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Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 2001

Jeweler to the Gods

One-stop shopping for divine silver and gold

Anandhi Ramachandran, Chennai

Nearly 23 years ago, Kalki Raju came to Chennai, India, and opened Sukra Jewellery, a store that crafts and sells high-quality "costume jewelry" known as kundan, for dancers. Soon Raju became popular with dancers around the world. But he felt something was missing. He wanted a more lasting satisfaction from his business.

Eventually, Raju decided to specialize in traditional Hindu puja, or worship, items, realizing that there were many new temples being built around the world that needed the sacred implements. He depended on the store for his livelihood, yet didn't want monetary concerns to interfere with the sanctity and accuracy of the products. He consulted elders and commissioned a few pieces. Soon people came to him for specialized puja items. Often, these were difficult to make, as many of the traditions for crafting these had been lost, and the instructions for others were in Sanskrit. He learned Sanskrit, and by trial and error his artisans carefully replicated some of the articles used in the Rameshwaram Temple. Now Sukra Jewellery makes everything from God's silver kavacham, or armor, to a wide variety of temple lamps.

Raju has made a silver elephant for the Pittsburg Temple in Pennsylvania, lamps for the Sydney Murugan Temple, items for the opening of the Veera Kali Amman Temple in Singapore and the Livermore Temple in California, a 44-pound silver kavacham for the Raghavendra Mutt near Mysore and much more. He's also made small pieces in pure gold and can custom-make just about anything used in puja. "Hinduism has come a long way," said Raju, "Our religion has gained a new strength today. I want to minimize the commercial interest and contribute all I can to our traditional arts and culture."

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