

# THE TRADITION OF THE YOGASŪTRAKĀRA- MAHĀBHĀṢYAKĀRA PATAÑJALI OF TAMIḻAKAM

(IDENTITY OF THE YOGA-GRAMMARIAN SAGE PATAÑJALI AS  
NOTICED IN TAMIL NADU & KERALA)

MURALI N. KADIRAMANGALAM, M.Phil., Ph.D.



*Kalavai Sri Mahadevendra Saraswati Sankaracharya Trust,  
Mumbai*

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Sankaracharya Trust, 3/55, Skandha, Pestom Sagar, Road No. 2, Chembur, Mumbai -400089  
Mobile: 093 222 30098 / 091 37023299 Email: [kameshwarii@gmail.com](mailto:kameshwarii@gmail.com)

## Table of Contents

<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgement .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Plates, Tables &amp; Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background and Motivation .....	1
1.2 Works Dealing Specifically with Patañjali .....	1
1.3 Identity / Duality of Patañjali .....	3
1.4 Patañjali & Śiva Naṭarāja .....	4
1.5 Closing Remarks .....	10
<b>Chapter 2. Texts, Literature &amp; Legends on Patañjali (Primary Sources) .....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Patañjali as Described in Sanskrit & Tamil Texts .....	15
2.2 Patañjali in Stotras .....	28
2.3 Patañjali in Sthala Purāṇas .....	30
2.4 Miscellaneous Legends & Traditions of Patañjali .....	41
2.5 Concluding Comments .....	42
<b>Chapter 3. Patañjali as Discerned in the Tamil Sangam Literature .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	48
3.2 Methodology .....	49
3.3 Presence of Brahmins in Tamiḷakam During Sangam .....	49
3.4 Vedas & Vedangas in Tamiḷakam During the Sangam .....	50
3.5 Agnihotra & Ordained Sacrifices in the Tamil country .....	50
3.6 Vedic Sacrifices Performed by Kings during the Sangam .....	50
3.7 Śiva in the Sangam Poetry .....	51
3.8 Śiva Temples & Royal Patronage in Tamiḷakam .....	51
3.9 Ala Amar Kadavul or the God Seated Under the Banyan Tree .....	52
3.10 Śiva as the Originator of the Vedas and Vedangas .....	52
3.11 Dances of Śiva in Sangam Literature .....	53
3.12 Tiruvāthirai in the Sangam Age .....	54
3.13 Concluding Remarks and Observations .....	56
<b>Chapter 4. Patañjali: Iconography, Epigraphy &amp; Temples in Tamil Nadu .....</b>	<b>60</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	60
4.2 Patañjali Image Statistics .....	60

4.3 Patañjali's Persona Based on Iconography .....	63
4.4 Patañjali in Thondai Nadu .....	64
4.5 Patañjali in Tyāgarāja Swamy Temple, Tiruvarur .....	67
4.6 Temples for Patañjali .....	69
4.7 Chidambaram Naṭarāja Temple & Patañjali .....	71
4.8 Patañjali in Chola Nadu .....	73
4.9 Patañjali and Pandya Nadu .....	75
4.10 Patañjali Bronzes .....	80
4.11 Chronology of Granite Patañjali Images .....	83
4.12 Tiruvāthirai Festival in Inscriptions .....	83
4.13 Varanasi and Patañjali .....	84
4.14 Closure .....	85
<b>Chapter 5. The Living Tradition of Patañjali in Tamil Nadu .....</b>	<b>89</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	89
5.2 Patañjali in the Life of Tamil Nadu's People .....	89
5.3 Patañjali in the Tradition of the Tillai Diskshitaras .....	94
5.4 Patañjali in Carnatic Music Tradition .....	99
5.5 Concluding Remarks .....	102
<b>Chapter 6. Findings &amp; Closure .....</b>	<b>107</b>
6.1 Background .....	107
6.2 Questions Posed .....	107
6.3 Findings .....	107
6.4 Migration of Patañjali to Tamiḷakam .....	114
6.5 Summary of Findings .....	115
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>xxi</b>
Appendix for Chapter 2 .....	xxi
Appendix for Chapter 3 .....	xxii
Appendix for Chapter 4 .....	xxiii
Appendix for Chapter 5 .....	xxv

## Preface

My thesis was completed at Deccan College PGRI, Pune, in late October 2019. The subject of my thesis was “Examination of Sage Patañjali’s Tradition of Tamil Nadu”. In the meantime, much more material regarding this Southern tradition of Patañjali was unearthed by me from additional field visits & literature. This resulted in several re-writes of my thesis, which was slowly turning into a monograph. However, due to the ever-expanding nature of the material evidence and my inability to cogently summarize the vast findings in a terse research paper or as a monograph, no publication regarding this topic has come forth from my side since my thesis.

Meanwhile, word of mouth news of my thesis spread and there has been interest to read my thesis from several quarters & the demand is growing with the passage of time. After my viva, typographical errors in various sections of my thesis were noticed, which have now been corrected in the present book. Notwithstanding the corrections made in this version, there are still diacritical marks missing on several words. The indulgence of the reader is sought in this regard.

I wish to bring to the reader’s attention my primary findings, first that the Mahābhāṣyakāra & Yogasūtrakāra Patañjali were one and the same and that he was likely the author of an Ayurvedic text as well. Secondly, he was considered the incarnation of Śeṣa from approximately the seventh century onwards in both north and south India. Patañjali founded the Chidambaram Naṭarāja temple and wrote its worship manual. The Mahābhāṣyakāra Patañjali quite possibly moved to Southern India (after ~148 BCE) and taught his texts in various places there, beginning with Chidambaram. There is a huge number of images, inscriptions, temples & textual materials in Tamil & Sanskrit, primarily from Tamil Nadu that supports my hypothesis. Unfortunately, at the time of publication of this book, voluminous materials about Patañjali still remain unpublished and hopefully will see the light of day soon.

Prior to admission to Deccan College, I gave a preliminary presentation on the Southern tradition of Patañjali at the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth (TMV), Pune. My presentation was reviewed by none other than Prof. A.P. Jamkhedkar, the Hon. Chancellor of Deccan College, PGRI. At the time, I was pleasantly surprised by the level of his pre-preparation on the topic and the feedback he gave me. I continue to benefit from his guidance, which has been invaluable. Recently, Prof. Jamkhedkar guided me in bringing to light one of the oldest images of Patañjali and that too from Maharashtra and I remain indebted to him for the same.

There were many gifted persons who travelled small portions of the path in my search for Patañjali, some literally and others who assisted me, but are no more. I lament the unfortunate and untimely passing away of my friend and senior research colleague Ms. Liesbeth Bennink (of the Netherlands) and also that of the respected Tamil scholar Ma. Ve. Pasupathi. Similarly, I am pained by the loss of my junior colleague Ms. Kanimozhi E, who would eventually have

transformed into a rising star in the field of the archaeology of the South; her premature demise is a loss to the field of Southern archaeology, which is in dire need of talent.

This year, Prof. Gudrun Bühnemann, who is also researching Patañjali, and I met accidentally at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and have spent many an hour immersed discussing the subject so dear to both of us. I greatly enjoyed these discussions, which I hope have been as inspiring for Prof. Bühnemann as for me. I wish her the very best for her forthcoming monograph on Patañjali, which I am sure will be enlightening to one and all.

I thank Mr. B. Shridhar, Managing Trustee, Kalavai Sri Mahadevendra Saraswati Sankaracharya Trust, Mumbai for graciously publishing this book. This will greatly benefit researchers and those interested in the Patañjali tradition.

Pune  
September 14, 2022

Murali N. Kadiramangalam, M.Phil., Ph.D.

## Acknowledgement

As vast is the subject of Patañjali, so were the number of persons who came out to help me. It is a formidable task to thank everyone; at the outset I already know that I will not be able to do justice to this.

My wholehearted thanks to my guide, Prof. V.S. Shinde, then Vice-Chancellor of Deccan College PGRI for his supervision, encouragement and also advise on liaising with government agencies. I am grateful to my co-guide Dr. Pradnya Deshpande for her patient and meticulous guidance and for keeping me focused. I especially appreciated my interaction and collaboration with her on this and other research topics. I thank the Faculty of Deccan College for all that they taught me, inside and outside the class – I greatly benefitted from the interaction with them.

Deccan College has one of the better libraries in Indology and Archeology and I appreciate the assistance of the Librarian and Staff who went out of their way to assist me. Situated behind the old Indo-Saracenic College building on picturesque grounds makes it an ideal setting for research!

A special thanks to the Sanskrit Department Research Scholars who helped me with Sanskrit texts, access the scriptorium and cleared my doubts. The Sanskrit Department Library is a unique place; it was a joy to do research there—its staff were also very helpful.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. R. Balasubramanian Curator (Retd.) Madras Museum. He is a great teacher! He taught me the nuances of South Indian iconography, took me out on the field and helped me learn about the examination and dating of images. He has always been available to me irrespective of whether he was travelling in India or abroad. He has sent me books, notes and was always there to clear my doubts and advise me on a vast array of matters. Words are insufficient to thank Dr. Balasubramanian.

Dr. K. Dakshinamoorthy Sthapathi pointed me to the earliest Patañjali image and also gave me his paper on the Dakṣiṇāmūrti panel of Kailasanatha temple. I am thankful to him for the same.

Professor Madhav Deshpande, University of Michigan has been an inspiration. His talks, papers have been very valuable. His humility and willingness to discuss the Patañjali problem with a novice and continue communicating encouraged me.

Dr. David Smith of Lancaster University was most gracious in sending me John A Loud's translation of the Koyil Purāṇam and other valuable materials and I thank him profusely for the same.

Dr. T.P. Mahadevan, Howard University agreed to give a talk at Deccan College, PGRI at my request and spent time discussing the Patañjali problem with me. His work on the Pūrvaśikhā migration in a sense, set the stage for my research.

I thank Dr. T. Satyamurthi, Superintending Archaeologist, Chennai Circle (Retd.) for sending me a copy of his book on Chidambaram, his Chidambaram plate of Patañjali and for his suggestions and inputs.

My friend and former colleague Dr. A.R. Srikrishnan, now Associate Professor at Amrita University has given me valuable clarifications and suggestions regarding the Sanskrit texts and verses related to Patañjali. I acknowledge his support and friendship over the past two decades.

Late Lisbeth Pankaja Bennink was an independent researcher from Holland and an expert on Naṭarāja and Chidambaram. I thank Lisbeth for assisting me in numerous ways, even accompanying me on a portion of my field visit. She had the uncanny knack of pointing attention to important ideas at the right time and place.

I think Dr. Annalise Seastrand, University of Minnesota for providing me photographs of Patañjali murals and sharing her insights. I thank Prof. Whitney Cox, University of Chicago for sending me the two unpublished Chidambaram Māhātmya manuscripts. Kerry Kresse of the University of Wisconsin-Madison was kind enough to scan and send John A. Loud's thesis on Chidambaram. Many thanks to Dr. Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer for sending me her thesis on "Koyils in the Coḷamandalam", a painstaking and detailed work that took her over a decade to complete.

At my behest, Mr. A.R. Karuppan Chetty, CA made a trip to his ancestral home (Devikottai), located the Tirukārāyil Purāṇam and was kind enough to share one of the few remaining

originals with me. I remain indebted to him for the same and also thank him for his assistance and courtesies.

I am most grateful to former Hon. Commissioner, Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments Department (TN HR & CE), Mr. Phanindra Reddy, IAS a most dynamic and approachable officer. Under his leadership, the then HR & CE staff throughout Tamil Nadu assisted me in several temples. Special thanks to (former officers): Mr. G.Thennarasu, Joint Commissioner—Thanjavur & his efficient team, Mr. S. Sivakumar, Joint Commissioner—Mayiladuthurai & his staff, Mr. Yagnanarayan, Executive Officer (EO), Tiruchendur Temple, Mrs. Kavita, EO Tiruvarur Tyāgarāja Swamy temple and the Manager there Mr. Nandakumar. I also thank ex-Joint Commissioner, Madurai Meenakshi Temple, Mr. N. Natarajan, Mrs. Shanta and Mr. Hamsan of the same temple for their assistance. I cannot begin to recount the countless number of temple staff and priests who have assisted me and it will be unfair to name any one single person. My humble Pranams and thanks to all of them. I wish to specially thank the then Hon. Commissioner, Tamil Nadu HR & CE & the staff in the HQ (Chennai) for permitting me to study & photograph the temples & images under their control across Tamil Nadu.

I wholeheartedly thank the Podu Dikshitaras of Chidambaram Nataraja temple who went out of the way to assist me in numerous ways. They were also kind enough to share numerous photographs, couple of which are used in this work.

My thanks to Acharya Shri Kundan Pandeyji, Mahant of Nāg Kuan Temple, Varanasi. He worked tirelessly and assisted me. It was due to his efforts that we were able to locate an image dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century there. However, there is much more to be done in in Varanasi and he is continuing the good work.

I thank the renowned Tamil scholar Late Shri Ma. Ve. Pasupathi who fine-tuned my thinking about the relevant Tamil literature and shared his knowledge, books on the same. I will always cherish the memory of my meeting and discussion with him.

I thank Mr. Ramesh Kumar of IFP (French Institute), Pondicherry for his assistance in accessing and analyzing their photograph archive. I also thank the IFP Library staff Mr. R. Narenthiran and G. Saravanan for their efforts and excellent assistance; they went beyond the call of duty.

The Librarian and Staff of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute library were ever ready to help and assisted me in finding some valuable references.

I wish to thank my co-student Late Ms. Kanimozhi E who visited and studied a temple in her district on my behalf. She was also a source of support to me. I also wish to thank M.A. student Ms. Kavya for her assistance.

I express my gratitude to members of my family for assisting me, especially my son Madhavan Kadiramangalam. My mother Mrs. S. Natarajan spent many a day looking at the translations of old Tamil texts, correcting me and offering useful suggestions.

I am sure that inadvertently some people who assisted me greatly have been skipped and I thank them and apologize in advance for the omission.

Murali N. Kadiramangalam  
Pune, September 14, 2022

Note: Unless specified otherwise, ALL photos in this book are courtesy of the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments Department (TN HR & CE). Other than those photos attributed to others in the captions, all photos have been taken by this author, pursuant to permissions granted by TN HR & CE. Plates 4.1-4.3, 4.7 & the photo on the cover page are courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Chennai Circle.

## Abstract

The Northern tradition of Sage Patañjali informs us that he was the Mahābhāṣyakāra, officiated at Puṣyamitra Śuṅga's Aśvamēdhā Yajñas, was an Agnihotrī and lived in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Medieval Tamil and Sanskrit texts from Tamil Nadu suggest that a single Patañjali wrote the Mahābhāṣya, Yoga Sūtra, an Āyurvedic text (Three Texts) and also witnessed the dance of Śiva Naṭarāja in Chidambaram. These texts also inform us that Patañjali and Vyāghrapāda initiated the Tiruvātirai festival at Chidambaram and other places. Early images of Patañjali (7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> century) from Tamil Nadu suggest that indeed the same Patañjali wrote the three texts mentioned above; these images also depict him to be an incarnation of Śeṣa. A plethora of similar therio-anthropomorphic images of Patañjali dating from the early-to-late period have been located in Tamil Nadu. Epigraphy also confirms that prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed in that region that the Sage was the incarnation of Śeṣa. There are three temples dedicated to Patañjali and three other temples established by him, including the Chidambaram Naṭarāja temple in the Tamil country. The Tillai Dīkṣitas (Chidambaram) wear the tuft as a top-know (Pūrvaśikhā), worship Naṭarāja according to the Pūjā Sūtra attributed to Patañjali, celebrate a ten-day annual festival in his honor and believe him to be the author of the three texts. Patañjali has left a deep impression on the people of Tamil Nadu as noticed in art (music-dance-painting), that portrays him outside the religious space as well. However, the information presented above is separated by a significant length of time from the Sage. Hence, the Sangam literature was perused. It paints a picture of a strong Vedic-Śāstra-Śrauta culture during that period, which entailed the study of the Vedas, Vedāṅgas, including grammar. The Sangam literature attests to the celebration of the Tiruvātirai in the early part of the Common Era and likely even back further in time. Thus, since, the latter half of the Sangam Patañjali's influence seems to become apparent in Tamiḷakam (Tamil Nadu and Kerala). In inscriptions and texts, the Tiruvātirai is mentioned as being continuously celebrated since the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE in Tamiḷakam. Through a detailed study, T.P. Mahadevan (2008, 2011) had inferred that the Pūrvaśikhās had migrated from the North between 200-100 BCE into Tamil Nadu. It was thus concluded that Patañjali together with some Pūrvaśikhā student migrated South and this led to his strong influence in the region. The descendants of the Pūrvaśikhās are the Tillai Dīkṣitas among others, who continue to preserve Patañjali's tradition in Tamiḷakam.