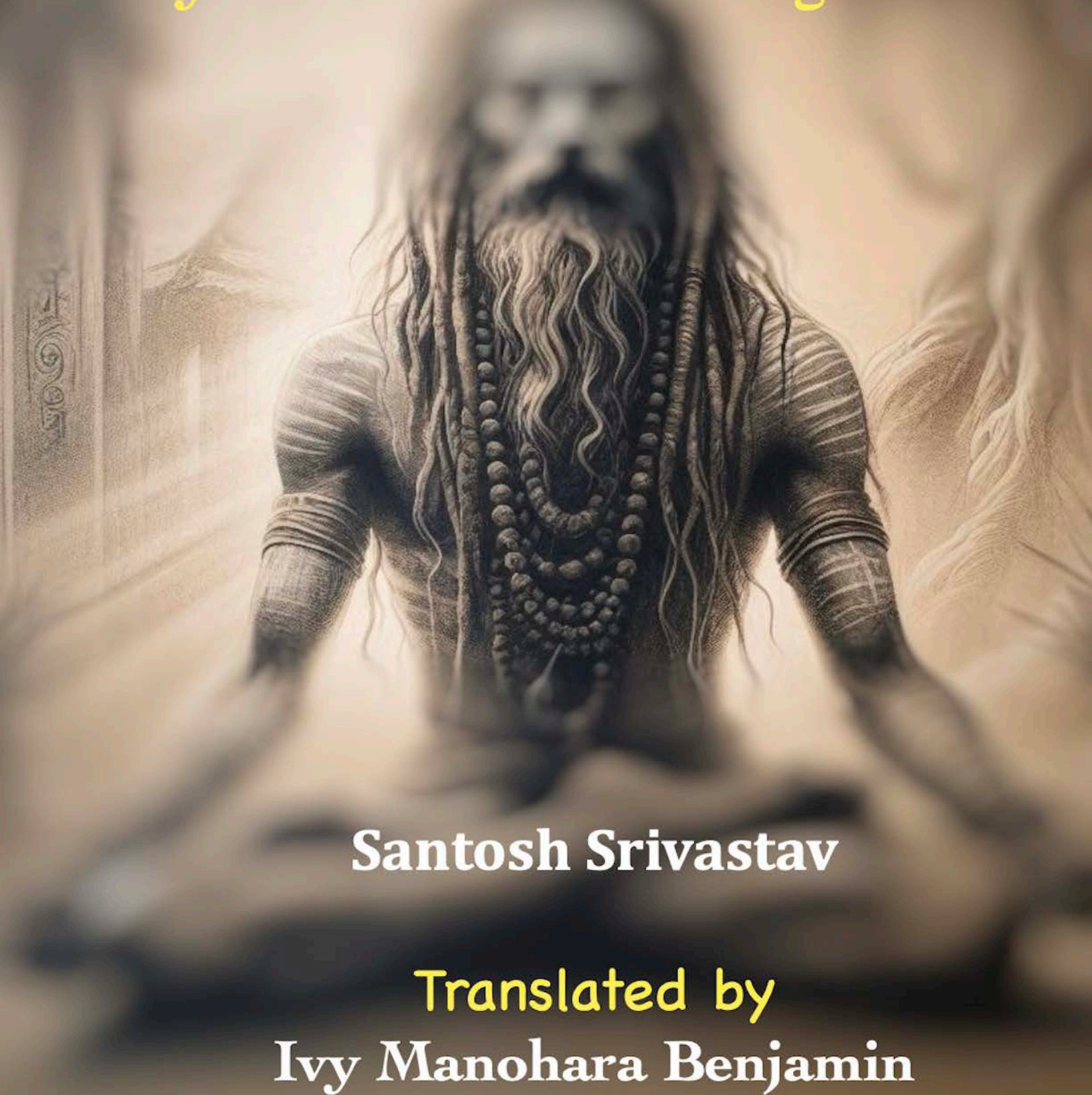


Catherine

and

the Mysterious World of Naga Sadhus



Santosh Srivastav

Translated by
Ivy Manohara Benjamin

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Dedication

To the Naga Sadhus of my country, whose sacrifice, penance and bravery are recorded in history; who took up weapons and scriptures like commandos for the protection of Sanatan Dharma and the country.

Naga Sadhus – A Challenge

Maha Kumbh, the world's largest fair... In 2012, I got the opportunity to go to the 55-day long Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Amazing supernatural view of the world. As the evening approached, the lights in the fair would sparkle as if a blanket of stars had been spread across the sky. As if diamonds had been studded in 58 square kilometers of jewellery.

The Naga Sadhus stand out even in a crowd of millions!

For me, seeing them and writing about them was like an unprecedented fulfillment of my desire which I had for so many years.

All my time at the Maha Kumbh festival was spent in going to the Arenas of the Naga Sadhus, understanding their mysterious life and world, interviewing them, trying to get an in-depth understanding of even the minutest details of their life.

I did not find any other book on Naga Sadhus from where I could research or reference more information about them. Whatever I have written in this book, is all the information I have personally collected from the Naga Arenas. Writing about the Naga Sadhus was a tough challenge, which I accepted and started writing this book from 2015 onwards, which was completed in Hindi in March 2021. This book is the result of many years of effort and my deep interest for the Naga Sadhus and the result is this book. I have also woven a fictional tale into this.

The original Hindi version of this book titled “कैथरीन और नागा साधुओं की रहस्यमयी दुनिया ” was published in

January 2023 and became the center of attraction in the World Book Festival. Now this book is included in the bestsellers list. About 28 intellectuals and critics have written their reviews, insights about this book. All their thoughts and articles is being compiled and will be published shortly. The success of the Hindi novel inspired me to translate this book into other languages. For English, I approached the skilled translator Ivy Manohara Benjamin and handed this responsibility to her. she studied this book in great depth and then translated it into English.

My heartfelt gratitude to them.

Bringing this book to my English readers, makes me feel like I have crossed a milestone!

Santosh Srivastav

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Translation – My Thoughts

I have always been fond of English literature and have been quite a bookworm. My love for reading started with fiction of all types, mainly detective, true crime, international espionage etc. However, my reading has changed over the years and I find myself enjoying autobiographies and biographies of great people, ideologies and world affairs. However, one thing that has been constant is my love of poetry and good lines.

I met Santhosh Srivastav in 2006, and immediately fell in love with the way she spoke and her way of writing. I call her 'Aunty'. During my times with her, I would listen to her short stories and the novels she had written. I simply loved the 'mehfils' that she with her author and poet friends would engage in, regaling each other with good lines and poetry, discussing literature. I knew less Hindi and Urdu then, but since I

loved both languages, I suppose I would absorb every bit of it from my surroundings.

Aunty first asked me if I would help her proof read the English translation of her book 'Romancing the Thames'. Although I did not have prior experience, I readily agreed. It was the first time that I read her writing and simply fell in love with it. Though I had read the English translation of the original, I admired her thought process and how creatively she had weaved the story together. Her stories, though prose, sounded like poetry to me. Since then I have edited the English translations of 3 of her novels.

Aunty had been speaking about her biggest book yet about Naga Sadhus for several years. I knew of the times she spent in Varanasi, the research she was doing and I was quite curious about the final product. Once the book was ready after several years of hard labour, she asked me if I would like to help in the final translation. Ofcourse!

This time I read from the Hindi original version and added to the translation by Punit Srivastav. It was a mesmerizing experience - not only to be able to read her original Hindi version which was out-of-this-world, but also to delve into the mysterious world of the Nagas. To my delight, my Hindi had improved over the years so much that I could read her original version. I could truly then appreciate her writing, the metaphors, the flow of the language. It was a great learning experience for me! I hope the English version does justice to the original and brings out the beauty and grandeur of the book in the same way as it is meant to be.

Thank you, Aunty, for this opportunity.

Ivy Manohara Benjamin

About Ivy Manohara Benjamin

Bangalore-based, born and raised there.

Academically she is a Post Graduate of Environmental Sciences. She started her career as a Teacher in one of the renowned schools in Bangalore, Bishop Cottons, where she taught Environmental Studies.

She then changed direction and moved to the Diamond Mining Industry as a Technology Specialist.

After a few years there, she wanted to be her own boss and so became a businesswoman. She, along with her husband Benjamin Jacob, run Filmapia,- which provides locations for movies for all the main film industries in India and do a few international productions as well.

Ivy has won awards as best businesswoman by various entities including Indian Institute of Science,

Times of India and the Karnataka State Woman's Award.

Her hobbies are Reading and Travelling. She has made a business 'Filmapia' out of her travelling hobby - and a fairly successful one at that.

Out of her Reading hobby, she edits books. That's how she has turned out to be the translator of this book!

About Santosh Srivastav

Having written 31 books of stories, novels, poems, women's discussions, memoirs, short stories, interviews and autobiographies have been published, Santosh Srivastava is a recipient of 25 awards - both within India and at the international stage.

She has received an Honorary Ph.D. degree from Rajasthan University. Her book, 'Mujhe Janm Do Ma' is the story of the different dimensions of a woman. This book is now part of the curriculum of different universities as a Reference book.

M.Phils have been awarded on 6 books of Santosh Srivastav from various universities of the country. And so far 7 PhDs have been completed.

‘हेमंत स्मृति कविता सम्मान” is organized annually. She is the Founder President of the ‘International Vishwa Maitri Manch’

Her stories, short stories and memoirs are taught in courses in various schools and universities in India.

Her work has been translated into several languages, viz, Marathi, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi, Chattisgarhi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Bengali and English.

She has travelled to 30 countries on cultural and literary tours.

Part 1

The icy winds from all around were trying to move his stone-like body. But Narottam Giri was immersed in supernatural bliss engrossed in meditation. There was no effect on any part of his body even in that sub-zero temperature. He was engrossed in meditation for a year and a half on the inaccessible snowy mountain ranges of the Himalayas.

After many days the sun was shining. Narottam got down from the mountain. He bathed for a long time in the flowing icy water stream. His marble body glistened like a crystal in the sun. Then wearing his complete jewels and ensemble– the Rudraksh, Bhasma and Tilak, he chanted the mantra while remembering his adorable God.

The group of climbers who were returning after hoisting the victory flag on Everest saw Narottam Giri. Seeing his personality and his Naga-like appearance,

they came close to him. "Baba ji, Pranam, we mountaineers have just returned after hoisting the flag of India on the top of Everest. We are surprised to see you naked in this sub-zero temperature. How it is possible Baba...?" asked one of the climbers.

Wrapped head-to-toe in the icy wind, he had his leather-gloved hands in the pockets of his overcoat, trying to keep from the cold. Narottam's silence was broken after a year and a half - "We are sanyasis. Even while living in the world, we are away from it..."

"Amazing, seems impossible to believe, yet we are seeing you in person. There is not disbelief. We'd like to ask you a few questions to satiate our curiosity but first some food. You also eat all these canned things and hot coffee with us."

"We only eat once a day which is after Sandhya Vandan. You guys eat."

“No, we will also eat with you in the evening. There is no restriction for us. We keep eating while walking. Will eat coffee and biscuits now.”

They kept eating biscuits while drinking coffee. Narottam Giri took the conversation forward- "Do you want to know why I became a Naga?"

"Ji, Baba ji, you have such pure English, Hindi and a grand personality like the Chancellor of a university. Tell me, why did you become a Naga? Was it a betrayal in love or failure in career?"

Narottam Giri became serious. He had forgotten this episode in his one and a half years of hard meditation penance. He was believed to have been reborn as a Naga. Same repetition today!

It was so dark. As of the nights of centuries, eclipses of the moon, all the lights were covering the sun, like a firefly pushing the flame of the lamp beyond, covering Mangal who loved Deepa but could not confess his love to her. Don't know how many nights, how many days,

how many years, he sacrificed, thinking and feeling Deepa. He felt Deepa's palms in those feelings and kept writing on them. Yes, I love you... But don't know which ink those letters of love were written in, that the words were not erased and yet were never seen again.

Now the name of Keerat Bhaiya has been applied on Deepa's palms. Deepa came to Mangal's family as a bride but not his. Situations changed with the arrival of Deepa. Roles changed. But Mangal does not feel guilty for loving Deepa. Nor did he blame Deepa for his love. Deepa was not even aware of Mangal's love. Love is an endless forgiveness and generous thought, and this forgiveness, this generosity becomes a habit. Even if he failed by loving, it is better to fail than not to love. Seeing Deepa as Keerat Bhaiya's bride, Mangal wished many times that he could put a line of his name on her palms with the words of love.

"Tell me Baba ji, your silence is adding to our curiosity." insisted one of the climbers.

"We are sannyasis and sannyasis have no past or future. Himalayan ranges, forests, caves are our abode and roots, fruits are our food. Now hunger or desire of the body does not haunt us. We are there to protect Sanatan Dharma. If needed, we do not miss the opportunity to go to the battlefield to protect the country." Narottam Giri closed his eyes and remembered Lord Shiva. "O BholeBhandari! Do not take me back into the past. With difficulty, I have adopted the Naga cult by sacrificing Mangal.

They had more questions but Narottam Giri had only one answer.

"This life is a maze. No matter how much we try, we cannot escape from its tangle. That's why we chose this path."

"You mean without any pressure or failure?"

"Of course, we chose this path voluntarily. Like all of you, conquering Everest was your goal."