



The National Library's Collection on Hinduism

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Don't worry if you are not sure about what books to read or reference for a better understanding of Hinduism. Singapore Hindu explores the collection on Hinduism at the Lee Kong Chian Reference Library.

Introduction

The new National Library, at Victoria Street, has become a feature of Singapore's geographical and literary landscape. Its design is unique and as a modern library, provides access to a wide range of reference and research materials particularly on Singapore and Asia. Located in the heart of the Arts, Culture, Learning and Entertainment belt, the National Library serves as a one-stop information and resource centre to researchers, professionals, scholars, students and the community at large.

Lee Kong Chian Reference Library

The Lee Kong Chian Reference Library at the National Library houses the reference collection and provides the reference services. It occupies levels seven to thirteen of the building. It is named after the philanthropist and founder of the Lee Foundation, Dr Lee Kong Chian. The reference collection is rich and diverse, catering to both scholarly pursuits as well as the general interests of the lay public.



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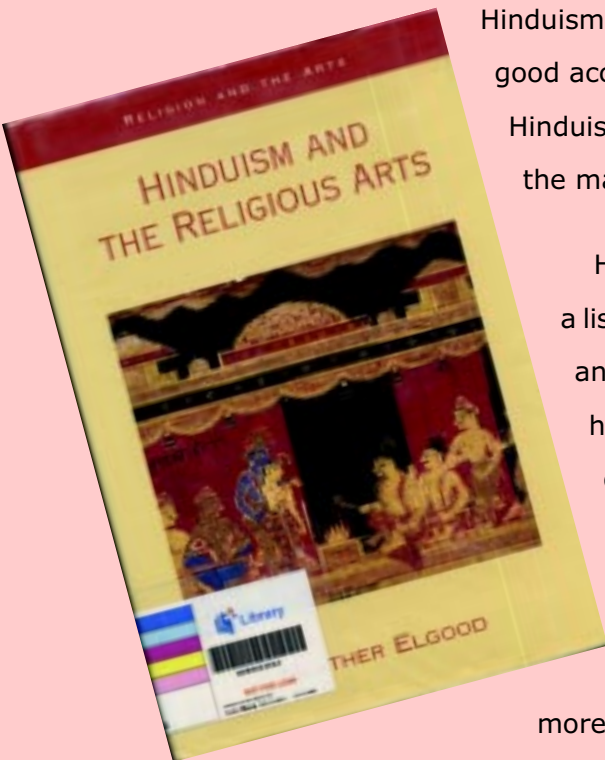
Works on Hinduism at the National Library

The Lee Kong Chian Reference Library has over a thousand books on Hinduism, in Tamil and English and covering all aspects of the religion and its literature. The English collection of Hinduism books is at Level 7 of the National Library building, as part of the Library's Social Sciences and Humanities collection. The Tamil collection is integrated with the Language collection at Level 9. Books on Hinduism related to Singapore are housed in the Singapore/ Southeast Asia Collection at Level 11.

Besides containing general information on Hindu doctrines and beliefs, the collection is also well-stocked on specialised materials covering a wide array of topics such as Hindu temples, family deity worship, history of devotees, and works of Saivites and Vaishnavites. Of course, no Hindu religious collection is complete without the works on Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas. There is also a small thesis collection in Tamil.

English works on Hinduism

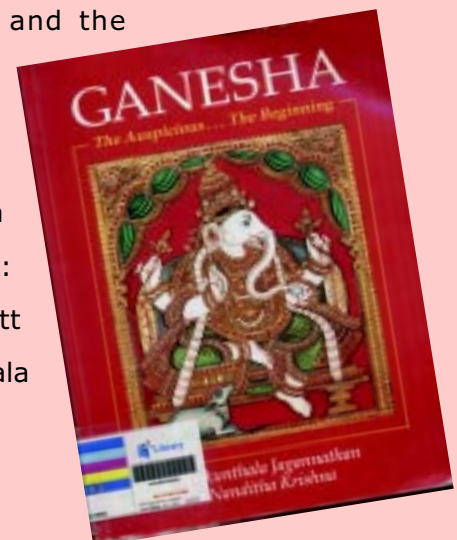
There are numerous interesting books on Hinduism written in English. Here is a sample of the array, catering to the different needs of the reading public.



Hinduism (1996), by Nirad Chaudhuri, a renowned Indian scholar, gives a good account of the religion. His simple description of the development of Hinduism from its early Indo-European origins to its evolution as one of the major religions of the world, appeals to the general reader.

Hinduism and the Religious Arts (1999), by Heather Elgood provides a list of beautiful illustrations of Hindu deities, Hindu architecture, village and tribal religious arts along with the philosophical explanations and historical background. Hindu Goddess (1987), by David Kinsley describes the various Goddesses in the Hindu mythology, the meaning of each Goddess, cult and the theology.

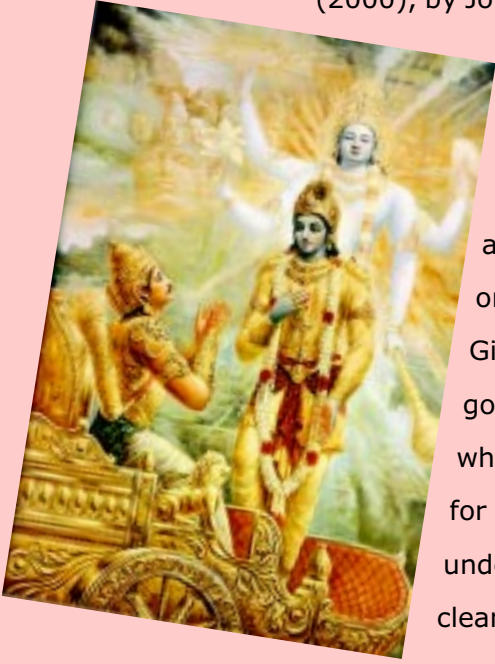
Readers who want to know more about Vishnu, Shiva and Ganesh with simple explanations and illustrations would find Vishnu: An Introduction (1999), and Shiva: An Introduction (1997), by Devdutt Pattanaik or Ganesha: The Auspicious, The beginning (1992), by Shakunthala Jaganathan, most useful.





Encyclopedias and dictionaries like *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion* (2000), by John Dowson help readers find the meanings and also serve

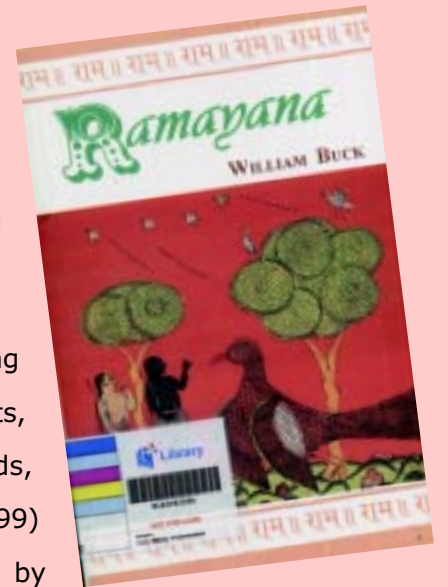
to familiarise them with the correct transliteration of the Sanskrit alphabet into English.



As Hinduism enlightens the ethics of life and moral values, readers are treated to a generous collection of books in both English and Tamil on these subjects. The teachings of the Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* have a two-fold mission. One is about self-knowledge, which is the goal, and the other pertains to action with a certain spiritual attitude, which is the means. Right action is repeatedly suggested as the means for the purification of the mind. Readers who are looking for a general understanding can go for *Essays on the Gita* (2000), by Sri Aurobindo that clearly explains morality and virtues.

An excellent book that would answer most of the reader's doubts regarding Hinduism, its culture and beliefs is *Dancing with Siva: Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism* (1997), written by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Written as a catechism, the book is refreshingly different and easy to understand.

Though a purana, the *Ramayana* has come to be revered as a Veda in some quarters because of its universal appeal. *Ramayana* (2000), by William Buck is good for a general reader as it is told with charming illustrations. *Ramayana* (1997), by Ranchor Prime is a splendid book that depicts the voyage from one end of the Indian subcontinent to the other, a powerful symbol of the spiritual voyage from man to God.



The Upanishads are wisdom teachings that explore the deeper meaning of sacrifice. The Upanishads were dialogues between gurus and their students, emphasising the dimensions of sacrifice. To know more about the Upanishads, there are several books like *Upanishads: Selection from 108 Upanishads* (1999) by T.M.P. Mahadevan, *The Supreme Wisdom of the Upanishads* (1998) by Klaus G. Witz, and *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (1999) by Paul Deussen.

Tamil Works on Hinduism

The Tamil collection in the Library includes a more in depth collection of books mainly on Saivism and Vaishnavism. The Saiva canonical poems composed by 63 leading saints over a period of almost 600 years were classified into 12 books, *The Panniru Thirumuraikal*.



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The first, second and third Thirumuraikal were composed by Thiru Gnana Sampanthar, born in Sirkazhi in the seventh century A.D. In a short life span of 16 years he achieved great fame and was one of the architects of the Bhakthi movement. He has composed 1600 pathikams (group of 10 stanzas) out of which only 384 are now available.

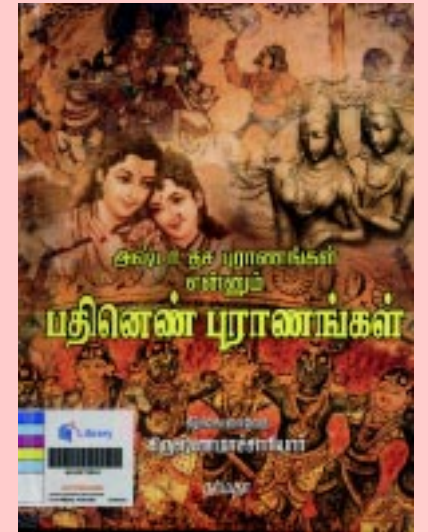


The fourth, fifth and sixth Thirumuraikal were authored by Thirunavukkarasar, the other architect of the Bhakthi movement. Out of the 4800 pathikams he wrote, only 312 are available. Suntharar, the author of the seventh Thirumurai, was instrumental in organizing the followers into a cohesive group. Only 100 pathikams of Suntharar are available. The first 7 Thirumuraikal are collectively known as Thevaram (garland of gods).

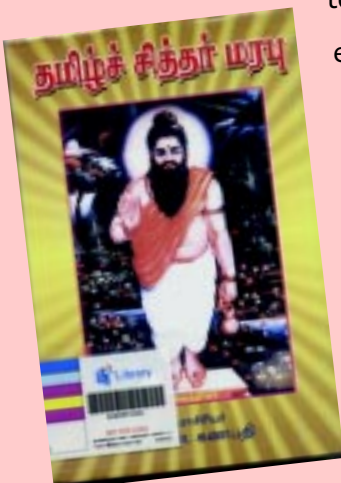
Manikkavasagar wrote the eighth Thirumurai consisting of Thiruvachagam, Thiruvempaavai and Thirukkovaiyaar. The ninth Thirumurai is named Thiruvisaipa was written by nine saints. The tenth Thirumurai Thirumanthiram was written by Thirumular. It is noted for its philosophical messages and profound principles. As one who stood for the eclectic school of mysticism, Thirumular had made references in his book to tantra, mantra and yoga practices.

The eleventh Thirumurai consists of poems composed by a heterogenous group of 12 Saivaite scholars and devotees, including Karaikkal Ammaiyar, Nakkira Thevar, Kalladath Thevar, Kapila Thevar, Cheraman Perumal, Nampi Andar, and Pattinathatikai. The twelfth Thirumurai was written by Sekkizhar. His work is called Periya Puranam and it deals with the glory of the Saivites.

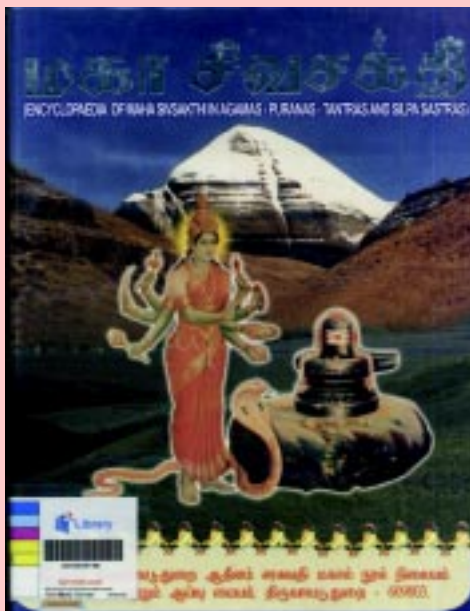
The Nalayira Divya Prabandham is the divine collection of 4000 hymns sung by Alvaars, who lived in the southern part of India before 8th century A.D. They were immersed in Bhagavath anubavam all the time. For this collection, there are explanatory notes written by renowned authors.



The Thiru Arutpa written by Saint Ramalinga Swamigal is made up of 5818 poems and is regarded to be an excellent blend of literary beauty and divine grace. The books have explanatory notes written by well known authors to facilitate understanding.



Other great works include Mahabharatham written by Villiputhur Alvaar and Kambaraamayanam written by Kambar. The Thiruvilyaadal Puranam extols the 64 avatars (forms) of Lord Shiva while the Kantha Puranam was written in praise of Lord Muruga. These books would be of interest to people who want to know more about the culture and religion of South India.



Works on the Tamil Siddhas will kindle the curiosity of readers with tantric imagery and references to Kundalini. Readers will find these books intriguing because of the enigmatic nature of the Siddha and their philosophical viewpoints, yogic practices, alchemical recipes for herbal tinctures and base metal amalgams.

Bilingual works

The Library’s collections include several bilingual (English/Tamil or Tamil/Sanskrit) works such as Thirukkural Naladiyaar (2002), which explains the Hindu ethics of life, Encyclopaedia of Maha Sarasvahthi (2003), and Encyclopaedia of Maha Sivasakthi in Vedas- Agamas-Puranas and Silpa Sastrastha (2003). There are also the works on the Rig Veda with extensive explanatory notes in Tamil and English.

Singapore Collection

Books on Hinduism in Singapore also form a part of this collection. These are mainly on the Hindu custom and rituals as practiced by the Indian community in Singapore. The collection includes temple consecration souvenir magazines like Beyond Divine Doors (2005) - the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple souvenir book, Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple Consecration Ceremony (2005), and Sri Ramar Temple Mahakumbabhishegam (2005). These books give an insight into the history of the temples and the pioneers who helped in their development. They are published with illustrations and beautiful pictures. Among the religious rituals practised in Singapore, the popular ones are Thimithi and Thaipusam.



One excellent book is Celebration of an Epic (2003), published by Sri Mariamman Temple on Thimithi festival. It gives a detailed explanation with illustrations of all the religious customs performed during the festival.

Services

The Lee Kong Chian Reference Library, at the National Library, provides reference and information services on language and religion for researchers and general readers. The subject librarians would be most happy to provide answers to queries, suggest useful search strategies and guide library users to relevant and useful resources available at the library. Researchers and readers needing further information and assistance on Hinduism may contact the library staff at Tel: 6332 3255, Fax: 6332 3395 or Email: ref@nlb.gov.sg.