

## [The T-Shirt Tiff: Gaudy or Godly?](#)

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### The T-Shirt Tiff: Gaudy or Godly?

Shirts and skirts with lavish images of Hindu Deities sold in Malaysia should be banned, say outraged members of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam

Some Hindus entering tourist shops on Penang Road in Penang, Malaysia, were shocked and outraged to find t-shirts, "disco blouses" and mini-skirts decorated with images of Hindu Gods. Calling the clothes "degrading and insulting to the Hindu religion," the Malaysia Hindu Sangam launched a campaign to interdict the popular fashion fad.

The clothes, imported from Hong Kong and Thailand, display traditional and highly artistic images of Ganesha, Durga, Vishnu, Krishna, Amman and Siva. The stylish t-shirts exhibit a rainbow of colors and styles. Many are printed solid, front and back, making a strong visual impact and costing about <sup>us</sup>\$5 each. The "disco blouse" and mini-skirts come in three colors: maroon, blue and beige and run from <sup>us</sup>\$8 to \$10.

According to P. Murugiah, chairman of the Sensitive Issues Committee of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, "Malaysia is a multiracial country with complete freedom of worship. Anything that is degrading and offensive to any religion should not

be allowed. The sale of these materials is not only offensive to Hindus but a cheap and degrading sales gimmick. It is using religion for commercial gain." Murugiah went on to state that these clothes are especially popular with tourists, who buy most of them.

Asked by Hinduism Today for their opinion on the controversy, identical twins Susi and Susila Kuppusamy, who posed for our cover and the picture at right, observed, "It is wrong to portray our Hindu Deities in this manner--especially on the skirt and disco blouse. It may convey a wrong message to Malaysians of other religions."

Other parts of the world have different views. In the island of Mauritius just off the coast of Madagascar devotees frequently go to the temple wearing Deity t-shirts. To them it is acceptable devotional Hindu dress. A Sri Lankan family from Saskatchewan, Canada, visited our Hinduism Today offices in Hawaii recently wearing a Ganesha and Laksmi t-shirt bought at a yoga ashram in Virginia. The mother confessed that she's worn the shirts to work where her

co-workers asked respectful questions.

A brief search of the Internet turns up t-shirts for every faith, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Dozens, if not hundreds, of different Christian-theme shirts are sold, one brandishing the face of Jesus, and others showing him on the cross. In this generation few things are taboo, and cool t-shirts like these, are considered suitable, even admired, attire for dressy occasions.

Hindus like Vasanthi Perakasam of Kuala Lumpur worry that "it could be a strategy to demean our Gods and make others laugh at it." Her husband, Selladurai Perakasam, agreed, but admitted, "It could also be an opportunity for adults or children to get to know our many Gods and provide a chance for a non-Hindu to ask about the Deity. We need to have a very open mind about our religion and defend it when necessary but not over protect it."

As a result of Malaysian Hindu Sangam complaints, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs

Deputy Minister Datuk S. Subramaniam ordered the Trade Enforcement Division to take action and confiscate the miniskirt and "disco blouse." T-shirts, though, are still being sold.

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