

MALAVIKA NATARAJ

**A**T THE end of Waterloo Street, a thick smell of incense permeates the air. It is difficult to pinpoint the source. As you keep walking you realise the fragrant aroma comes from two sources: The Sri Krishnan Temple and the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple (also known as the Kwan Im Temple), situated right next to each other.

At the entrances of the two places of worship, devotees bend their heads in prayer, offering the gods smouldering sticks of incense.

Dedicated to the Hindu god Krishna, who is known for his bravery in destroying evil and spreading love, the Indian temple is a popular place of worship – and not just for Indians. Among the temple's followers are thousands of Chinese.

And at the Kwan Im temple – one of the oldest Buddhist-Taoist temples in Singapore – in addition to Chinese devotees, many Indians pay homage to Guan Yin, the Chinese goddess of mercy.

This temple is of special significance because it is believed to bring good luck to worshippers, regardless of race or colour.

The temples came into existence around the late 19th century, as small structures erected by the local residents in the area and although the temples have undergone restorative work since, the original architecture still remains, making them fine examples of traditional Chinese and Indian craftsmanship.

But there is more binding the two places of worship than just geographical location. In the hearts of the devotees who regularly visit, is a deep faith that transcends race, colour – and even religion itself. In fact, their faith stems purely from the heart, rather than from an intellectual understanding of either religion.

Taxi driver Ho Huang Kim is a frequent visitor to both places of worship. "I don't know about Hinduism. All gods are one to me and I feel peace when I pray at both temples. Maybe you go in, you also feel

# They pray in both temples

Indian and Chinese devotees mingle in Hindu and Buddhist places of worship



A matter of faith... Madam Suriya Kumari (in purple T-shirt) and other devotees at the Sri Krishnan Temple (above) and the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple (below). PHOTOS: MALAVIKA NATARAJ



good."

The Sri Krishnan Temple was founded by a large community of Hindus living in and around Waterloo Street. But, interestingly, these days, worshippers at the temple are often not Hindu. The temple priests are not surprised that sometimes, the temple's Chinese devotees outnumber the Indian ones. Says a priest: "Anyone who believes can come here, whether they are Indian or not. These people have a very deep bhakti, faith, so they come here to pray."

And what draws Indian devotees to worship at the Kwan Im temple?

"Faith in Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy, is the reason people come to the temple to pray," says Dr C.K. Tan, the chairman of the Kwan Im temple.

"(They) pray for things like good health and safety; people come here to thank the goddess for answering their prayers, or to simply pay homage to the goddess."

Although the majority of devotees are Chinese, many Indian worshippers are drawn by the compassionate, healing powers of the goddess Guan Yin. For others, like Singaporean Suriya Kumari, it simply brings a feeling of well being. "I live in Tampines, but I come here to pray at both temples on my way back from work. It makes me happy," she tells tabla!

Another Indian devotee, Mrs Sharmila Mani, says: "I go to the Chinese temple twice a year because it is a Guan Yin temple. I was told

that it is a good temple, and people say that it is situated in a lucky place."

While Mrs Mani, who is from south India and has been living here for the past five years, admits that "nothing significant has changed in my life because of my visits", she claims she feels good going there.

Through their devotees, these temples have witnessed an intermingling of cultures that is rarely seen. It can only be called a faith that is beyond even religion.

Today, the area around the two temples has become home to other places of worship, like the Maghain Aboth Synagogue, the Malabar Jama-ath Mosque and Church of Saints Peter and Paul.

**I don't know about Hinduism... all gods are one to me and I feel peaceful when I pray at both temples.**

– Cabby Ho Huang Kim, who worships at both temples

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