

[Devotees Flex Their Memory Muscles in Thayumanavar Contest At Madras' Yogasana Alayam](#)

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There was a time when all communications were verbal, all teaching was oral, all data was stored not on dual density "floppy discs." but in the mind, the memory of man. For example, even today, India Tribune reports, Vedashastra Balachandra Karanbelkar, 73-year old Sanskrit scholar, will take about 950 hours to recite for tape recording all the mantras he knows by heart.

Memory is a wonderful tool - in many countries these days a concept most commonly associated with the ubiquitous computer. Few humans would consider storing in the memory of their brain 1,000 or even 100 verses of scripture for instant recall. But five ladies of the Yogasana Alayam did just that more. Demonstrating the power of the mind under the direction of devoted efforts, at the Thayumanavar Hymns Memorization contests held on April 14th in Madras, each lady proved to the judges that she had indeed memorized the entire tract of 1,450 songs of the renowned Saivite saint of the eighteenth century, and received a gold medal and other prizes from the Alayam. The contest is held each year at the Alayam on the eve of Tamil New Year Day, a day set aside by members as "Thayumanavar Day." Through their remarkable achievement, the awarded may serve as teachers, or Pracharaks, of which the 1,400-member organization now has 15:10 ladies and 5 gentlemen. At other contest levels, special prizes were awarded for memorizing 600,500,400,300,200,100, and 25 songs. contestants ranged from mature adults to children below 12 of age.

Each hymn is comprised of anywhere from 5 to 24 lines, and the total work is a volume of hundreds of pages. The hymns are all-embracing, as they often speak of absolute realization, yet are also rich in beautiful bhakti utterances. Sri Thayumanavar began his spiritual quest early in life with the study of Vedas and Agamas and the mastering of Sanskrit and Tamil. His leanings toward renunciation, however, were put off for a later date by his guru. Following orders, the bright young man soon married and lived an exemplary family life. After his wife's passing in middle age, he rejoined his guru to continue his inner work. Soon after, he sat in

deep samadhi at the Chidambaram Temple for one full month without moving, then pilgrimaged to Lakshmipuram where he settled for the rest of his life in a small garden hut and engaged himself in meditation and writing his divine songs, or hymns, on palmyra leaves in Tamil. They are sung daily in many Saivite homes throughout South India and Sri Lanka.

The main speaker at the festive day of contest, Thiru Valampuri John, said that the service being rendered by the Alayam through its centers to Hindu children, from the very infant stage, is most praise worthy and, further, commended the oneness he could see and hear among men, women and children as they participated in the group prayers. Through the means of teaching yoga asanas to the youths and engaging them in spirited bhajans, executives explain, the Yogasana Alayam takes an "easy approach," and gradually "The children stand strong on the principles of Saint Thayumanavar and Hinduism.

The Alayam encourages Hindus living outside India who wish to help expand the propagation of Thayumanavar's works to contact T.S. Kalyanansundaram, 1 Vivekanandapuram, III Street, Madras 600 033, INDIA.