

▶▶ KAVERI

The Golden River

The 785-km-course of the Kaveri, regarded as the sacred Dakshina Ganga, is dotted with historic and religious sites. As the Kaveri winds south-eastwards, through Karnataka and Tamil Nadu towards the Bay of Bengal, a number of tributaries, such as the Hemvati, Kabini and Aiyar, invigorate its flow. At Poompuhar, on the Coromandel coast, the fresh water of the Kaveri spills into the salt-laden sea. Before that, after passing the temple town of Tiruchirappalli, the Kaveri begins to dissipate into a delta system which spans more than 80 km from north to south.

At Talakaveri, the Kaveri trickles into a trough in front of a small shrine. Pilgrims head to Talakaveri all the year round, though most visit during October to November when the river, revered as a goddess, celebrates her birthday. Known as Tulasankramana Day, it is marked by a brief surge in pressure at the river's source. To the inhabitants of the Kodagu region, the event has special significance. Theerhodbhava is a time for ancestor worship and the celebration of local traditions.

Texts such as the *Tulakaverimanmiyam* and *Kaverittalpuranam* document the mythology of the Kaveri's origins. Swami Ananda Tertha, who has spent a lifetime around the stories and knows them by heart, knows the subtle differences in the Kannada and Tamil versions of the legends. "A sage named Agasthya, the father of the Tamil language, came to this area and asked Kavera for his daughter... Kaveri agreed to marry him, under the condition that Agasthya should never be away for more than 40 minutes at a time. Back then, there was no water on this side of the mountain, so Agasthya went to the other side of the Brahmagiri. He kept Kaveri in the form of water, in a jug. After the 40 minutes was over, a surge of water came from the jug and that is how the Kaveri river emerged....," explains the Brahmagiri resident.

In the Tamil version, elders pleaded for water to Ganesh, who then sent Kaveri river towards Tamil Nadu. Though the details of the river's divine origins may be disputed, the Kaveri's importance to the region is not.

—Stuart Forster



PHOTOS: STUART FORSTER



LEGEND HAS IT...

There was once born a girl named Vishnumaya or Lopamudra, the daughter of Brahma, but her divine father permitted her to be regarded as the child of a mortal called Kavera. Lopamudra resolved to become a river whose waters would purify the sins of mankind. It is believed that even the holy Ganga travels underground once a year to reach the source of the Kaveri.



(Clockwise from top) Past Srirangam island; ruins of Srirangapatnam; tourists enjoy a ride; and a magnificent view of the Kaveri