



AGASTYA MUNI

Maharshi Agastya, one among the saptarshis (seven great sages), is distinctive in several ways.

Agastya is a spiritual bridge between North and South India. Born in North India, he travelled to the South and settled there. Both have legends about him. *Rama Charita Manas* of Tulasidas, one of the most widely read morning prayers in Hindi and its dialects, mentions that Agastya tamed the Vindhya mountain on his way to South India.

Agastya is also a link between Sanskrit and Tamil literature. He is mentioned and celebrated in both. He is referred to in the original *Valmiki Ramayana*. You may be familiar with the prayer, *Aditya Hridayam*. It is chanted in many houses for a prescribed period or daily. In that case, one of your senior relatives might have told you that it was a teaching by sage Agastya to Sri Rama in the battlefield in Lanka, during the difficult phase of the battle with Ravana.

In Praise of Sun

It praises the divine qualities of the Sun, seeing him as a divine being. Reciting it with due reverence will bestow many divine benefits. The profound potential psychological benefit is to imbibe the qualities of the Sun, which can help you in any

battle or task. Just reflect how modern technology helps mankind to turn to solar energy to deal with adverse climate changes, which is probably the biggest challenge to the survival of humanity and other species.

A temple dedicated to Agastya in the Pothigai Hills of Tamil Nadu finds mention in both *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekhalai*, two grand old Tamil classics. Many other places in the South also claim to have been his abode. He perhaps stayed in these places during his travels. One such place is an *asram* on the bank of the Godavari river, which courses through Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

An old text, the *Tambraparani Mahatmyam*, refers to the origin of the perennial Tambraparani river in the Pothigai hills, which is also called Agastyamala. The seafaring Tamils had built shrines for him in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and elsewhere in South East Asia.

Founder, Siddha Tradition

Like other *Maharshis*, Agastya is remembered for many contributions. He is considered the founder of the *Siddha*

tradition. His disciples carried it further. It has continued to this day. The *Siddha* system of indigenous medicine is still being practised. In the name of The Ministry In the abbreviation, AYUSH, referring to the Health Ministry, the alphabet, S, stands for *Siddha*. Agastya was the author of *Agastya Samhita*, a treatise on traditional medicine.

The popular prayer to the Supreme Goddess, the *Lalita Sahasranama*, the thousand names of the Goddess, was composed by sage Agastya.

It is chanted in homes and temples and during important events. There are translations and commentaries on the compilation in many languages. Read one of them. One or more names among them may inspire you; some can give you electrifying insights and strength.

Another composition by Agastya is *Sarasvati Stotram*, in praise of the Goddess of learning. As you know, there are many prayers to Hanuman. Perhaps the most popular is *Hanuman Chalisa*. Agastya's prayer to Hanuman is called the *Ekadasa Mukha Hanumantha Kavacham*. Like Brighu

Maharshi, Agastya also wrote on astrology. His particular addition was *Nadi Josyam*.

Princess Lopamudra of Vidarbha renounced her royal life of comfort and became Agastya's *Rishipatni*, despite the understandable initial hesitation of her parents. In terms of modern Human Resource Management, we may see in this act of Lopamudra both her own immense spiritual potential and her deep understanding and veneration of the *rishi*.

Perhaps, the highest form of marriage is the shared Self-realisation of two kindred souls. They are believed to have led a life of great happiness and partnership in spiritual matters.

As in many other cases, there are numerous legends around a many-sided sage like Agastya, it is our tribute to Agastya that many regions and groups claim relationship with him. His teachings have relevance even today.

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