

[Srouta Saivas: Voices of the Elders](#)

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Voices of the Elders

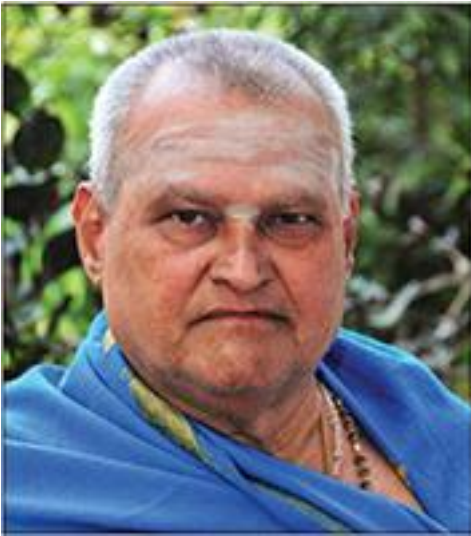


Sivasri Sadguru Dr. Kandukuri Sivananda Murthy Garu, 86, Peethadhipati, Saiva Maha Peetham. "We are known as Srouta Saiva. Srouta means in accordance with shruti, which are the Vedas. We adhere strictly to the Vedas and allied scriptures. We can call this Vedic Saivism. There is non-Vedic Saivism as well. The Lingayats and present-day Virasaivites of Karnataka, for example, also wear the Sivalingam, but they do not accept the authority of the Vedas. The Saivism of Karnataka rejects the caste system of the Vedas. They make no differences between castes. Members of our community respect and observe differences between the castes, varna dharma, as described in the Vedas. We will give Siva mantra diksha and the Sivalingam to anyone, even Dalits and so-called untouchables. But when we initiate someone of a different caste, they receive a different ceremony and a different kind of Sivalingam. Similarly, with vegetarianism, it goes with the caste. A sudra who is initiated may wear the Linga and be non-vegetarian. If you are a brahmin Lingadhari, you must be a vegetarian.

"We are not followers of any person. We follow the shastras, our scriptures. There are many other paths leading to salvation, like rivers going towards the sea. The goal is the same-Siva-and that is why we pray to Siva. But Srouta Saiva does say that your liberation is guaranteed in this path, while you are not necessarily guaranteed salvation in the other paths. We are not proselytizing Srouta Saivism. We do not call people and say, "Take to Saivism, it is so great and others are bad." We never talk like that. Our path is different. It is all voluntary acceptance.

One American couple came. We did not invite them or proselytize them. It was their choice and we gave them initiation.

My message to all those who take initiation is to keep the panchakshara maha-mantra, Aum Namah Sivaya, in your mind all the time. That is the only teaching I give. Every human being really knows what is good and what is bad. To tell a lie, to harm somebody is bad. Do we need to tell this to anybody? Everyone knows what the general, essential good conduct of human beings should be. But though dharma is known, they may not follow it. Human beings are free. Everything is ordained by God.



Sivasri Dr. Attaluri Mrutyumjaya Sharma Garu, 68, Upa Peethadhipati, Saiva Maha Peetham: Without the blessings of Lord Siva, nothing is possible. Even with initiation, if the grace of Lord Siva is not there, Siva puja is not possible. The Lingadhari Diksha can be given only after the boy has received the upanayana samskara (sacred thread ceremony). As prescribed by the Vedas, for brahmins the age is eight years, vaishyas eleven years and for kshatriyas it is twelve years. The Vedas do not prescribe upanayana samskara for a sudra. But if Lord Siva's grace is there, a sudra can also receive the Lingadharana Diksha after receiving upanayana samskara, Gayatri Mantra Diksha and the necessary purification. Agamas clearly say that a girl must first be married to a Lingadhari. Only then can she receive Lingadharana Diksha.

Once you are a Lingadhari, you are a Lingadhari at all times. The Linga can never be separated from our body. You cannot keep it somewhere else. Virasaivas of ancient times who lost their Linga would commit suicide. It was taken as if the

existence of that person was over. They were that drunk with Siva bhakti.

â€œModern Virasaivism and the Linga-yats of Karnataka are the branches, Srouta Saiva Sampradaya is the tree. We follow the Vedas; they do not. But the caste system practiced today in India is not the old varn-ashrama system given in the Vedas. All these four varnas or types of people are necessary for the well-being of society. Brahmins guide society and kshatriyas defend it. These are essential occupations for a vibrant, thriving, living society. According to Manu, all the four types of people were equal. There is no greatness or smallness. If in the course of time the brahmins started looking down upon the workers/sudras, that was an aberration.

We initiate Dalits and untouchables if they want Lingadharana Diksha. The concept of untouchability is being misused by present-day politicians. Untouchability is nothing but an individualâ€™s perception. If a woman has bathed but her children have not, she will treat her children as untouchable. We even accept converts to Hinduism. Srinath Mahadevan and his wife are examples (see page 32). If someone joins us midstream, we first perform the requisite sixteen samskaras in a nutshell form, and then a shuddhi (purification). Then the process is the same, upanayanam and Lingadharana initiation. Now, Srinath is not just a Hindu; among the Hindus he is an aradhya, a Srouta Saiva.

The requisite qualification for a person like Srinathâ€™s our expectation for any Linga-dhariâ€™s is that he must be committed to perform Siva puja daily. There is laghu, or small puja, which can be done in fifteen minutes; and there is maha puja, that takes three hours. One chooses whatever suits oneâ€™s lifestyle. But whatever you do, you must do consistently. As one grows older, one should devote more and more time to puja. Gradually, one has to realize that wearing the Linga is only a means and not an end in itself. Once you are accustomed to worshiping the Linga on your body, you have to realize that the same Lord is in your heart, too. It is through the Lord in oneâ€™s heart that one can reach the Brahmanadi that is there in oneâ€™s head. The moment one is connected to Brahmanadi, salvation is assured.

â€œWe encourage arranged marriages. In our community 99 percent of marriages are arranged. Our youth accept this system. Love marriages also take place, but rarely. Inter-caste marriages are not approved. A brahmin should not marry a vaishya or a sudra or a kshatriya. But if a brahmin marries a sudra girl, on principle

we would not approve, however there is no thought of making them outcasts. Once it is done, we cannot undo it, so it has to be accepted. We provide her Lingadharana and take her into our fold.

Lingadharis talk about their initiation, daily worship and life as a devotee



Nagendra Nath, 29, chartered accountant: "We face a problem of conversion to Christianity and Islam, so we need to educate our people about our traditions. I took Lingadharana Diksha at the age of 16. Even as a child I did puja and memorized all 185 verses of Lalita Sahasranama. By the age of ten I could also chant many other shlokas. I studied in Saraswati Vidyalayam, which was run by the Theosophical Society and RSS. All this had an impact on me."



Raga Ranjita, 24, MBA graduate, Nagendra's wife, homemaker and mother: "Today I will be given Lingadharana Diksha. It is nice to see so many young people here to get Lingadharana Diksha. Some kind of divine spirit enters inside one if one does the abhishekam of the Lingam every day."

Vasantha Kumar, software engineer: "I have been a Linga-dhari for twelve years. Before initiation my life was undisciplined. With my initiation, a new power came to me. I started getting up early and performing puja before sunrise. All the young people who have taken the Lingadharana Diksha experience changes in their lives."



Sharda, 70, educated to tenth standard, full-time mother and housewife: "I have been doing normal pujas till now. My son took Lingadharana Diksha when my husband passed away. Now, late in life, I have developed interest in the tradition. I want to merge into Siva when I pass away. Therefore I have taken the path of Lingadharana today."

Uma Kasinathini, 40, postgraduate in Public Administration, exams trainer: "I do Siva puja every morning for half an hour. I have never missed my puja since my initiation after marriage in 2000."

"The mother's role in spreading our tradition is more important than the father's, because she has the most contact with the child. Without her, the tradition cannot endure. I have seen families of aradhyas who are living like ordinary people, not wearing and worshipping the Linga. In such cases, I feel it is the women who are not doing their jobs. If the father is very busy, the mother must play a leading role. Some people say they will perform their religious duties once they get older. But my father taught us Siva puja is an integral part of your life, just like eating."

"I carry Lord Siva on my body. He is the guiding force, helps me lead a disciplined life and He does not let me do anything wrong. The Lingam gives me solace, and I converse with God when I am down."



Vijay Prakasham, retired mining engineer: "I am so happy that my grandson Shreyas has got his Lingadharana Diksha today. I was initiated 52 years ago, in

1962. Lingadharana protects you in every respect. Someone Whom we cannot see but is the power behind us, protects us. In my life, the days when I could not do abhishekam of my Linga were days with problems. But whenever I performed my abhishekam, my days were trouble free.â

Sasidhar Mudigonda, 36, computer professional: âThe community is changing. We are more focused on our religion. Youth are getting attracted to our culture and temples. My message to the Hindu youth, based on my personal experience is: after a morning bath, just spending ten to fifteen minutes on Siva abhishekam will give you relaxation and many other positive results.

âMuch is said about the negatives of IT, bad work hours and time challenges, etc. But there are now so many divine websites and positives in the Internet culture. If we do our Siva puja and meditate for fifteen minutes when we get home from work, that will give us a lot of self-confidence. If we cannot even spend 15 minutes, even two minutesâ chanting Aum Namah Sivaya will give us relief from stress. We must also reserve more time for our families.â



Shreyas, 11, student, fifth standard: âI got my upanayanam samskara at age eight, and today I got the Lingadharana Diksha. My father and grandfather have been doing Siva puja every day, and now I will also for ten or fifteen minutes daily. Linga puja every day will make me a better student.â



S. Ramchandra Prasad, 47, advocate: âWe do abhishekam to the Linga with the sacred water. Water becomes sacred when it is mixed with holy ash. We are always elated that the omnipotent Lord Siva is there in the Linga we wear on our body and He safeguards us. I would like to tell Hindus all over the world to have a firm belief in the existence of God. To Hindus, Lord Siva is omnipotent, the ultimate power. I am not making any distinctions between Lord Siva and other Gods, as all other forms are also the manifestations of Lord Siva only.â



Janahvi, 13, daughter of Chandrasekhar, student, ninth standard: "My grandparents were Lingadharis and so are my parents. When I was a small child, my grandfather would tell me stories of Lord Siva. I recite Siva Panchakshari every day and chant the names of Lord Siva. I dream of being initiated as a Lingadhari when I marry. Aradhya families train their children from childhood so we are prepared for Lingadharana when we reach that stage.

"My friends at school are very interested in the traditions of my community. They tell about their traditions and I share mine. I tell my friends about Panchakshari, Siva puja, holy ash and ru-draksha. My message for the youth is: obey your parents and follow the traditions of the community. Go for Lingadharana and upanayanam. Tell everybody about the importance of wearing the Sivalingam."



Sivalenka Anuradha, 43, practicing chartered accountant: "As children we would help our father in the daily puja however we could. Immediately after getting up we would wash our face and apply vibhuti, pluck flowers, clean the puja room and put out the mat, then bath and attend the puja. I do my Siva puja daily with my husband at almost the same time each day. I provide everything he needs so that we do not have to interrupt the puja for anything. We spend roughly ten to fifteen minutes on the puja. Women have a short Siva puja format. Men do a longer puja and also chant the Gayatri.

"My father introduced me to Namah Sivaya even before I could read or write. This mantra always rings in our mind. Anything we do or start, we do it chanting Namah Sivaya. No matter where we roam, we have Lord Siva with us on our chest all day and all night. I have no worries and no depression at all."

Sri Mulugu Hanumanth Rao, 76, Secretary, Saiva Maha Peetham: "About five thousand families practice the Srouta Saiva traditions. Globally it might be about thirty thousand people. The majority are in Andhra Pradesh; only a very few are outside India. If you include those who only took rudraksha or mantra diksha, there could be a few thousand more. As far as activities go, besides the annual festivals, ceremonies and initiations, we recently initiated some social projects to provide

financial and medical assistance to help those in our community who are having economic difficulties. We have started an ashram at the ancient Siva temple of Srisailam and hope to develop a branch there. Each month we publish the Saiva Mataha Prabodhini magazine to keep everyone informed. Also we are printing and distributing books on our system and theology.



Secretary: Mulugu Hanumanth Rao, Secretary of Saiva Maha Peetham, Hyderabad
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“Women are as important as males in our community. The family traditions are passed on primarily by the women in the home while raising the children. In a way, they are more important than the men for us to keep our dharma alive and pass it on to the future generations.”

T. Viramallayya, 65, environmental journalist, Vice President, Saiva Maha Peetham, Twin Cities Branch: “Ours is a rational Vedic culture. Our scriptures state that Rudra, or Siva, is the most ancient God. Siva is the only God. There is no other God than Siva. We liberalized all our rituals and systems. Our system is very easy to adopt. I say we are liberal because we do not have so many rituals. Siva is Abhishek Priya, one who loves to be bathed; water would suffice. For Siva, you do not have to perform so many rituals. If you can do puja with flowers and fruits, then that is good. But if you cannot, you can even just do puja mentally. That is called manas

puja, puja in the mind.

â Scriptures say a Lingadhari is always purified. This means a man who wears Linga is himself an embodiment of Siva. I believe only in Lord Siva, considering Him the supreme power. In my house I only allow pictures of Lord Siva and Mother Parvati and of no other Deities or Gods. Though I am cosmopolitan in my approach, at the same time I observe all the rituals meticulously. In the morning I get up around 5 and spend two hours doing my Siva puja. Even on an airplane flight I do not miss my puja; I do manas puja.â

Mudigonda Amarnatha Sharma 44, Sanskrit scholar and lecturer, Agama expert, Asthana Pandith and matrimonial priest: â The proof of Lingadharana is there in four Vedas. The Narayana Upanishad states, â May I wear the Lingam on my body for salvation from rebirth.â There are 28 Agamas. Srouta Saiva Siddhanta is based primary on the Chandragyana, Karanottara and Makatottara Agamas. Chandragyana Agama states that you have to wear the Lingam on your body. The Mahabharata states that all the Pandavas, Sri Krishna and Arjuna were Lingadharis. Upamanu Maharishi gave diksha to the son of Lord Krishna. Pashupati Diksha, Shambhava Diksha, Shiro Diksha-â these are all synonyms of Lingadharana. The Siva Gita says that even Lord Rama was a Lingadhari and had taken the Pashupati Vratam (Vow).

â The Agamas followed by Sivacharyas of Tamil Nadu and Srouta Saiva are one and the same. They take the rudraksha dharana, bhasma dharana and mantra upadesha. But they do not follow Lingadharana.

â There were twelve revered aradhyas who propagated our Srouta Saivism, and 63 Nayanars propagated Saivism in Tamil Nadu. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no link between the two lineages.â



Srouta Saiva scholar and priest: Mudigonda Amarnatha Sharma

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Dedicated to Siva's Message

BY LAKSHMI SINGARAJU

MY FATHER, SIVA SRI ANNADEVARA SUBBARAO Garu, was born in an orthodox brahmin family in a small hamlet in West Godavari district of AP. He underwent the Lingadharana initiation and devoted his entire life to the worship of Lord Siva, diligently performing all his duties as a family man and as a Siva devotee. His life was an example of one who strived for kaivalyam, liberation. All his conversations revolved around Srouta Saivism and the worship of Siva. He often compared himself with Nandi, Lord Siva's vehicle, saying his duty was to serve the Lord just as Nandi did.

Our parents raised six children with strict discipline. Each of us had daily chores. The day began with house cleaning, picking flowers and preparing puja articles. My mother cooked the food offerings. My father had to finish his Siva puja, eat and leave for work by 9:30am. By then my brothers had to finish their Sandhyavandanam and Gayatri, and my three sisters and I had to finish reciting our

Lalita Sahasranama. This was a strict rule, and we followed it regularly. All eight of us always sat together for dinner, sharing our experiences of the day. Weekends were more relaxed, and Dad spent more time with us. He cherished analyzing the great texts, linking them to his devotion to Lord Siva. He would get so enthused talking to us of Siva that my mother had to remind him to complete his puja.

My father was a voracious reader, especially of works about Saiva Siddhanta and the works of Siva Sri Nagalingasastry Garu. He once took me on a two-hour ride to an old library in Chennai. Why, I did not know. Later, after going through his life work, I came to understand his zealous striving for a broad comprehension of Saiva Siddhanta from different sources. He used to say that only with Lord Siva's grace could one eventually understand the texts.



Father & guru: Siva Sri Annadevara Subbarao garu; his daughter Lakshmi, author of this article

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After retirement he devoted himself to translating the works of Sivasri Nagalingasastry Garu into English. Despite his meager finances, he established a trust called Sivajnanalahari, published books on Srouta Saiva Siddhanta and created a website, www.sroutasaivasiddhanta.com, putting the tenets of our faith into simple, plain English to make it accessible to seekers all over the world. He said future generations will not have the time to read complex books, especially not in

Sanskrit or old Telegu. He felt that even if a single person was influenced by his effort, his purpose would be fulfilled. His two sons are devotedly carrying on his work. Within weeks after my father passed, one Mr. Sriram called from Chennai. To our family's delight, he said that having gone through the website, he wanted to receive Sambhava Diksha. Then in 2011 Mr. Srinatha Mahadevan and his wife, Shankari, discovered the site and later became the first Westerners to convert to Srouta Saivism.

My dad is my guru; he bestowed me with the Sambhava Diksha. The aradhya community is so small that many of our young ladies have to marry outside the faith, but Dad was determined to marry all four of his daughters into aradhya families so we could continue to practice our religion. I live in the US and perform puja to my Sivalingam every day. I am fortunate to have been born as his daughter. I am forever indebted to him, as he gave me a chance to practice Srouta Saivism.

Two Americans Find Truth

MARK SAUNDERS, BORN IN 1978, WAS RAISED IN TEXAS. BUT his thirst for truth could not be quenched in America. He started a business importing goods from India. That nation became his home. Out of love for Lord Siva he took the name Srinath Mahadevan. He and his wife, Shankari, were the initial spark for this feature story. "Though US born," he says, "I grew up from the age of nine in Sanatana Dharma, originally as a Smarta. I studied Shankara-charya's work. As I delved deeper, I could not ignore the overlaying message of Siva Manasa Puja and Sivananda Lahiri and so many more things in the Shastras, in all the Itihasas. All these things pointed with no doubt directly to the greatness of the Saiva path. When I first came to India 14 years ago, I left the Smarta Sampradaya and joined the Gorakhnath Sampradaya. A year ago I made the decision to leave the Gorakhnath tradition, due to the current decline in orthodoxy, the high rate of illiteracy of most members and the lack of knowledge of Agama Shastra and shruti. I prayed very hard to Lord Shankar to guide me on the correct path. With great astonishment I came to find a community in Andhra that Indologists have said no longer exists. The followers of Lakulisa Acharya, the Aradhya Brahmins, are alive and well in Andhra, and by the blessing of Mahadev I and my wife are the first non-Indians given Lingadhara initiation in this community. I feel it is my duty and a seva to my guru and lineage to help bring our tradition to the global readers of your esteemed magazine."



Initiates: Srinatha Mahadevan and Shankari in Rajasthan

