

## T Krishnamacharya



Picture courtesy of KYM Archives

Shri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya was one of India's most respected authorities on the Vedic tradition and Yoga Teachings and practice.

He was born in Karnataka State in South India in 1888 and belonged to a family of distinguished ancestry. Among his forebears was the 9th century teacher and sage Nathamuni. Shri Nathamuni was a great Teacher who created remarkable works, such as the Nyaya Tattva.

In his youth, Shri Krishnamacharya experienced insights around some of these teachings in a mystic dream whilst on a pilgrimage. Many of his later teachings were influenced by this ancient sage's approach to spiritual practice.

T Krishnamacharya began his formal education at the age of six, at the Parakala Math in Mysore. His thirst for knowledge gave him the opportunity to travel widely and seek all aspects of the Vedic tradition from the best teachers across India. His formal education, largely in Sanskrit, included degrees from several universities in North India.

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He in turn studied and mastered these systems and was bestowed with titles such as Samkhya Yoga Sikhmani, Mimamsa Tirtha, Nyayacharya, Vedanta Vagisa and Veda Kesari. He was also a master of Ayurveda (the ancient Indian system of healing) and Sanskrit.

At the age of twenty-eight, he trekked over 200 miles to Lake Manasarovar at the foot of Mt. Kailash in the Himalayas in Western Tibet, to learn Yoga from Ram Mohana Brahmachari. He stayed for over seven years returning on his teacher's instructions to South India to teach. Being a master in many subjects, Krishnamacharya was offered high scholastic positions in great institutes of learning. Instead he chose to be a Yoga teacher to fulfil the promise he made to his own teacher in Tibet. Eventually he came to establish a school of yoga in the palace of the Maharajah of Mysore.

On many occasions he demonstrated the great potentials of yoga in different areas of health and self-control over oneself. The most prominent among them was being able to stop the heart beat for more than two minutes, using yogic practices. With his vast learning in yoga as well as other systems of Indian Philosophy, he emphasized that the practice of yoga must be adapted to the individual, and not the individual to yoga. This was probably one of his most significant contributions in the field of health and healing through yoga. Some of his early students, such as Pattabhi Jois, BKS Iyengar and the late Indra Devi, became renowned teachers themselves.

After Independence and the closing of the school he moved to Madras where he became well-known for his therapeutic use of yoga. He was married and had six children, two of whom are also teaching yoga.

Sri Krishnamacharya is now becoming renowned the world over as an accomplished exponent of Yoga, and a major influence in shaping what we see as Yoga in the West. He was also a visionary who had a sense of the atrophy that Vedic study would face in modern times. He made it his lifetime work to nurture Vedic culture by teaching Yoga, Sanskrit and the Vedas, to one and all who sought him. Tracing the genesis of Vedavani, a center for teaching Vedic chanting, which was inaugurated in 1999 under the auspices of the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, TKV Desikachar linked its roots to his father's conviction that teaching of the Vedas had to be kept alive at all costs.

Undaunted by the criticism that the Vedas cannot be chanted by everyone, he taught the Vedas, on the authority of the scriptures that such stringent regulations could be set aside at times when there was threat to dharma (Apadkala), which was true of this age. Even though it may not be possible to follow the same system of teaching in such an institution, it was more important to retain the spirit of the tradition, said Desikachar, in an address at the inaugural function of Vedavani, a centre established solely to teach Vedic Chanting.

His death in 1989, at the age of 100, marked the passing of a great sage and teacher.

*"Teach what is inside you.  
Not as it applies to you,  
to yourself,  
but as it applies to the other."*

- T Krishnamacharya 1888 - 1989