

107 Anderson Hall
PO Box 117410
Gainesville, FL 32611-7410
Phone: (352) 392-1625
Fax: (352) 392-7395
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I had the privilege of participating in a SARII symposium in 2015 and can honestly say that this institution has carved an exemplary and unique space for itself in the study of Indian history and culture. In these SARII conferences, there is a cordial and mutually beneficial coming together of independent scholars and scholars in academic institutions with the participation of an engaged community that has people in many professions. There were serious and most interesting discussions following every paper and as the day progressed I realized how this could be a model for South Asian scholarship and how intellectual conversations and connections should be between scholars. This was a shared universe where everyone had something to give and something to learn.

While this is a collective effort of several individuals, the leadership of Dr. S. Palaniappan has been integral to the success of SARII. With his low-key style and his deep scholarship, Dr. Palaniappan has invested his time and energy into making SARII an exemplary model of what one could wish for in collaborative endeavors. I have also had the honor of being with him as a participant in seminars, including one on bhakti in Tamilnadu, conducted by l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient in 2013. While I had read his papers earlier, it was that summer that I got a sense of his passion, his delight in intellectual debate, and his commitment for the transmission of knowledge and culture. SARII is a product of this vision.

I specialize in the Sri Vaishnava tradition, dealing with Tamil, Sanskrit, and manipravala literature, and look to texts, ethnography, architecture, and language for primary materials. What has impressed me immensely is the rigorous inter-disciplinary approach in research promoted by SARII, especially the integration of philology and epigraphy to generate new insights. A close reading of texts, contexts, rituals, and society of ancient Tamil lands, to cite just two examples, has led to new meanings for the word *alvar* and challenged us to rethink the status of the *panar*.

As a professor of Religion, I have taught about the Hindu traditions since 1978; initially at DePaul University in Chicago, and at the University of Florida since 1982. I have served as the vice-president, president-elect, and then president of the American Academy of Religion between 1999 and 2002. In these capacities, I had the privilege of getting to know about scholarship in North America and can honestly say that the

research sponsored and promoted by SARII holds its own in terms of rigor, breadth, and sophistication.

I studied at the Universities of Madras and Bombay in India and at Harvard in this country and have been learning about Indian culture all my life: from my grandmother, family, teachers, friends, and students. Each perspective is different and to be valued. It is this diversity that I saw at SARII, with many kinds of knowledge being articulated. I have been studying the SARII programs carefully over the years (wonderful resource on who is doing what) and have been amazed that the committee (with members of the Asian Studies program at the Southern Methodist University and in the community) have consistently been inviting a diverse set of scholars who are all excellent in their areas.

This kind of scholarship and learning should not just be encouraged but actively supported and sustained. We are the beneficiaries of SARII.



Vasudha Narayanan
Distinguished Professor, Religion
Director, Center for the study of Hindu Traditions (CHiTra) at UF