siva’s devoted *vahana* (mount), the one in whose ear devotees whisper wishes so they reach the Lord first. Yet I had never thought of Him as a central Deity. In Bengaluru I found a city that does exactly that. What began as a transit stop changed into a pilgrimage.

My flight landed just after midnight. The ride from the airport was quiet until the taxi turned onto Bull Temple Road. Suddenly the



night was bright. A canopy of colored bulbs stretched from post to post, garlands swayed in the breeze and a hundred stalls stood half-built along the street. Families were still awake, arranging baskets, stacking toys, laying out sweets and flowers. Some people were already buying, paying with crumpled notes or tapping phones to QR stands. The driver grinned in the rearview mirror and said, “Kadalekai Parishe starts tomorrow. Biggest day for Nandishwara.” I laughed at the timing and thought, maybe this is grace, arriving on schedule. I checked into a small hotel one lane away from the temple and fell asleep with the quiet certainty that I was exactly where I should be.

I woke early, before the street filled, and asked the hotel manager for directions. He pointed to the short stretch between the Bull Temple Cross and the nearby Govardhan Kshetra Temple. In those three hundred meters sit the Doddabasavana Temple, the Big Bull Temple and Govardhan Kshetra, with the Bugle Rock Garden forming their green backdrop. Bugle Rock is an ancient stone outcropping, part of the peninsular gneiss that geologists say is unimaginably old. In the old days, a guard would sound a bugle from the top at sunset to signal that the city gates should close. The hotel manager smiled and said, “Go now, have darshan, then enjoy the fair.”

I stepped out of the hotel and was immediately wrapped in a warm, nutty fragrance. The air smelled of roasting peanuts! That is when I learned that “Kadalekai Parishe” simply means “peanut fair” in Kannada. The street was filling with vendors. Some had wheeled carts, some had tarps spread on the ground, some stood behind neat pyramids of



ALL PHOTOS: SAVITA TIWARI

raw peanuts still in their shells. Steam curled up from large pots where peanuts boiled in salted water. Iron pans hissed with oil as vendors stirred and roasted peanuts for those who could not wait to snack.

Farther along, women sold strings of jasmine, wooden toys and simple household charms. One stall drew me in: a woman weaving door hangings from rice paddy. When I asked the meaning, she said the hanging invites prosperity and keeps out negative energy. “We make it while reciting prayers,” she explained, fingers moving fast, voice gentle. The price was about ten dollars. I asked her to set aside five for me, picturing them as gifts for friends and family. She tucked them under the table with a smile that said she had already guessed my plan.

The crowds thickened as the morning grew. The road would be closed to vehicles during the fair, so vendors were already spilling into the center of the street. Only a narrow lane remained for devotees walking toward the temples. A local told me the fair

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Bustling festivities: (far left) The early morning view of the fair from the author’s hotel-room window, showing mountains of peanuts being sold on the roadside; (above) a shopkeeper sells jaggery and nut sweets to be offered at the temple; (below) Nandi, decorated with garlands, welcomes visitors inside the temple; our author (in blue) enjoys some time interviewing festival vendors



NATTY SINGH





draws a million visitors across two days. I believed it. I moved with the current toward my first stop: the Dodda Ganapati Temple at the base of the hill.

The temple is Dravidian in style, square and solid, with a sanctum that seems to hold its own coolness even on the hottest day. From the street, you can already see the Deity: a monolithic Ganesha eighteen feet high and sixteen feet wide, washed to a soft gray and standing without adornment, as if

waiting for the day's dress and garlands. As I joined the queue, an elderly man told me that Kempe Gowda, the chieftain who founded Bengaluru under the Vijayanagara Empire, discovered this stone while the Bull Temple was being built. The image of Ganesha already existed on the boulder. He saw it as an auspicious sign and had the sculptors refine the image, then consecrated the temple to Dodda Ganapati—"big Ganesha." Today, statues of Kempe Gowda stand all over the city, including outside the airport. The man spoke with the calm pride of someone telling a family story.

Closer to the sanctum, the murti felt even larger. Its clean surface, unadorned by paint or cloth, made the form seem alive. Locals say the right side of the image has grown over the centuries and now touches the sanctum wall, a sign that the Deity is still expanding His presence. Whether legend or fact, the idea made me smile. The priest, noticing my camera and the foreign currency I offered, leaned in and said, "Come tomorrow morning to see the butter decoration." I promised I would. He nodded once, as if to say the appointment was made.

Outside again, I wandered through stalls selling clay Ganapati idols in bright colors. I chose a five-headed form, then stood at a cart for a tall glass of sugarcane juice, poured over ice chips that clinked like tiny bells. A pair of farmers showed me their sacks of peanuts and told me the fair is much the same as in their grandparents' time. They grinned and held up their phones to show QR codes. "Only this changed," one said. Tradition and technology shook hands right there in the lane.

Ten steps up the street, the road rose

Lord of beginnings: (above) the Dodda Ganapati Temple as seen from the roadside; (left) the temple's renowned shrine, featuring a gargantuan Ganesha murti

toward the Big Bull Temple. Fifty broad stairs climbed the small hill, flanked at the base by two sculpted bull horns that framed the entrance like a gate of strength. Up the steps, a tall flagstaff—*dhvajastambha*—stood before the great tower. Its base had carvings of guardian Deities on all four sides. A large flag snapped in the wind, as if summoning the Gods to witness what would unfold that day. Devotees stopped at the flag to place flowers and dab *kumkum* at its base, then continued toward the main hall.

From the courtyard I saw Basavana in the distance, seated in His sanctum. Unlike most temples, where Nandi faces Siva and His back is turned to the arriving crowd, here the bull faces the devotees directly, as if receiving them. The surface of the stone is glossy and dark, polished by centuries of oil offerings and the touch of countless hands. From the head rises a trident whose tip almost touches the sanctum roof. On the front of the trident a tiny Siva is carved, reminding you that Nandi's devotion is always directed toward the Lord, even as He presides here in His own right.

I joined the line for darshan and soon reached a display board that retold the old story of the bull that trampled the fields, the stone that grew, the vow that stopped it. The board also mentioned something I had not known: long ago a river called Vrishabhavathi flowed from this very hill, said to emerge near the base of the Nandi. An inscription about it is engraved on the plinth of the statue. Standing there, reading the legend in the place where it took root, I felt time loosen. The hill of stone, the fields of peanuts,



Approaching Nandi's shrine: (clockwise from above) Two giant bull horns mark the entrance to the temple steps; the tall stone *dhvajastambha*—the temple's flagpole; devotees reach the temple gopuram

the anxious villagers running after a bull on a moonlit night—all of it seemed to step a little closer to the present.

The line moved forward past families carrying trays piled with peanuts, some raw, some roasted. Children clutched small sacks while trying not to spill shells onto the stone floor. The air inside the hall was cool, even with the crowd. Ahead of me, Basavana's great head tilted slightly to the left, so that His right eye—painted red, white and black—seemed to look straight into the heart of anyone who stood before Him. Carved garlands of bells and flowers lay across His body. Around His neck, the sculptors had given Him a necklace with a large bell at the center, which priests still decorate with powder and flowers. There is even a carved saddle, as if to say Nandi is always ready to serve.

I asked the woman beside me, "If He was a mischief-maker, why is He worshiped as a Deity?" She laughed softly and said, "Every creature has its *svabhava*. A bull will do what a bull does. A human has the duty to see the good and the God in everything. That is our *svabhava*, our nature." Another woman behind us added, "Even Rama kept his promise. '*Praan jaye par vachan na jaye*'—life may go but one's word must not. We keep our ancestors' promise by bringing the first peanut here every year." The simple dignity



in her voice answered more questions than any book could.

Near the sanctum, a priest sat with a small bowl of sandal paste. He touched my forehead with a cool streak, and I asked him, "In every temple, Nandi faces Siva. Why is there

no Siva here?" His mouth tightened. "There is a Sivalinga behind Basavana," he said. "You will see it when you do parikrama. But this is not a Siva temple. This is a Nandi temple. The only one." He let that settle in the space between us like a stone placed carefully on a



shrine. I bowed and moved on.

Crossing the threshold into the sanctum, I stood before Basavana. In most places I have known Him as the model servant, the silent sentinel gazing toward His Lord, listening for the slightest command. Here He felt different. Not less devoted, never that, but more central, more like an elder who receives guests at the door and ushers them in. The trident above His brow made a vertical line of power. The painted eye made a



horizontal glance that met the soul. The hush of the sanctum, even filled with people, was a reminder of the strength that comes from vows kept. I placed my peanuts on the offering tray and prayed for steady courage, that strength which is neither frantic nor loud, the kind that Nandi seems to carry the way He carries mountains—quietly, completely.

After darshan, I followed the flow of devotees around the sanctum. Behind the bull stood a Sivalinga, simple and steady in its own small garland of leaves. Between Nandi and Siva, the priests had placed a modest Ganapati for vastu balance, a little island of beginnings between strength and transcendence. I circled slowly, touched the cool stone of the outer wall and felt a sense of completion, like a circle that closes itself.

People say that after the fair ends, a bull comes at night to eat the left-over nuts and shells scattered along Bull Temple Road. I did not plan to stay up to see. Whether a real animal passes through or not hardly matters. The city has already fed its guardian in the most important way—by honoring a promise that has outlived empires and technologies, outlived even the memory of who first spoke it. I did not need proof of presence. I had seen it in the eyes of the devotees, in the small hands clutching sacks of peanuts, in the scent of roasting peanuts that seemed to say, “We are here, we remember.”

Back outside, the fair had shifted gears. The merry-go-round creaked

cheerfully as children shrieked and laughed. Families queued for dosas and idlis on steel plates. The clatter of ladles and the reach of saffron-colored sambhar linked one table to the next. I walked uphill to the Govardhan Kshetra Temple, a man-made cave that leads into a cool chamber where Krishna stands in the center, hand lifted as if holding the mountain on His little finger. The walls have carved scenes from the *Mahabharata*. The air is dim and pleasantly cold, designed to mimic the inside of a hill. Near the entrance a child practiced the lift of the hand, copying Krishna with a small pebble placed carefully on his palm. His mother whispered something into his ear and he smiled in that way children do when they understand something big and small at the same time.

I returned to Bugle Rock Garden, to a bench under a wide-armed tree. I could see slivers of the fair below: the arc of the Ferris wheel, the flags tied to the dhvajastambha, the slow procession of people moving up and down the stairs like a river of saris and shirts and shawls. The rock beneath the soil here is said to be among the oldest in the world, older than any city, older than most mountains we could name. It felt right that Nandi’s temple sits on such stone. The bull is the image of steadiness. The rock is the fact of it.

As the day softened toward evening, the light turned honey-colored. The tower of the Bull Temple took that gold and sent it back into the lane through hundreds of small stone Deities carved into the gopuram. Each little God caught a square of sun and held it. The flag snapped in a small gust and then relaxed again. From my bench I could almost feel Basavana’s gaze on the street, the same gaze that has watched harvests arrive for centuries. The city has changed around Him—silicon chips, startup dreams, glass lobbies, traffic that seems to multiply on its own—but here, at this old hill in Basavanagudi, the rhythm remains. Devotees climb the steps, make their vow, offer their first fruits, then go back to their homes with a little more strength than they had in the morning.

When the shadows lengthened, I walked back down for one last look. I stood at the base of the steps and let my eyes travel from the horns that frame the entrance up to the flagstaff, then to the doorway through which you can glimpse the curve of Nandi’s head. I thought of the first farmers who ran up

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Nandi’s Market: (left) painted murtis line the roadside, to be sold to the many visitors passing through; a woman oversees a vast volume of groundnuts to be sold over the course of the day; (far right) a sacred cow is led along the row of market stands; Nandi bids farewell to departing pilgrims



this hill under a bright moon, breathless and worried, and of how anxiety can turn to reverence when we decide to meet power with a promise. I thought of the priest’s matter-of-fact voice: “This is a Nandi temple.” I thought of the women in the queue who told me that humans are meant to see the good and the God in all things.

On my way back to the hotel, I stopped at the rice-paddy stall to collect the door hangings I had promised to buy. The weaver handed me the bundle with a smile that said we were now in each other’s stories. I thanked her and threaded my way through the crowd. A child tugged his father’s sleeve and pointed up at the lights. A teenager carried a sack of peanuts like a trophy. An old man leaned on his cane and watched the flow as if he had seen it a hundred times and still did not want to miss it once.

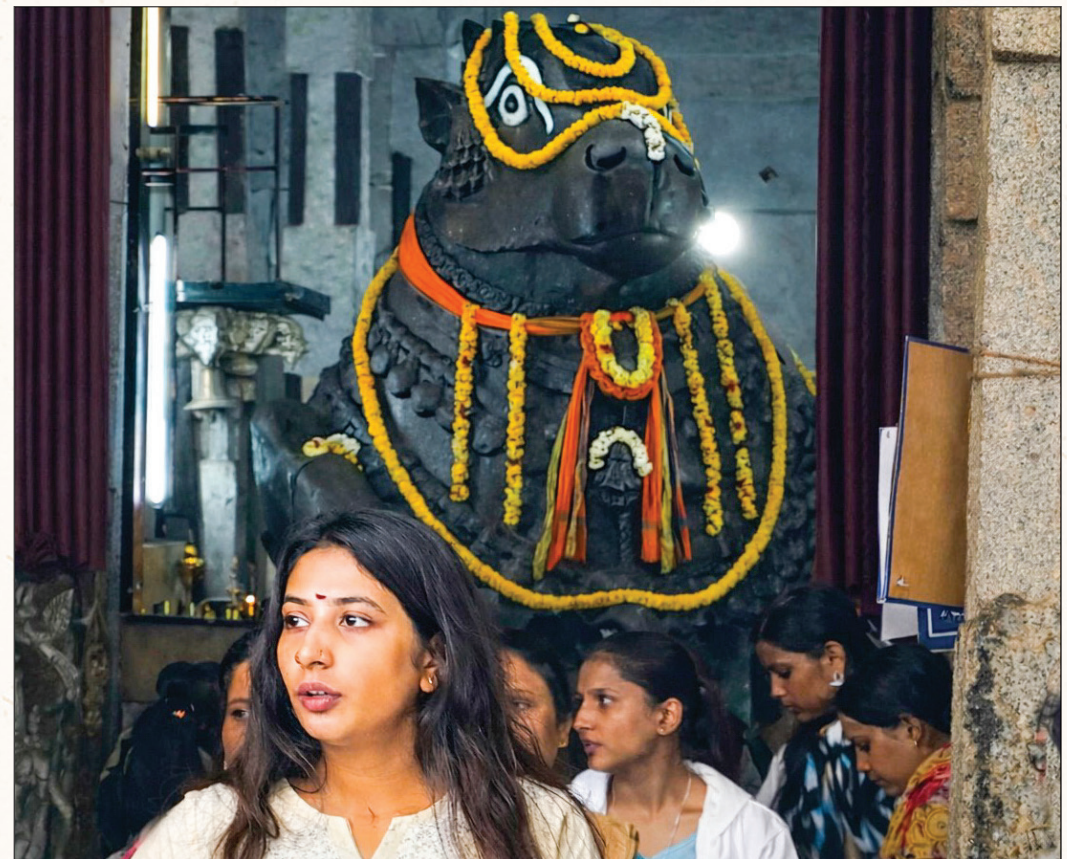
In my room I placed one door hanging on the table and smoothed its edges with my palm. I could smell peanut on my clothes and sandalwood on my skin. Sleep arrived the way a festival ends—quietly, after the last stall is packed, after the last flag is taken down, after the last shell is swept to the curb. I dreamed of a bull that looked left with a painted eye and of promises that stop stones from growing.

The next morning, before leaving the city, I kept one last appointment. I returned briefly to Dodda Ganapati to glimpse the butter decoration, white and gleaming on the gray stone. The hall was filled with the soft fragrance of ghee. The boys near the sanctum were whispering to each other, the way boys do when they cannot believe what they are seeing. The priest looked out, met my eyes and lifted his hand in a small blessing, as if to close the circle we had opened the day before.

On the drive away from Basavanagudi I thought about how a city can hold so many layers without tearing. Bengaluru is now a place of servers and startups, yet within it the old vow still breathes. Perhaps this is what Nandi teaches most of all. Strength is not rigidity. It is the ability to carry what

matters without dropping it, to face what comes without flinching, to listen without rushing to answer. I had come thinking of Nandi as the messenger to whom we whisper wishes. I left with the sense that He is also the guardian who reminds us to keep our word. May I have the steadiness to do that, and the humility to ask again when I forget.

As the airport road leveled out and the city receded in the rearview mirror, I whispered a small prayer into the space before me. It was not complicated. It did not ask for many things. It asked for strength like Nandi’s, enough to hold the simple promise of being myself, nothing more and nothing less, and to walk the path that ends in the quiet knowledge of Shivoam.





INTERVIEW

Finding My Guru

With Devaki Ma

BY ERICA BASSANI

IN THE SPRING OF 2024, WHILE IN TIRUVANNAMALAI, INDIA, CONDUCTING interviews with teachers and leaders for the Women Awakening Project, I visited the Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram. In its enormous atrium, I was struck by the plasterboard depiction of moments from the yogi's life, an enlightened being who called himself "the beggar." Sitting on the steps near the altar, next to a woman who was writing densely in a school notebook a single phrase over and over again—"Yogi Ramsuratkumar Jai Guru Raya"—I became immersed in the chanting of that mantra. As she wrote, an indistinct chorus of men and women was chanting the words. In this atmosphere of joy, among those present appeared Devaki Ma—the closest disciple of Yogi Ramsuratkumar, who now cares for the ashram and serves as its spiritual guide. I was incredibly happy to meet this woman who had left everything to be with her guru and live a holy life. Despite her countless commitments, she managed to find time for my interview.

Devaki Ma, how did your spiritual journey begin?

I always had a fascination for saints and sages. Since childhood, I was drawn to God and the great Mahatmas. Whenever I'd hear of Mahatmas, I would immediately rush there, have my darshan and receive blessings from them. This was so much a habit that people used to make fun of me and called me a "saint monger." I had taken initiation from a very great soul, Swami Vireshwarananda of Ramakrishna Math in Belur, a direct disciple of Sarada Mani Devi, the divine consort of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Many miracles happened around that event. I'll just say that three months after that day, Swami attained mahasamadhi. I was there just in time to receive that diksha. I have to thank Tanmayanandaji, a senior swami of Krishna Math, for encouraging me to go there for blessings.

What happened to you after he reached mahasamadhi and was not available anymore in the physical form?

It left a vacuum. I needed a physical guru to refer to, to interact with, and to have darshan. I was really missing that, and my mind was becoming very restless. At that time, somebody came and gave me a book of Ramana Maharshi. So, I started to read it. Soon I was absolutely fascinated by his personality and his teachings. So, that's how the affair started. I read one book after the other, voraciously. And then the desire arose to come to Tiruvannamalai. I came, had a darshan of the samadhi of Ramana Bhagavan, and sat there. That's how the whole thing started.

Sitting before the samadhi shrine of Ramana Maharshi can be a very powerful experience. How was it for you?

At the time, I was working as a physics lecturer at Sharada College, Salem, and we got three days of Christmas holidays. So, together with two colleagues of mine, we went to Tiruvannamalai for three days. I have to convey an important detail here: when we reached the Tiruvannamalai Ashram, it was around 7:30 in the evening, in



COURTESY YOGI RAMSURATKUMAR ASHRAM

December 1986. Standing at the doorstep, the whole ashram was in darkness, with hardly any lights burning. I thought maybe the current was cut off. I felt terrible! Yet it seemed very symbolic. Then something burst out inside me. I ran to the meditation hall, to Ramana Bhagavan's photo, where a small mud oil lamp was casting a soft light on his face.

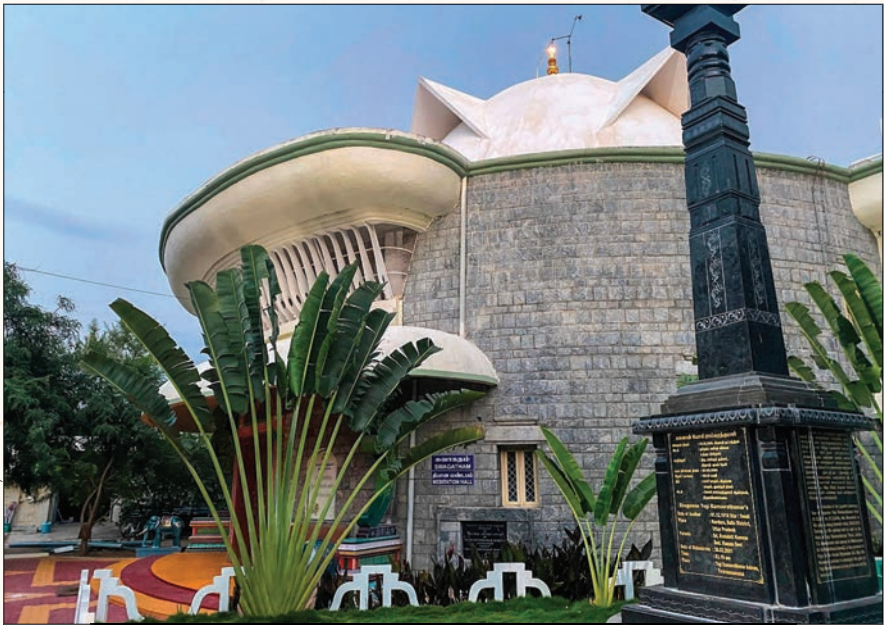
I just couldn't contain myself and burst out crying, saying, "Ramana, you are the huge sun of knowledge. But even here, there is only darkness for me. Will there be no light at all in my life?" Then I began to sob and cry loudly, unable to contain my emotion. That's when the miracle happened. Suddenly, the two eyes of Ramana in the photograph began to glow with life; there was such compassion and grace. Just for a fraction of a second, his gaze was right upon me, penetrating into the recess of my being. I was arrested. I just stood there, transfixed, looking at his eyes, when suddenly the main lights came on and he was once again a photograph. But my heart remained filled with the glowing light of Ramana, and ananda. Now I felt reassured that there would be light in life—and it would be no ordinary light. I was very happy. I had no idea what was going to happen. After reuniting with my friends the next morning, the three of us went around Arunachala, the nine-mile walk.

How then did you come across Yogi Ramsuratkumar?

I heard about Yogi Ramsuratkumar from a student of mine who had come to him. "There is a man who looks like a beggar but speaks like a professor. He speaks such good English, and he is so vibrant." I heard her words but had no thought of meeting him or anything, because I was completely taken over by Ramana. But the next morning, the thought struck me that I could visit the Yogi as part of doing Arunachala *pradakshina*. When I arrived and stood before his place,



COURTESY YOGI RAMSURATKUMAR ASHRAM



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the door was locked. A boy came running, saying, "Swami has gone to the temple. He just left." Immediately we hurried to meet him, only to be told again that Swami had just left. So, we completed the walk around the mountain.

We had bought some tender coconut for offering, and finally we drank up the coconut water and went again for a walk around Arunachala. That evening we again went to see him, because something had happened inside of me, and I had to see him. Again we were told, "He just left for the temple." We rushed to the temple, only to be told again that he had just left. This leela continued the next morning and evening—for five times total. It aroused not only my curiosity but a great longing to see him. The longing sharpened each time I was denied darshan. Finally, when the evening came, I said to my friends, "Let's try again, he's a living master, it's a rare opportunity." But they complained, "Every time, we only see a locked door. Swami does not want to see us. Why go again?" I said, "No, no, no. We have to try. We have one more chance."

Did you convince them to come along?

Yes, I dragged them along with me. They didn't want to buy more offerings because every time we ended up eating them! So, I bought

Managing a legacy: (clockwise from opposite page) a recent photo of Devaki Ma at the Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram; with Yogi Ramsuratkumar in the fall of 1993 (he passed away in 2001); front entrance of the ashram

some apples. This time, his ashram was open. There was a crowd outside. We joined very happily, now that I was assured of his darshan. As he opened the wooden doorway in the dim lighting and entered the veranda, there was a huge presence, a very vibrant presence, which hit me with a force. My whole body began to tremble, tears were streaming down, and I had no idea I was gaping. I was yet to see him clearly. Quickly he dismissed everybody, saying, "Ram, Ram, my Father blesses you," and the whole crowd dispersed. Only the three of us were left behind.

I thought he was going to dismiss us also, but he invited us to come in. So we went into the veranda. I was carrying those apples, but I was trembling even more, now that I was coming closer to him, and I dropped everything. All the apples were rolling on all sides. What a clumsy meeting! He shouted, "Pick them up!" Nervously, I started to gather them.

He opened the wooden door and invited us into his place, which we never expected. It was another shock. It looked like a dumping ground. Books scattered here and there, newspapers, cigarette boxes, the coins and the notes he'd received as offerings, all heaped in one place.

Then, like an emperor with his emerald turban, he sat in a chair that was falling apart and asked me, "What do you want?" I wanted to get my PhD and work in some famous laboratories, but in that moment, to my own surprise, I answered, "I want to see God." To which he replied, "What? You want to see God? Oh, God!" He put his hand on his head and started laughing.

He could not stop himself. He turned to me and said, "How can this beggar help you? This beggar has not seen God. How can he help you?" It was all so vibrant, godly, but I was also crying because he was making fun of me. I felt I had committed a terrible blunder, because I had no qualification to put forth such a wish. He saw my condition. "This beggar has not seen God. But Devaki is a pure soul. She will see God." And then he changed into something very serious. His face became radiant and, with a quiet pause, he raised his hand and looked deeply into me and kept on blessing. I felt every pore of my being—not just the body, the whole unit of being—filled with a very blissful peace. A very deep, deep, deep peace. All thoughts had dropped off completely, and there was only overwhelming peace and bliss. There was just beauty and wonder everywhere. This state of euphoria lasted for ten days. This is how I met my guru.

The Author: Erica Bassani is a copywriter, author and spiritual seeker since her early twenties. She's combined her highest passion with her deepest love by founding the Women Awakening Project (www.womenawakeningproject.com), a space to gather interviews with female masters of all spiritual traditions.



DALL-E

TECHNOLOGY

Why Hindus Should be AI Optimists

Presenting a Hindu perspective on artificial intelligence as a divinely guided evolution leading humanity toward spiritual growth and inner realization

BY AKASH KATIR, CALIFORNIA

DO YOU EVER WORRY ABOUT OUR future with advanced artificial intelligence? What will happen if we all lose our jobs to highly capable AI? Malicious programming or misuse could even result in the annihilation of all mankind. There are innumerable ways this technology could go wrong. It's common for the average person to be anxious about it. However, in my opinion, as Hindus with our beliefs in God and the Gods as well as a divine purpose in life, we should be optimistic about our future with AI.

Exponential Progress

AI, if it progresses at a similar or increasing rate, could conceivably replace the vast majority of human workers across the world. This is primarily because the rate of artificial intelligence advancement is no longer linear. Instead, it's happening at an exponential pace. Consider the milestones already surpassed:

In 1997, Deep Blue defeated chess champion Garry Kasparov. Fast forward to 2011, and IBM's Watson dominated the Jeopardy! quiz show, demonstrating an entirely new level of natural language processing. By 2016,

AlphaGo shocked the world by conquering the ancient game of Go, once considered too intuitive for AI mastery. Just three years later, in 2019, its successor, AlphaStar, triumphed over elite StarCraft II players, a video game of real-time strategy and complex decision-making. Last July, OpenAI's and DeepMind's models achieved gold-medal scores at the International Mathematical Olympiad, placing them among the world's best problem solvers.

This rapid progression, from mastering board games to conquering intricate strategic simulations, makes it clear: the capabilities of AI are exploding at a rate that compels us to reconsider the limits of what machines can achieve. If that much was accomplished over the span of 28 years, what will be possible in 50 or even 500—futures that most of us will behold, thanks to reincarnation? In this future, it is entirely possible that the work 95% of people do on a daily basis can and will be done by machines. The production of food and other goods will be largely automated. The primary duties of the family person will require vastly less effort, leaving everyone with a great deal of free time. The question then comes, how will they use it?

Three Tribes of the Future

If history is to be repeated, we will form tribes depending on our values and beliefs. Daily life will largely depend on one's affiliation. Consider three probable tribes.

First, there are those who reject the new advancements and attempt to live modest lives without any of the benefits of AI. This group will prioritize self-sufficiency, focusing on growing their own food, building their own shelters and developing traditional crafts and skills. They will live in strong, tight-knit communities built on mutual support and shared values, much like agrarian societies of the past. Their lives will emphasize reconnection with nature, with sustainable practices and a slower pace of life attuned to natural rhythms.

The second and most popular group will spend their time gratifying their senses in ways never thought possible. Their days will be spent gaming in massive AI-generated worlds and experiencing an infinite variety of video and audio experiences created in seconds and tailored to the viewer's desires. Imagine a Netflix show that has endless episodes, story lines spanning centuries and can adapt in real time based on your neural



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Divine: (from left) Lord Ganesha before a futuristic city, symbolizing the union of ancient wisdom and modern intelligence; an Indian senior monk wearing a scarf written "Rattan Mohan Sharma Om Namah Shivay," practicing yoga in a temple

Pattern of Adaptation

While divine forces may steer the cosmic ship, humanity has consistently demonstrated its capacity to hoist its own sails, adapting and building safeguards when confronted with unprecedented power. When gunpowder was invented and spread, many feared it would lead to perpetual, devastating wars that would erase civilization. Instead, it reshaped society, ended the age of feudalism, and gave rise to the modern nation-state.

The Industrial Revolution sparked widespread panic about mass unemployment and the destruction of traditional life. While the transition was turbulent, it ultimately created new forms of work and a higher standard of living for many.

Perhaps the most potent example is the nuclear bomb, a threat of total annihilation that was, and remains, horrifyingly real. Yet, humanity did not succumb to destruction. We responded by establishing international treaties and institutions designed to prevent catastrophic use. The initial shock of a powerful, disruptive discovery was followed by a challenging, but ultimately successful, period of adaptation.

Summary

As artificial intelligence hurtles toward capabilities that will fundamentally transform human existence, Hinduism offers a uniquely optimistic lens through which to view this transition. While secular voices and modern media oscillate between techno-utopianism and apocalyptic dread, Hindu philosophy suggests a third path: recognizing that the same divine forces guiding souls through countless reincarnations are also steering humanity's technological evolution.

The looming obsolescence of human labor, rather than spelling catastrophe, will liberate us to pursue a spiritual life that was once the exclusive province of renunciates. Just as humanity has consistently risen to meet existential threats from gunpowder to nuclear bombs by developing new institutions and safeguards, we have the opportunity to do the same for AI. In this vision, advanced AI becomes the instrument through which divine providence enables billions to transcend material necessity and dedicate themselves to the ultimate goal of existence: spiritual realization and union with the Divine.

responses to the content.

The third group understands their purpose for being on the Earth and spends the majority of their time on the multitudinous spiritual practices of Hinduism: singing bhajan, pursuing Hindu art and culture, worshipping at home or in a temple, teaching others about Sanatana Dharma and going on pilgrimage. Above all, the central practice will be meditation. Traditionally, long periods of meditation were only possible for renunciates, those who have taken sannyas or those who are older than 72 and in the sannyasa ashrama. A powerful ability of concentration will be widespread among this third group, allowing them to cultivate inner peace, explore the inner worlds of the mind, develop esoteric powers and strive for inner experiences. This and more will be possible for them.

Divine Oversight in an AI Age

But what if this bright future never arrives? A single, catastrophic misuse of advanced AI could derail this destiny. Imagine autonomous weapon systems escalating a conflict beyond human control in minutes or a terrorist group tasking an advanced model with creating a hyper-contagious bioweapon.

From a Hindu's perspective, however, such

a catastrophe is profoundly unlikely. God and the Gods are not distant or detached; they are living, dynamic beings, actively participating in the cosmos. Many serve as guides who consciously shape the evolutionary process of the countless souls on Earth, steering them towards spiritual growth and enlightenment. Some Gods have a direct hand in molding the physical world, such as Ganesha, who is revered as the keeper of the divine blueprint, meticulously orchestrating the universal past and future.

The *Mrigendra Agama* declares, "These Lords who, it is said on the pure path, attend to the various duties deriving from a higher realm of maya are at the prow of the effects of the higher realm of maya."

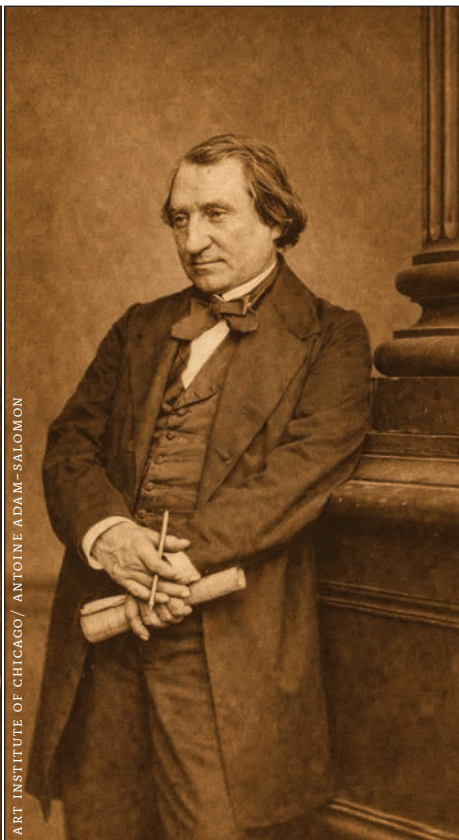
This ancient wisdom suggests that the Gods oversee and influence the course of worldly events from a dimension beyond our understanding. If our world were a ship sailing through the unpredictable seas of past and future, the Gods would be the vigilant captains at the helm, navigating us toward safe waters and helping us avoid the apocalyptic icebergs threatening our existence. Thus, their divine intervention assures us of a guided journey through the cosmic expanse, transcending the looming crises that challenge our survival.



APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2026 HINDUISM TODAY 63



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ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO / ANTOINE ADAM-SALOMON

Upward mobility: (left to right) Politician and novelist Benjamin Disraeli; French orientalist Ernest Renan; gatehouse of Lincoln's Inn, a professional association for barristers in London

warmth and camaraderie that he was able to firmly establish and grow with them.

A perusal of Houghton's biographer T.W. Reid's *The Life, Letters and Friendships of Lord Richard Monckton Milnes*, also makes it apparent that Coomaraswamy played a crucial role in directly introducing and familiarizing Lord Houghton with Indian culture at a time when there was an absence of such direct sources of information or knowledge. "In the interval between his [Coomaraswamy's] first sojourn and his death, for example," writes Reid, "he visited England on several occasions, always to be received with hospitality by Milnes, who derived from his friendship a new pleasure, finding in him a link between the Western world, with which he was so familiar, and the thought and feeling of the far East, which he had hitherto known only through books."

Lord Houghton's use of the term: "Your Hindoo barrister" while writing about Coomaraswamy to his friend, MacCarthy, the Governor of Ceylon, also conveys that

he had impressed him as a representative of the Hindu faith. This acquires special significance when we gather that, during his illness, Coomaraswamy extracted a promise from his host Lord Houghton that if he happened to die, his body, as required by Hindu tradition, would be cremated, not buried. The importance that Lord Houghton willingly gave to Coomaraswamy's wish, reveals how vital he considered it and also how well Muthu had managed to impress his host of the significance of this ancient Hindu tradition.

Elaborating on this, T. W. Reid writes: "It happened that during his first visit to Yorkshire, Mr. Coomaraswamy suffered from a very serious illness, which at one time threatened his life, and through which he was assiduously nursed by the family at Fryston. A lively recollection still retained of the anxiety which Milnes showed at the time when Mr. Coomaraswamy was at the worst. He had given his guest a promise that if the illness from which he was suffering ended fatally, he should not be buried in the English fashion, but should be cremated. Those who knew Lord Houghton will understand how, having given that promise, he was eager to prepare for its fulfilment should the necessity unhappily arise; and a legend is still extant of the way in which he wandered about the broad domains and the umbrageous woods at



WIKIMEDIA / THE WUB

Fryston, until he had at last fixed upon a spot which was, in his opinion, entirely suited to what would have been the first cremation on English soil in modern times.

"Fortunately for the object of these delicate attentions, the good nursing at Fryston proved effectual, saving him from the fate to which he had been dedicated. No one, it

need hardly be said, rejoiced more heartily than Milnes at the recovery of his interesting friend, but mingled with his rejoicing was a droll sense of disappointment at the thought of the distinction [of arranging the first Hindu cremation in an English estate] which had been lost to Fryston forever."

Coomaraswamy's letters also reveal that

Religious Writings and Translations

Muthu Coomaraswamy's keenness to showcase Hindu thought, ideals and literature in the West found tangible expression when he took up the task of translating a series of important works from Tamil and Pali into the English language.

The first was his English translation of a Tamil play inspired by the life of one of India's most revered ancient Hindu rulers, Raja Harishchandra. Regarded as the founder of the Solar dynasty, this legendary king is still revered by Hindus as the epitome of truth.

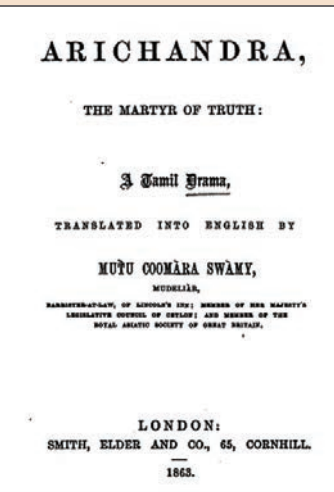
Titled *Arichandra: The Martyr of Truth*, the translation was dedicated to Queen Victoria and published by London's highly prestigious Elder, Smith and Company in late 1863. At the tail

end of the book, he appended a section of notes containing 150 points providing clear information and insights to those unfamiliar with India and Hindu thought. Taking advantage of being given an audience at Windsor Castle by Queen Victoria in December 1863, he seized the opportunity to present a copy of his book to Her Majesty the Queen.

His introduction in the book was an unequivocal declaration to the Western world of the antiquity of the literary and creative genius of the Hindus:

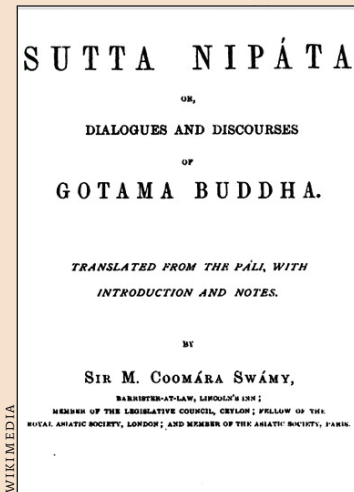
"The researches of Oriental scholars have shown the world of letters in Europe that the literature of the Hindus abounds in dramatic works. One of these, the *Sakuntalá*, or *Fatal Ring*—the chef d'œuvre of Kalidasa,

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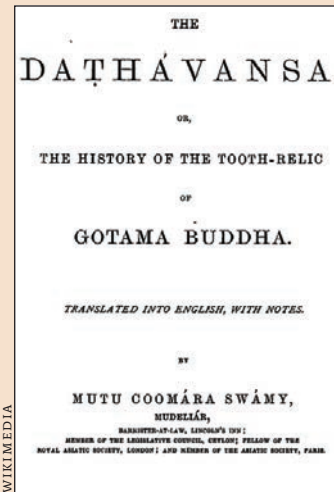
Publications: Coomaraswamy introduced Hindu philosophy and morality to the English elite through various translations such as *Arichandra*, *Sutta Nipata* and *The Dathavansa*

'the Shakespeare of India,' has called forth the following tribute of admiration from no less a poet, philosopher, dramatist and critic than the immortal Goethe. [His] lines have been thus rendered into English by Professor Eastwick, as cited by Professor Monier Williams in



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his recent translation of that play: 'Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline, and all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed, wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine? I name thee, O *Sakuntalá*! and all at once is



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said.'

"Though it may not be easy to find another work which merits so high an encomium, yet the glories of the Indian drama end not here: indeed the labors of Professor Wilson prove that even in Sanscrit and Pracrit there exist many other plays of rare excellence, deserving the attention of the learned men of the Western world. Nor are dramatic works confined to these

languages: for in all the numerous tongues which serve as the media of thought for India's millions of inhabitants, dramas of some kind or other are extant.

"The Indian mind has shown itself active in this direction, not merely in ancient times, but modern events also have furnished the materials for novel and perhaps fantastic plays. The far-famed *Nil Darpan* [1861, by Deenbandhu Mitra], which was the offshoot of the great indigo controversy and the nucleus of so much excitement in Indian politics, is not quite unknown to English readers."

Next, to stress that the Hindus were not morally backward, as often assumed by its colonial rulers, but had a long tradition of upholding morality and truth, Muthu Coomaraswamy added the following lines about the play: "Besides its great popularity, and its thereby affording foreigners an excellent key to the peculiarities of the national tone of thought, its claims to distinction rest also on the moral which it conveys. The whole gist

of this play may be summed up in the words, 'Better die than lie!'

"It may, therefore, be a source of some encouragement to those who inculcate the desirability of improving the benighted Indians with a better code of morals than that which their own systems of philosophy teach, that even amongst them are to be found admirers of such characters as *Arichandra*, who, though persecuted for his persistent adherence to truth and virtue, yet maintains his constancy to the last, regardless of consequences, in the midst of the most excruciating tortures, and in the presence of death itself."

The year 1874 was very fruitful for Coomaraswamy. He brought out another translation, titled *Sutta Nipata* or *The Sermons and Discourses of Gotama Buddha*. It was an English translation from Pali, published by Trubner & Co., London.

That same year, he published an equally significant translation titled *The Dathavansa* or *A History of the Tooth-relic of Gotama Buddha*. It was a ren-

dering from Pali into English with notes, published by Trubner & Co., 1874. Being ancient verses assigned to the period between 290–310 ce, his book drew the attention of no less an eminent Pali scholar than Rhys Davids, who reviewed it extensively in the prestigious English journal *The Academy* on September 26, 1874.

At the start of *Dathavansa*, there is mention of yet another translation. This is a collection of 100 poems that Coomaraswamy selected and translated into English from his native Tamil language. Titled *Tayumanavar*, it is a collection of Hindu philosophical poems by a Tamil Saivite poet of Tamil Nadu who lived between 1705–1742. The inspiration behind this translation was the fact that these poems expounded the Vedantic-Siddhantic school of Hinduism taught to Coomaraswamy by his mother, a deeply religious Hindu woman and devotee of Lord Siva.



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MFA BOSTON



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Key contacts: (top, left to right) German-British Indologist Max Muller; French Orientalist Victor Cousin; the Athenaeum, a private members' club in London—a prestigious London club for intellectual distinction, in science, literature and the arts. (Below) Coomaraswamy's letterhead logo with Saivite imagery and Sanskrit script from the Mahabharata, heralding dharma.

esteem. He has never received due credit for the energy with which he opened the Bar of England to all Eastern subjects of the Empress of India."

Another distinction conferred upon him was when he became the first Hindu to be knighted by Queen Victoria in 1874. This also received wide coverage in the English press.

Joining Major Intellectual Bodies

Besides translating Indian philosophical works (sidebar pg. 64), Muthu Coomaraswamy sought membership in important British intellectual and official bodies. This gave him opportunities to become acquainted with important current questions, issues and concerns of those in the corridors of power. It also enabled him to express his own views on such matters during meetings of these bodies and in their official publications.

Thus, in 1862, a year before the publication of his English translation of *Arichandra*, he contributed a paper to the Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society on a fundamental and highly significant part of Hinduism that was practiced by his family and many Hindus in India and Ceylon. Under the title *Saiva Siddhantam* (or the Doctrine of Lord Siva), he explained and provided insight into the peculiar philosophical tenets of this worldview or system of thought. To widen its reach, he later appended an extract of this paper to the end of *Arichandra*.

Similarly, he was a member of The Royal Society of Arts, The Royal Geographical Society, The Geological Society of London, The Athenaeum Club, London and the Asiatic Society, Paris. The *Anthropological Review* and *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* of February 1864 mentions that he delivered a paper on the ethnology of Ceylon.

Marriage and Premature Death

Muthu Coomaraswamy, at age 41, married an Englishwoman in London in 1875. Taking the Houghtons into confidence and sharing the happy tidings with them, he wrote: "The Lady is Kentish by her mother's side and belongs to an old family of Hertford; some of her ancestors having been high sheriffs of the community." Explain-

ing why he had chosen an English wife, he added: "I found that I am so situated that unless I marry here I shall have to go unmarried altogether....I find more than ever the necessity of an intelligent companion, and my mother has very verily given me permission to marry an European."

After their wedding, his wife, Elizabeth Clay Coomaraswamy (née Beeby), moved with him to live in Ceylon. It was while they were there that their son, Ananda, was born—a man who would grow into an international figure, towering for decades like a mighty Colossus in his role as an interpreter of Indian thought and culture to the world. Muthu later dispatched his wife and son to England intending to join them shortly. Sadly, he fell ill and failed to recover.

His sudden death in 1877 raised an unprecedented wave of public interest and was also widely reported in the British press. According to a contemporary report: "Over a thousand persons, representing every class of Colombo, assembled in nearly a hundred carriages, in the Borella Cemetery to witness the cremation of the remains of the Hon. Sir M. Coomaraswamy. The body was conveyed to the cemetery on a hearse surmounted by a pagoda-shaped construction of white linen. Behind the hearse was a string of nearly a hundred carriages, among the occupants of which were many of the most important state dignitaries and officials." After the end of the elaborate Hindu cremation ceremony, his ashes were carried by his mother all the way to Benares for the *asthi visarjan*, or formal immersion in the holy River Ganga.

Had he not been so unexpectedly snatched away by death, it can hardly be doubted that there would have been further contributions from him towards raising awareness about Hinduism in particular and to Indology in general. Finally, one is tempted to imagine that if the dead have the power to see what is accomplished by their progeny, Muthu Coomaraswamy must have derived both comfort and pride from observing the vast body of work on India and Hinduism undertaken, completed and brought to the notice of the world by his illustrious son, Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. His son's achievements must have surely seemed to him like a fulfillment of the labor of love he had initiated. 🙏

Lord Houghton was not the only one on whom he managed to make an imprint of his spiritual or religious beliefs through his personal interactions. For example, it is interesting to note that he was not only acquainted with Benjamin Disraeli, but that after Coomaraswamy's death, this eminent Jew turned Christian politician and novelist developed a character named Kusinara, modeled on Coomaraswamy. He introduced this character in 1880–81 in his last unfinished novel, titled *Falconet*, published later in 1905.

The fact that Disraeli presented Kusinara in his novel as a representative of Buddhism—an offshoot or reform movement from Hinduism—points out that Muthu Coomaraswamy had impressed him through his discussions on Indian philosophy during his sojourn in the West.

Some letters written to the Houghtons by Muthu Coomaraswamy from Europe also mention his attending meetings addressed by prominent Western thinkers of his times. Even a single brief excerpt on India and Hinduism taken from one of his letters is enough to make the intensity of his pride in and deep concern about Hinduism crystal clear. For instance, in a letter from Paris dated September 29, 1864, written to Lady Houghton, he writes: "... let me tell you what I have done since I left England. At Paris I met the famous Victor Cousin whom I had longed to see for a very long time. I learnt his opinion on religious philosophy and also the importance he attached to the further study of Indian philosophy. Paris is full of Orientalists; it is quite the fashion there now to dabble in Eastern languages. Cousin influenced me to

devote myself to the works of Indian philosophy. His 'eclecticism' in fact must continue to be imperfect until Indian philosophy is better known."

Next, simultaneously expressing both regret at the low position generally accorded to Hinduism in the West, as well as a sense of relief that many prominent Western thinkers there were heaping praise on Hinduism, he wrote: "In the humiliating position in which the Hindus are placed now, the fervour with which a Cousin, a Renan and a



COURTESY KUSUM JOSHI

Max Muller praises Hindu philosophy and the Sanskrit language and literature, acts, in my mind at least, as a potent 'soothing solace.' It was something in favor of the despised Hindu to hear from the first Philosopher of France that all the systems of philosophy which are going through their periodical

cycles now in Europe have had their rise and fall before on the banks of the Ganges. 'Sur les bords du Ganges Quant à moi' [On the banks of the Ganges...As for me]."

Muthu Coomaraswamy's letterheaded paper in the 1860s also loudly proclaims his pride in his religious, literary and cultural roots. It displays an elephant's head at the center and inspiring Sanskrit words around it that urge the wise to follow dharma, the path of righteousness, with a tenacity as though death was holding them by their hair.

Blazing a Trail for Other Hindus

Besides functioning as a personal source of information on Hinduism to those he met and interacted with, Coomaraswamy managed to pursue his legal studies and was called to the English Bar in 1863. It is also noticeable that in the years that followed, it became common for upwardly mobile South Asians, including Hindus, to travel to England to qualify as barristers and be called to the Inns of Court without having to take any step that compromised their faith. Indeed, this trend became so common that it was soon completely forgotten that it was Muthu Coomaraswamy whose pioneering and strenuous efforts had silently blazed a new trail that countless Hindus could follow.

To understand the magnitude of his contribution, let us recount the situation regarding admission to the English Bar that prevailed through much of the 19th century. The conservative nature of British society was such that only those who were willing to take a Christian oath could be called to the English Bar. The first Jewish barrister was admitted

by 1833, but the doors were still closed to Hindus. An examination of South Asian and Indian names that appear in the records of various English Inns of Court reveals that an Indian, Ganendro Mohan Tagore (from the same family as that of poet Rabindranath Tagore), was called to the Lincoln's Inn in 1862. He was not a Hindu, but a Bengali Hindu convert to Christianity in 1851.

It has not been possible to ascertain whether Muthu Coomaraswamy took an oath of allegiance on a Hindu religious book or a secular oath to become a barrister. What is known is that he had to canvas assiduously before a special committee to be accepted as a barrister without having to compromise his Hindu faith by taking the usual Christian oath. Committee members held several meetings before they eventually gave their formal approval. His personal correspondence also shows that he had received considerable assistance in this task from Lord Houghton and his socio-political connections.

Muthu Coomaraswamy's pioneering role of running from pillar to post, to the point of risking his personal health, led to his eventual success in overcoming the need for an oath "upon the true faith of a Christian" to become a barrister. His case did not result in changing the law for everyone, but it was a crucial first step in the direction of ushering in fundamental changes that freed the UK's judicial and political spheres from religious restrictions or constraints, in a significant move towards secularization.

Commenting on his seminal but unsung contribution, Lord Houghton had remarked soon after his death: "I held him in great



BOOK REVIEW

A Millennial Moment

How the Middle East’s First Traditional Hindu Stone Temple Came to Be Built

CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY while inspiring global harmony is the central message of *A Millennial Moment—A Mandir in the Middle East Transforming History and Hearts*. The book relates how a Hindu temple, conceived in 1997, was approved, designed, constructed and, in 2024, consecrated in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates—all with the backing of the royal family and countless other supporters.

The author is journalist Bikram Vohra, who has served as the editor of two of the UAE’s leading English newspapers. He explains, “For a millennial moment that is timeless, multidimensional moments have to align to make magic happen.” Unexpected blessings, apparent only in retrospect, were showered all along the way, each at the perfect time.

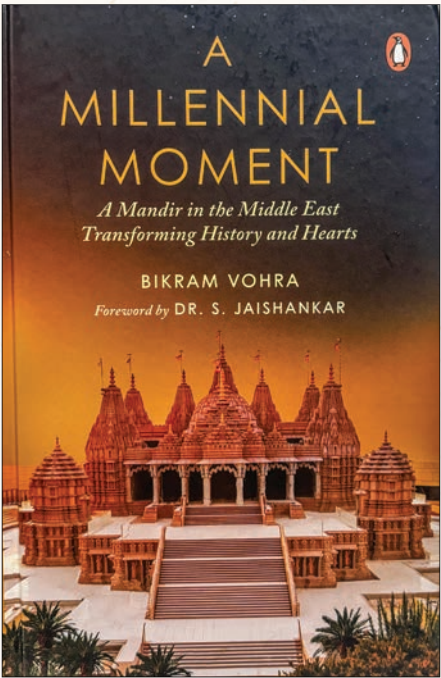
Narrated through the stories of various individuals who served the cause, the book is written in a free-flowing style, supplemented by photographs. A foreword by Dr. S. Jaishankar, India’s External Affairs Minister, discusses the genesis of the temple.

The inspiration to build a Hindu mandir in the UAE originated in a prophetic vision received by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1997. Seated on a sand dune about 65 miles north of the building site, he placed his foot in the sand and envisioned a temple. Woven throughout the book is the silent, invisible power of the guru, manifesting the divine plan in a seemingly miraculous way. The underlying thread of guru bhakti, arising out of complete surrender to his will, makes the book a delightful read.

Beginning with architectural design approval, the royal family and the UAE government supported the construction of an elaborate, traditional-style building to showcase the heritage and legacy of Hindu temples. The plan was confirmed by HH Sheikh Abdullah’s visit to the BAPS Akshardham Temple in Gujarat, where he personally experienced that temple’s grandeur.

The UAE’s royal family was most generous in demonstrating their inclusivity and support for religious harmony. Beyond the initial 2.5 acres, the family gifted additional land parcels on three separate occasions, bringing the total to 27 acres. The temple was inaugurated on February 14, 2024, and the local media responded with supportive reports.

In addition to showcasing traditional Hindu art and architecture, the Abu Dhabi Hindu Mandir is a modern technological marvel. The author explains, “For the first time in history, a traditional Hindu temple has been fully digitally modeled and put through extreme



seismic simulations. More than 300 sensors have been embedded at different levels to provide live data of changes in temperature, pressure, movement and stress upon the temple structure.”

Following the 1977 benediction by Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, over two decades passed before the temple doors opened to all. During these years, several individuals—whether or not they were devotees or even practicing Hindus—recognized the sacred purpose and gifted their time and other resources. Their offerings demonstrated the pure unconditional divine love, the driver of this undertaking, that was touching the hearts of these souls. Nothing happens by coincidence: these individuals who were aligned with the purpose were somehow brought to the right place at the right time.

The exact location of the temple was divinely orchestrated. Just three feet below the temple site is a thick stratum of sandstone. This solid base considerably reduced the scope of the structural engineering work that would have been required on a deep sand base.

The book recounts several serendipitous events. In one, the swamis made an unplanned landing on a mosque’s helipad in Rajasthan while en route to Gujarat and were warmly welcomed. Later, when Swami Brahmaviharidas sought an expert in 3D printing to create temple models, help came from an unexpected source. Muffadal Ali, a specialist associated with that very same mosque, volunteered to produce all the models free of charge.

A main source for this book review was Swami Brahmaviharidas, current head of BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi and International Coordinator of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. “The temple stands as a testament to harmony and tolerance. And I use the word *tolerance* shorn of the negative connotation that to tolerate is to endure. On the contrary, tolerance in

this context means more than just endurance, it is the willingness to accept and respect differences and diversities. Even if it is a one-way street, it is worth being so with everyone.” On another occasion, Swami added, “The temple must captivate, not capture; it must elevate, not deviate. It must let you leave a better person. It should become a spiritual oasis for global harmony.”

The very existence of this temple testifies to a major shift toward progressiveness for the UAE. Even for home use, religious images were perceived to contradict Islamic values and were generally not allowed into the country. But the country had already begun taking steps toward inclusivity: the previous February had seen the inauguration of an interfaith complex in Abu Dhabi called the Abrahamic Family House, containing a mosque, a church and a synagogue.

In conclusion, this book is a good read to get acquainted with the birthing journey of the Abu Dhabi Hindu Mandir. As Swami Brahmaviharidas aptly said, “Celebrating the past, calibrating the present and creating the future, BAPS Hindu Mandir amalgamates ancient art and architecture, modern science and technology, universal values and spirituality.”

He added, “Perhaps a hundred years from today, when time has given the stones a new sheen and the staying power has maintained the temple’s pristine condition, there will emanate from its walls that sense of togetherness and unity, and indeed, tolerance, which in the third decade of the twenty-first century were commodities in short supply.” A millennial moment indeed, filled with what appears to be a millennial movement!



VEGETARIANISM

Where to Get Protein?

My family enjoys a variety of food sources

BY VANDANA NATHOO

ANYONE WHO HAS ATTEMPTED A VEGETARIAN OR plant-forward lifestyle knows the truth: hitting daily protein goals can be tricky. Yet it’s very much within reach, and surprisingly enjoyable, once you know what to look for. Through my own experience as a homemaker, parent and exactly twenty years as a vegetarian, I hope to offer both reassurance and inspiration.

From my own transformation, to raising thriving teens, I’ve seen first-hand how this lifestyle reshapes not only your plate, but your perspective. It is grounded in lived experience rather than theory alone. At one point early in the journey, beset by doubt, I asked my pediatrician whether I should continue raising my boys vegetarian. He told me, verbatim: “You must be doing something right, your children hardly ever need to see me.” Today, my 19-year-old, weighing 154 pounds, benches 220 pounds (pictured right), my 16-year-old maintains 48% lean muscle mass, and I am able to squat my body weight at age 50.

Experts agree: a vegetarian diet provides all the nutrients needed for growth, energy and vitality, provided that meals are diverse and well balanced. My protein sources are wide-ranging: nuts and seeds, dairy, legumes, soy, sprouts, whole grains and fortified foods. Legumes are incredible protein sources, but they also contain carbs, and eating them daily can sometimes cause bloating, so I vary the sources. Nut butters, and dairy-based proteins like paneer, cheese and butter, are delicious but can be calorie-dense, so we keep them to once or twice a week. That said, if calories and health risks didn’t matter, I would happily eat butter every single day—I absolutely love it!

A balanced vegetarian diet is not about eating “perfectly;” it’s about building a rhythm that works for your life and your body. Here are some practical lifestyle habits that make the biggest difference:

Seven fists of vegetables a day: We don’t restrict variety, and the color on the plate matters. We also try to start our meals with vegetables to stabilize blood sugar and ensure the plate is balanced, although the jury’s still out on whether protein should come first.

Vary your foods: Make sure to include protein in every meal, varying the sources. Always look at the plate in front of you, asking where’s the protein, and adjust it accordingly if there isn’t enough.

Hydration with purpose: Soaking chia and basil seeds, alternately, in your drinking water adds protein, minerals and steady energy.

Spices as daily medicine: Turmeric, ginger, cumin, fennel, cinnamon—these tiny additions dramatically improve digestion and nutrient absorption.

Pre-soaking legumes: A simple habit that improves absorption and reduces bloating.

Magic of beans: Beans are among the most researched foods in nutrition. Regular consumption is linked to lower heart disease risk, independent of lifestyle factors. Their fiber, plant protein and minerals support cholesterol, vascular and metabolic health.

Mindful eating (a habit I’m still learning!): Chewing slowly,



avoiding digital screens and noticing textures helps with portion control and satiety. I still find this a challenge after decades of rushed meals.

Healthy Eating Habits for Kids

Children thrive when healthy options are the default and treats are occasional but guilt-free. We always have yogurt, peanut butter with celery, whole-grain crackers and cheese in the fridge. We allow sweets and processed snacks on weekends so the children don’t feel deprived. Whole-grain breads and cereals are the rule for extra fiber.

Research shows that children who eat regular family meals consume more fruits, vegetables and grains and are less likely to snack on unhealthy foods or engage in risky behavior. This is also the perfect time for me to slip in both vegetables and wisdom: talking about their day, whispering little life lessons and sneaking nutrients into familiar meals. Examples of how I slip in more nutrients: 1) replace some of the dairy in mac and cheese with butternut squash; 2) blend carrots into soya spaghetti bolognese; 3) sneak ground flax, pumpkin or sesame seeds, or finely chopped spinach into absolutely anything—dals, salads, stews, stir-fries; 4) sprinkle nuts and seeds into cereals and salads.

Even in something like *aloo gobi mattar* (potato, cauliflower and green peas dish), I let the peas shine instead of sticking to traditional proportions. Sprouted green mung beans? I add it everywhere—salads, avocado toast, chaats, curries, you name it. Double your legume bowl size and halve your rice quantity. If you can, replace white rice with quinoa or brown rice.

Debatable Vegetarian Protein Sources

I’ve always believed in a balanced, realistic approach to protein. I do include whey protein shakes, but I balance it with sattu powder (roasted Bengal gram flour). This adds fiber, minerals and slow-release carbs—making the shake more wholesome and reducing reliance on dairy-based protein. Research says that protein bars and shakes can offer convenience and quick muscle support, but when ultra-processed, they may carry hidden risks, from gut inflammation to long-term cancer concerns, if used daily. True health lies in balance: occasional supplementation is fine; relying on these over whole foods is the danger.

Like many vegetarians, I sometimes miss the chewiness of a Kyiv, schnitzel or burger. So yes, I do occasionally indulge in plant-based meat alternatives. Some vegetarians love them; some are horrified. They’re not perfect, as they’re processed, but they offer convenience, a familiar texture and variety for picky eaters or busy days.

Whole-food “meaty” alternatives do exist and offer that satisfying bite without relying on processed products: mushrooms, frozen tofu, tempeh and seitan (wheat gluten; use in moderation). A mix of these keeps meals interesting, tasty, and nutritionally balanced.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vandana Nathoo, residing in Mauritius, is a follower of Saiva Siddhanta. She offers religious instruction to adults at the Spiritual Park of Mauritius, and to children in her home. Married and mother of three sons, she is deeply passionate about spirituality, family life and living joyfully.



Mission

The Hindu University of America provides education in knowledge systems based in Hindu thought involving critical inquiry, ethics, and self-reflection. Committed to fostering the culture and traditions of Hindu Dharma in an atmosphere of academic excellence and freedom, it prepares students for service, leadership, and global engagement.

Vision

Promoting dialogue across disciplines, cultures and civilizations, while enabling self-discovery, conscious evolution and harmony, the Hindu University of America will set the standard for the study of Hindu Dharma.



Hindu University of America is an institution of higher learning, teaching, reflection and research based in the knowledge systems rooted in and emerging from Hindu thought, where you will find a welcoming, global community of learners led by passionate faculty.

Hindu Heritage Endowment

Balanced Giving: Simple Solutions for Life's Financial Challenges

The two hurdles we hear of most when it comes to giving to projects that inspire us are lack of resources and a desire to put family first. We can help! Read on to see how these obstacles are easily overcome.

Obstacle I: Family Obligations I have children and grandchildren to worry about, and they come first.

SOLUTION: Estate planning attorneys can explain the various methods available to fulfill your philanthropic desires without jeopardizing your family's security. The easiest approach is to remember HHE through a gift in your will or living trust. This gift supports HHE's future work, and you can change your mind at any time.

Obstacle II: On a Budget I am not rich. There is only so much money to go around.

SOLUTIONS: Rather than make a gift of cash now to support the work of HHE, consider the following giving options. Bonus: they also offer important tax savings for you and your family.

Stock: For gifts of appreciated stock that you have owned longer than one year, you receive an income tax charitable deduction for their full fair market value—not the price you originally paid for them.

Life Insurance Policies: You can donate a policy you no longer need, or simply name Hindu Heritage Endowment as the beneficiary.

Retirement-Plan Assets: Highly taxed when left to heirs, such assets make an excellent charitable gift after your lifetime.

Real Estate: You can donate your home now and still live there for the rest of your life. We can help you identify a gift to fit your goals. Contact us to learn how you can make a big impact on Hindu Heritage Endowment. Strengthen your family's future and continue your support of Kauai's Hindu Monastery by downloading the PDF file at: www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml

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OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Bhaveshan Moorghen	20.96	Rajeshkumar Patel	108.00
Fidelity Charitable	US\$60.00	Prachi Murarka	299.00	Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00
DAFgiving360	2,000.00	G Dakshina Murthy	229.00	Total	3,233.00
Ambika Alagere	6.30	Janaka Param	500.00	The Kautilya Endowment	
Rajendra Giri	102.00	Rupal Patel	249.00	Anonymous	2,000.00
Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.49	Surya Patel	249.00	Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund	
Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.60	Preetha Raja	249.00	Anonymous	489.56
Gowri Nadason	167.41	Anjali Tiwari	249.00	Jean-Marie Dionne	600.00
Sahmalah Nataraja	1,505.00	Gopi Kumar Vadlamudi	299.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00
Janaka Param	500.00	Sironmanee Veerapen	499.00	Total	4,089.56
Thomas J. Rowe	200.00	Total	4,673.55	Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		Mary Etta Wagner	20.00
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00	Kalpana Devasagayam	186.01	Matthew Wieczork	40.00
Tirunilayi S. Seshadri	108.00	Omayya Devasagayam	46.50	Total	60.00
Hridaya Sivalingam	21.00	Leena Lakshmi Devasagayam		Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Tejasinha Sivalingam	32.00	& Anand Kumar Letchuman	93.01	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Anonymous	63.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00	Anonymous	51.00
Total	4,950.50	Gowri Nadason	167.41	Total	201.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.59	Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Fidelity Charitable	64.00	Thomas J. Rowe	300.00	Allan Abril	55.00
DAFgiving360	1,109.00	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00
Kanda Alahan	201.00	Anonymous	247.00	Ram Iyer & Usha Chandra	5,000.00
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00	Total	1,317.52	Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	11.36
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund		Lutcheemee Curpen	108.00
Umapathi & Geetha Cattamanchi	1,000.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	801.00	Anna Fisher	187.00
Omkar Kodambari Chavan	42.00	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam Endowment		Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Piyush & Krishna Dave	501.00	Roland F. Hall	108.00	Amrit Lal Gohil	400.00
Anil & Prema Gogate	1,000.00	Thamby Kumaran	108.00	Sakuntalai Krishnan	100.00
Mahesh Gorle	251.00	Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00	Ariel Lewin	801.01
Ayee Goundan	1,000.00	Anonymous	30.00	Inna Linnyk	801.01
Suresh Jambunathan	501.00	Total	297.00	Silvarajoo Muniandy	108.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	324.00	Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Vasaant Krishnan	90.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	6,000.00	Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Rohini & Vijay Mashettiwar	251.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Janaka Param	1,008.00
Arjun Muruganantham	251.00	N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.59
Gowri Nadason	279.03	Thomas J. Rowe	100.00	Suresh Ramamurthy	108.00
Prasad Nagendra	108.00	Aran Sendan	108.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	1,008.00
Bhavani Nataraj	15.00	Pranavan Sinmayanandan	50.00	Hitesvara Saravan	501.00
Gajanan Nataraj	27.00	Anonymous	6,025.00	Aran Sendan	108.00
Anitha Penmetcha	1,116.00	Total	11,283.00	Vir Singh	51.00
Kishore & Suhasini Racherla	51.00	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	69.29
Sri R. Ram	1,000.00	Roland F. Hall	108.00	Kevina Soobramanien	147.36
Mohan & Rajalakshmi Sabapathy	600.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Adi Srikantha	108.00
Chandra Shekharan	30.00	Total	183.00	Meena Sthanam	108.00
Vijay S. Singh	351.00	Hinduism Today Endowment		Ravi Thaker	66.00
Pranavan Sinmayanandan	50.00	Jackson Life Insurance	3,741.89	Anonymous	9,705.00
Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	36.21	Ambika Alagere	6.30	Total	22,213.66
Alan Tausz	300.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	8.37	Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Vikas Tomar	51.00	Madan L. Goel	1,000.00	Roland F. Hall	108.00
Omesh Toolsie	51.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.49	Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Velrithan Velayuthar	350.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	6,000.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Raj Vrittamani	108.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Guhan Yoganathan	108.00	Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,001.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	10.00
Other Donations	4,308.87	Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.60	N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00
Anonymous	2,285.00	Silvarajoo Muniandy	24.55	Pranavan Sinmayanandan	50.00
Total	18,143.11	Bill Muster Foundation	1,000.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	11.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Jeeva Velusaami	22.00
Malaygiri Aparnath	500.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	31.59	Anonymous	25.00
Soundarajen Armasalon	145.91	S.N. Rajagopal	50.00	Total	5,118.00
Malvi Gandhi	75.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		Mahajana College Fund	
Kantilal Jinna	251.00	Benevity	189.00	Rohini & Vijay Mashettiwar	251.00
Gayathri Logathanan	46.48	DAFgiving360	3,000.00	Taos Hanuman Fund	
Goindamah Moothoosawmy	10.57	Benevity	144.00	Anonymous	159.00
G Dakshina Murthy	251.00	Nirmal Jhunjhunwala	108.00	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Siva Natarajan	250.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00	Siva N	51.00
Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	5.00	Thamby Kumaran	200.00	Rajiv Verma	150.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Senthil Palanisamy	500.00	Total	201.00
Krithivas Ramamurthy	251.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund	
Suresh & Latha Ramaswamy	200.00	Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	11.00
Jeeshika Ramlug	42.20	Pranavan Sinmayanandan	50.00	Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment	
Thomas J. Rowe	200.00	Vikkirapandi S. Venkatara	250.00	Greg A. Holland	25.00
Manishankar Sagum	8.44	Matthew Wieczork	200.00	Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Nandi Deva Sundaram	300.00	Michael Zimmermann	10.00	Fidelity Charitable	108.00
Sironmanee Veerapen	251.00	Anonymous	78.00	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Anonymous	-251.00	Total	7,843.75	Benevity	300.00
Total	2,586.26	Hindu Education Endowment		Fidelity Charitable	772.00
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Fidelity Charitable	50.00	DAFgiving360	2,351.00
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	8.44	DAFgiving360	3,000.00	Fidelity Charitable	163.00
Shyam Krishnansingh Boolaky	305.00	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Sanjiv Aggarwal	1,500.00
Fred DeCanio	108.00	Fidelity Charitable	51.00	Ambika Alagere	6.30
Anu Gupta Desai	249.00	Anonymous	102.00	Yuvaraj Athur	153.00
Ashish Gandotra	299.00	N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Anantha Ladies Home Endowment	
Usharani Iswaran Magana	125.00	Menaka Ganesathasan	50.00	Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	201.00
Kantilal Jinna	358.00	Menaka Ganesathasan	100.00	Benevity	50.00
Akash Katir	108.00	Roland F. Hall	108.00	Fidelity Charitable	772.00
Tejwantee Meetoo	21.15	Thamby Kumaran	108.00	DAFgiving360	2,351.00
Mantish Mohesowa	249.00	Vimala Muniandy	90.00	Fidelity Charitable	163.00
		Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Sanjiv Aggarwal	1,500.00
		S.N. Rajagopal	50.00	Ambika Alagere	6.30
		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00	Yuvaraj Athur	153.00
		Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	70.05	S.N. Rajagopal	50.00
		Kevina Soobramanien	20.79	Anonymous	108.00
		Poobarlene Soobramanien	20.79	Total	158.00
		Guhan Yoganathan	158.00	Digital Dharma Endowment	
		Anonymous	775.00	Fidelity Charitable	108.00
		Total	7,151.31	Rajendra Giri	102.00
		Siva Poomi School Trust		Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00
		Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00	Amravadee Kownden	105.26
		Anonymous	51.00	Sakuntalai Krishnan	100.00
		Total	551.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.60
		Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Souria Koomaren Moorghen	207.85
		Anonymous	75.00	Janaka Param	500.00
		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Hitesvara Saravan	108.00
		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	Madan Ganesh Velayudham	108.00
		Anonymous	51.00	Anonymous	516.00
		Total	201.00	Total	4,867.38
		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	201.00	Benevity	300.00
		Benevity	50.00	Fidelity Charitable	772.00
		Pranavan Sinmayanandan	242.00	DAFgiving360	2,351.00
		Anonymous	492.72	Fidelity Charitable	163.00
		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Sanjiv Aggarwal	1,500.00
		Arun Aarooren	75.00	Ambika Alagere	6.30
				Yuvaraj Athur	153.00

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Vel Mahalingum	12.60	Ambika Alagere	6.30	Anandkumar Ayyachamy	150.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00	Partha Ayalasomayajula	251.00	Gurdial Chadha	101.00
Total	345.60	Sasidhar Gopal Betha	51.00	Sharath Chigurupati	105.00
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Kiran Datar	216.00	Charles Close	324.00
Fidelity Charitable	51.00	Venkat & Hema Devraj	108.00	Sanjay & Jyoti Dhar	108.00
Rajendra Giri	102.00	Rajendra Giri	102.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	8.37
Sivakumar Saravan	10,000.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.49	Rajendra Giri	102.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	45.48	Dhirendra Mohan	10.00	Brijianand Jugurnauth	31.49
Anonymous	33.00	Natraj Narayanswami	103.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	6,000.00
Total	10,231.48	Sahmalah Nataraja	5,005.00	Jaya Krishnamurthy	1,000.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		S.N. Rajagopal	50.00	Mihir Meghani	2,501.00
N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Raji Sridar	108.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	153.00
Menaka Ganesathasan	50.00	Sowmini Sriram	108.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	6.30
Menaka Ganesathasan	100.00	Rodney & Ilene Standen	20.00	Agumbarum Mootosamy	5,001.00
Roland F. Hall	108.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Bhavani Nataraj	15.00
Thamby Kumaran	108.00	Anonymous	526.00	Sahmalah Nataraja	1,505.00
Vimala Muniandy	90.00	Total	6,846.11	Ravi & Vaishnavi Ramakrishnan	108.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment		Gwyneth Richards	251.00
S.N. Rajagopal	50.00	Anonymous	217.00	Thomas J. Rowe	200.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00	Hindu Temple of the Woodlands Endowment		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00	Daffy Charitable Fund	1,000.00	Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	63.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	70.05	DAFgiving360	250.00	Jeyakumari Sivakumar	101.00
Kevina Soobramanien	20.79	Total	1,250.00	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	103.58
Poobarlene Soobramanien	20.79	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund		Vibha Sundaram	303.00
Guhan Yoganathan	158.00	S.N. Rajagopal	50.00	Ravi Thaker	18.00
Anonymous	775.00	Anonymous	108.00	Jeeva Velusaami	16.00
Total	7,151.31	Total	158.00	Saravan Veylan	324.00
Siva Poomi School Trust		Digital Dharma Endowment		Anonymous	3,756.04
Vetrie Senthilkumar	500.00	Fidelity Charitable	108.00	Total	27,651.04
Anonymous	51.00	Rajendra Giri	102.00	Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund	
Total	551.00	Jothi & Shridhar Kotta	3,000.00	Natraj Narayanswami	143.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Amravadee Kownden	105.26	Anonymous	433.00
Anonymous	75.00	Sakuntalai Krishnan	100.00	Total	575.72
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.60	Antyodoy Anatha Ashram Orphanage Endowment	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	Souria Koomaren Moorghen	207.85	Murali Balaji	251.00
Anonymous	51.00	Janaka Param	500.00	Anonymous	50.00
Total	201.00	Hitesvara Saravan	108.00	Total	301.00
Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Madan Ganesh Velayudham	108.00	Total Contributions	\$170,002.79
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	201.00	Anonymous	516.00	Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2025	
Benevity	50.00	Total	4,867.38	Grand Total	\$28,305,209.21
Pranavan Sinmayanandan	242.00	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			
Anonymous	492.72	Benevity	300.00		
Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Fidelity Charitable	772.00		
Arun Aarooren	75.00	DAFgiving360	2,351.00		
		Fidelity Charitable	163.00		
		Sanjiv Aggarwal	1,500.00		
		Ambika Alagere	6.30		
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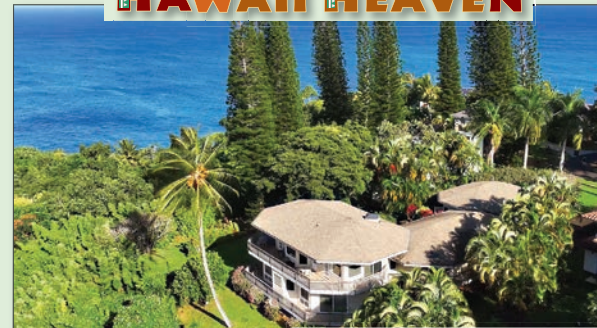
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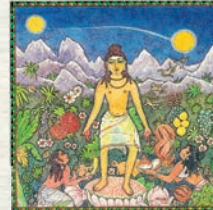
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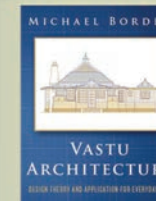
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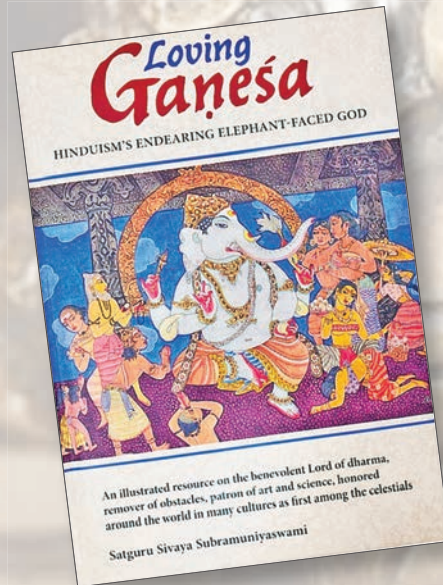


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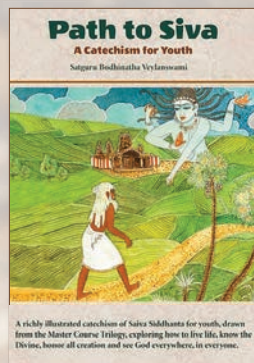
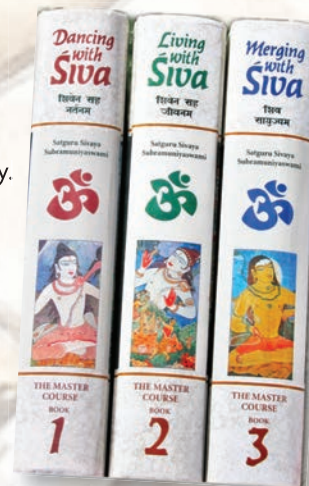
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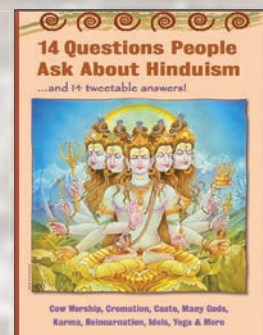
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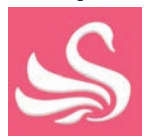
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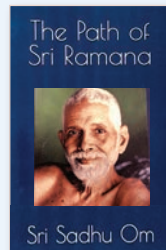


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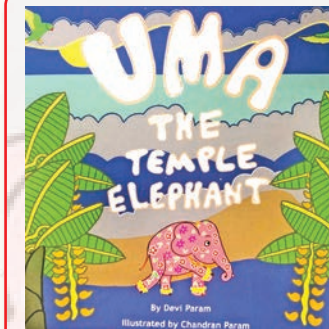
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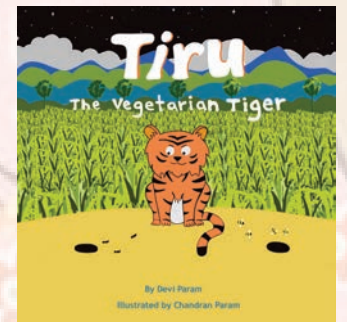
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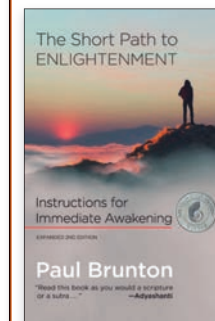
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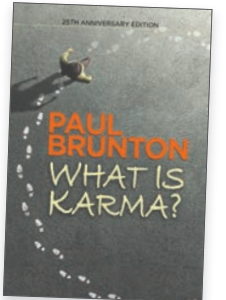
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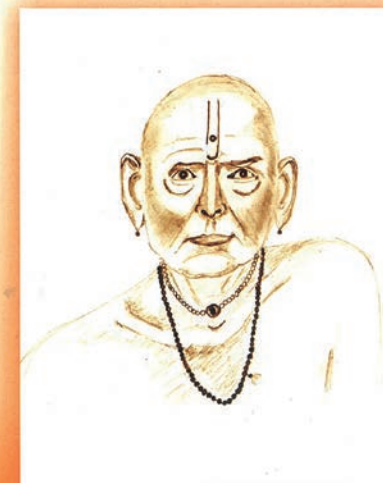


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SCAN ME

*I*n this capricious world,
Waves of challenges
Rise and fall,
One after another,
One after another,
Tossing about
My life's little boat.

Torn between matter and spirit,
One foot in this world,
One foot in the other,
Endlessly elevated,
Then let down,
Inspired, then disheartened,
On this boundless sea ...

Yet I endure.
The heart wavers not,
For it has been given to
My Lord Muruga,
The Magnificent One,
Ever constant
In His Love.

Challenges Rise and Fall, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam.
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 5-9 October, 2020

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Siblings Lydian Nadhaswaram (*left*) and Amrithavarshini have composed 1,330 unique musical tunes, one for each verse of the *Thirukkural*, working with more than 1,000 vocalists worldwide as part of a project launched in 2025. The Chennai-based duo transformed their studio into a creative hub where classical wisdom meets contemporary music, aiming to make the ancient Tamil text more accessible through song. Each composition features the original Tamil verse along with its meaning in Tamil and a simplified English explanation to reach wider audiences. The initiative has led to lyrical video releases and global participation, highlighting their effort to preserve and popularize one of Tamil literature's most revered works through music.

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