



# Pan India Presence Of Rishi Agastya: Life, Sacred Sites, and Mythic Deeds

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**Abstract:** Rishi Agastya holds a pivotal place in Indian culture and spiritual history, with his influence spanning the entirety of the Indian subcontinent. Revered as one of the foremost sages in the Vedic and Puranic traditions, Agastya is credited with bridging the spiritual and cultural divide between North and South India. This paper delves into the pan – India presence of Rishi Agastya by exploring significant episodes of his life, his contributions to Indian spirituality, and the sites associated with his legacy. From the Himalayas to the southernmost regions of Tamil Nadu, his journeys symbolize the dissemination of Vedic knowledge and the unification of diverse traditions.

A focal point of this study is the mythological narrative of how Rishi Agastya drank the ocean to aid the devas in their battle against the asuras, reflecting his divine intervention and unparalleled wisdom. The paper also examines key locations such as Augustmuni in Uttarakhand, Agastyarkoodam in Kerala, and other sacred sites tied to his legend, which underscore his geographical and cultural significance. By weaving together ancient texts, folklore, and historical references, this paper aims to illuminate the enduring legacy of Rishi Agastya, emphasizing his role in shaping India's spiritual and cultural fabric.

**Keywords:** Rishi Agastya, Vedic traditions, Spiritual unification, Cultural heritage, Agastyarkoodam, Augustmuni, Ocean myth, Devas and Asuras, Indian spirituality, Sacred sites.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Rishi Agastya is one of the original seven rishis or Saptarishis, celebrated for his wisdom, yogic powers, and contributions to Vedic literature. Mentioned extensively in ancient texts such as the Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata and Ramayana, Agastya's legacy transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. He is often regarded as the sage who harmonized the cultural divide between North and South India, embodying the spirit of unity in diversity.

### 1.1 Birth of Rishi Agastya

The origins of Agastya are mythical. Unlike most vedic sages, he has neither a human mother nor a father. His miraculous birth follows a yajna being done by gods Varuna and Mitra, where the celestial apsara Urvashi appears. They are overwhelmed by her extraordinary sexuality, and ejaculate. Their semen falls into a mud pitcher, which is the womb in which the fetus of Agastya grows. He is born from this jar, along with his twin sage Vashistha in some mythologies. This mythology gives him the name kumbhayoni, which literally means "he whose womb was a mud pot."

### 1.2 Birth of Urvashi

In the Himalayan region, two mountains are known as Nar and Narayan, named after the revered sages Nar and Narayan. According to the second part of the Shrimad Bhagwat Mahapurana, Chapter 7, it is said that in the Satyuga era, these sages performed intense penance at Badrikashram, near the Gandhmadan mountain. This sacred site is located close to the renowned Badrinath Dham. The Vaman Purana, in its sixth chapter, mentions that Lord Brahma created King Dharma from his heart, and Nar and Narayan were his sons. In the fourth part of the Shrimad Devi Bhagwat, the prayers of Nar and Narayan are described in detail. Through their dedicated austerities, they acquired immense divine powers.



Their relentless penance caused tremors in Indra's throne in heaven, alarming him. Believing that Nar and Narayan were praying to usurp his position, Indra summoned his apsaras. He instructed them to descend to Earth and disrupt the sages' penance, using the allure of their beauty as a means to break their focus. The sages, however, remain undisturbed by the attempts of Indra's apsaras to break their penance. To humble the celestial maidens and shatter their arrogance, Narayana strikes his thigh, and from it emerges Urvashi, a maiden of unparalleled beauty. Her radiance far surpasses that of Indra's apsaras, leaving them humbled and ashamed of their actions. Nar and Narayana then reassure Indra that they have no desire for his throne and present Urvashi to him as a gift. Urvashi goes on to hold a place of honor in Indra's celestial court.

## 2. ASSOCIATED SITES IN NORTH INDIA

### 2.1 Augustmuni (Uttarakhand)

Augustmuni, a small town in the Rudraprayag district, is named after Sage Agastya. The Agastya Muni temple, located in Augustmuni in the Rudraprayag district, is a renowned religious site dedicated to Sage Agastya. This ancient temple, originally constructed in the South Indian architectural style, has undergone renovations for preservation. The temple features Agastya Kund and a statue of Bhogajit, Sage Agastya's disciple, within its premises. It is believed that Sage Agastya meditated here for several years, enhancing the spiritual significance of the site. Additionally, the temple houses a shrine for Lord Shiva and is associated with the sage's penance dedicated to the Sun God and Shrividyia. The village of Augustmuni is named after Sage Agastya, and the temple attracts numerous devotees and tourists, making it a prominent spiritual landmark in the region.

### 2.2 The Dashavatara Temple

The Dashavatara Temple in Deogarh, located near the Uttar Pradesh - Madhya Pradesh border, features a 6<sup>th</sup> – century carving of Rishi Agastya from the Gupta Empire era.

### 2.3 The Siddhanath Temple / Ashram

The Siddhanath Temple in Panna district, Madhya Pradesh, is a revered spiritual site dedicated to Lord Siddhanath, a manifestation of Lord Shiva. According to local beliefs, during his 14-year exile, Lord Rama visited this sacred place and met Rishi Agastya, who is also known as Agastamuni.



Figure 1 Source : The Siddhanath Temple <https://panna.nic.in/en/gallery/temples/>

## 3. ASSOCIATED SITES / LANDMARKS IN SOUTH INDIA

### 3.1 Sri Agasthiyar Lopamudra Temple

Sri Agasthiyar Lopamudra Temple situated at Kalyana Theertham above the Agasthiyar Falls, Papanasam, Tirunelveli, India. Legend says, when Lord Shiva married Goddess Parvati, he was concerned that the massive gathering of people travelling from the South to the North for the wedding might cause an imbalance, leading the North to sink. To prevent this, he sent Sage Agastya to the South to maintain equilibrium. It is believed that this sacred site, now known as Agasthiyar Falls, was where Sage Agastya meditated. To honor the visit of the divine couple, a temple dedicate to Sage Agastya was constructed here.

The temple, located 4 km from the Papanasam Siva Temple, lies halfway to Panatheertham. It can be reached by trekking a distance of 3 km. The site is also referred to as Kalyana Theertham because Sage Agastya is said to have received the divine vision of Lord Shiva and Parvati in their wedding form at this very spot.



Figure 2 Source : Sri Agasthiyar Lopamudra Temple - <https://agasthiyarravikumar.org/>

### 3.2 Mallikarjuna Temple

The Mallikarjuna Temple at Mahakuta in Karnataka is closely associated with Sage Agastya, a revered figure in Indian spiritual and cultural traditions. According to legend, Agastya, known for his significant contributions to Vedic knowledge and Tamil literature, is believed to have spent sometime at Mahakuta, a sacred site surrounded by dense forests and natural springs. The temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, reflects the profound connection between Agastya and Shaivism. It is said that Sage Agastya sanctified the region with his presence and performed penance here, imbuing the place with spiritual significance. The natural spring – fed tank, called Vishnu Pushkarini or Kashi Tirtha, near the temple, is also linked to Agastya’s spiritual practices, symbolizing purification and divine blessings. This association enhances the temple’s status as a prominent pilgrimage site in South India.



Figure 3 Source : Mallikarjuna Temple – Mahakuta Group of Temples, Wikipedia

### 3.3 Kutralanathar Temple

According to Hindu legend, during the grand wedding of Shiva and Parvati, a massive crowd gathered at Mount Kailash, Shiva’s abode, making it impossible for Sage Agastya to witness the event. Deeply devoted, the sage prayed to Shiva at this location, seeking a vision of the divine union. Moved by his devotion, Shiva appeared before Agastya and his wife, Lopamudra, dressed in his wedding attire, accompanied by Parvati. Shiva then made this place his abode and came to be worshipped as Kutralanathar. It is here that the Tamiraparani River descends onto the plains.

The Kutralanathar Temple, located in the town of Courtallam in Tamil Nadu, is a historic and spiritual landmark dedicated to Lord Shiva. Known for its association with natural beauty, the temple is situated amidst the lush greenery and waterfalls of the Western Ghats. The presiding deity, Kutralanathar, is worshiped in the form of a Shivalinga.



Figure 4 Source : Kutralanathar Temple – Thirukutralam, Wikipedia

Figure 5 Source : Image of sage Agastya with his wife – Thirukutralam, Wikipedia

### 3.4 Agasthyamala

The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is located on the border between the Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The hill region in Tamil Nadu, with its mist-covered peaks, is known as *Pothigai Malai*. In Kerala, Agasthyamala features *Agasthyakoodam*, a significant pilgrimage site dedicated to the Hindu sage Agasthya, one of the revered Saptarishis mentioned in Hindu Puranas. At the top of the peak, there is a full-sized statue of Sage Agasthya, where devotees can perform *Pooja* on their own. In March 2016, UNESCO included the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve among 20 new sites in its World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

### 3.5 Agasthiyarkoodam

Agasthiyarkoodam, standing at an elevation of 1,868 meters (6,129 feet), is a prominent peak located within the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala, part of the Western Ghats in South India. Although situated within Kerala, it lies close to the border with Tamil Nadu. The lower slopes of the mountain are renowned for their rich diversity of medicinal plants, with around 2,000 species found in the region. Additionally, tea plantations have been developed at the base of the mountain in areas such as Brimore, Bonacaud, and Ponmudi.

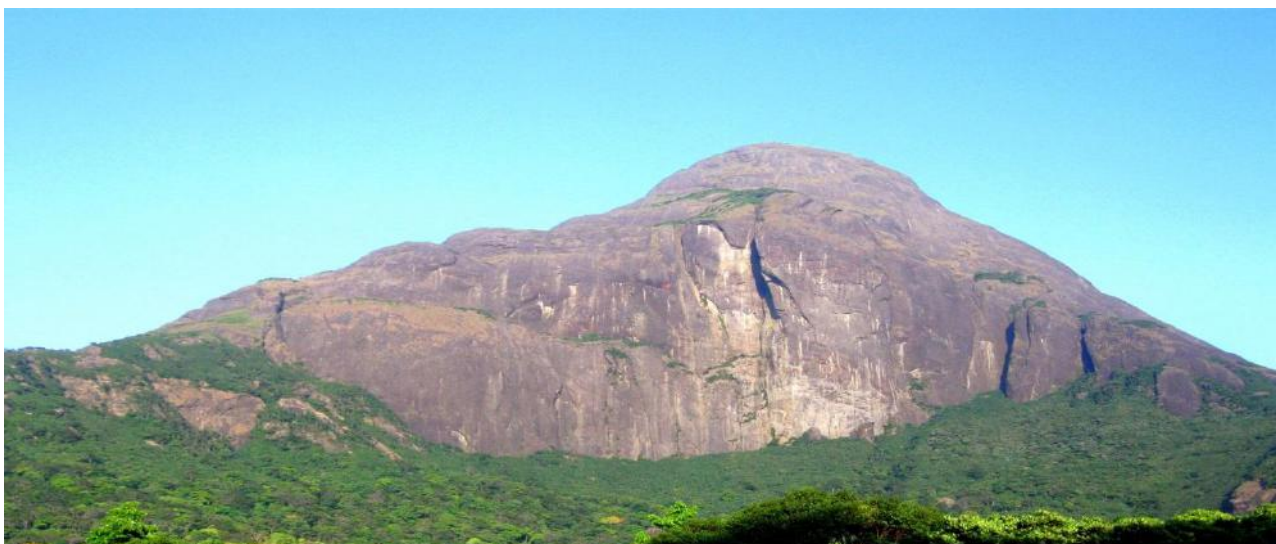


Figure 6 Source : A View of Agastyaarkoodam from the base – Agastya Mala, Wikipedia

### 3.6 Agatheeswarar / Vageeshwarar Temple

A 1300 year old temple dedicated to Lord Shiva stands in Kolapakkam, Chennai. This ancient temple holds significance for two revered sages, Sage Agastya and Sage Vageesha. It is said that when Sage Agastya returned from the Himalayas to Pothigai, he stayed here briefly and offered prayers to Lord Shiva. The temple observes three annual festivals and conducts six daily rituals at different times.



#### 4. Sage Agastya in Central India

##### 4.1 Shree Agastyeshwar Mahadev Mandir

Agastheswar Mahadev, one of the 84 revered forms of Shiva worshipped in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, holds immense significance for devotees. Worshiping this form of Shiva is believed to cleanse sins and fulfill desires. The temple of Agastheswar Mahadev is situated within the old Santoshi Mata Mandir premises, located behind the Harsiddhi temple complex in Ujjain. This form of Shiva is closely associated with Sage Agastya and is the first temple visited during the traditional parikrama (circumambulation) of the 84 Shivalayas in Ujjain.

According to legend, the devas were once driven out of heaven by demons and sought refuge on earth. They came across Sage Agastya and narrated their plight. Enraged by the injustice, the sage's fury manifested as a massive fireball, which began destroying the demons in heaven. Unfortunately, the fire also caused harm to other living beings.

Realizing the consequences of his actions, Sage Agastya felt deep remorse. On Brahma's advice, he traveled to Mahakaal Vana (modern-day Ujjain) and performed intense penance before a sacred Shivling. Pleased with his devotion and repentance, Lord Shiva appeared and blessed the sage. He also declared that the Shivling would henceforth be known as Agastheswar Mahadev.

#### 5. MYTHOLOGY

##### 5.1 Ilvala(Atapi) and Vatapi

In the *Mahabharata*, the sage Lomasha narrates to Yudhishtira the story of two daitya brothers, Ilvala and Vatapi. Ilvala, the elder, once approached a Brahmin hermit and requested a boon for a son who would rival Indra in power. When the Brahmin refused, Ilvala became enraged. He devised a sinister plan, he transformed his brother Vatapi into a goat or lamb, cooked the meal. After they had eaten, Ilvala would call out Vatapi's name, and Vatapi would emerge from the Brahmins' bodies, killing them. The brothers repeated this cruel trick on several Brahmins.

One day, they tried the same ploy with the sage Agastya. After eating the meal, Agastya digested Vatapi entirely. When Ilvala called for his brother, Agastya declared that Vatapi had been fully consumed and could not return. Terrified, Ilvala asked Agastya how he could atone. The sage demanded ten thousands cows, gold, and a golden chariot with two fine horses. In the *Ramayana*, it is said that Ilvala attempted to avenge his brother's death by attacking Agastya, but the sage killed him with a mere glance.

According to the Bhagavata Purana, Ilvala had a son named Balvala, who disrupted the sages in the Naimisha forest while they were listening to the recitation of the Puranas by Ugrashravas. The deity Balarama eventually killed Balvala during his pilgrimage.

##### 5.2 Agastya and the Vindhya Mountains

Once upon a time, the Vindhya mountains began growing at an alarming rate, causing great concern among the cosmic gods. They rose higher and higher, surpassing even the Himalayas, and threatened to block the sun's path across the sky. Despite the god's efforts, the mountains refused to stop or heed anyone's pleas. Their unstoppable growth worried the gods immensely.

The gods turned to Sage Agastya, who was the revered Guru of the Vindhyas. Knowing that the mountains respected and worshipped him, they implored Agastya to intervene. Agastya approached the Vindhyas one day and stood before them. Out of deep reverence, the mountains bowed to him immediately. Pleased by their gesture, Agastya said, "I am delighted by your respect and devotion." The Vindhyas replied, "We are honored by your presence. Please tell us how we can serve you. Whatever you wish, we will do."

Agastya responded, "I am grateful for your love and reverence. If you truly wish to please me, remain bowed down until I return. I am embarking on a pilgrimage and will deeply appreciate your devotion if you stay in this posture until I come back."

The Vindhyas agreed and stayed bowed as Agastya left for his journey. However, he never returned, and since that day, the Vindhya mountains have remained bowed in humble reverence.



## 6. ADITYA HRIDAYA STOTRA

The Aditya Hridaya Stotra is a powerful Sanskrit hymn dedicated to the Sun God (Aditya) and is believed to bestow courage, vitality, and victory. It appears in the Yuddha Kanda (Book 6) of the Valmiki Ramayana, where Sage Agastya teaches it to Lord Rama to instill strength and confidence in his battle against Ravana. The stotra extols the glory of Surya, describing him as the source of energy, the remover of darkness, and the sustainer of life. It emphasizes his divine role as the embodiment of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, as well as the controller of time and destiny. Chanting this hymn with devotion is said to bring success, dispel fears, and promote physical and spiritual well-being.

## 7. ORIGIN OF THE KAVERI RIVER

The origin myth of the River Kaveri is described in multiple Hindu texts, but the version in the *Skanda Purana* is among the most popular. This story begins at Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas, where an extraordinary event is about to take place – the wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. The grandeur of this occasion draws beings from all over the cosmos, including the *devaloka* (the realm of gods), to Kailasa. The massive congregation creates an imbalance on Earth, causing the northern region to tilt dangerously. This imbalance threatens the stability of the planet's movements.

To restore balance, Lord Shiva requests the powerful Sage Agastya to travel southward. Agastya, despite his deep respect for Shiva, is reluctant to leave as he too wishes to witness the divine wedding. Understanding his devotion, Lord Shiva promises to grant him a vision of the wedding procession. However, Agastya remains dissatisfied and expresses his long – standing desire to establish a holy *tirtha* (sacred water body).

At this point, Lord Shiva remembers Kaveri, a devotee engaged in penance to become a sacred river. To fulfill both Agastya's and Kaveri's wishes, Shiva places Kaveri into the sage's *kamandalu* (water pot) and asks him to carry her south. In the southern region, a demon named Surapadma has caused a devastating drought, threatening the land and its people. To resolve this, Ganesha, the son of Shiva and Parvati, intervenes. Disguised as a crow, he tips over Agastya's kamandalu, releasing Kaveri. She flows forth, becoming a life – giving river and a source of nourishment and prosperity for the region.

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