

Research paper

Commodification of Hindu Deities, Faith, and Belief on Thai Digital Platforms

Sophana Srichampa^{1*}, Amarjiva Lochan²

¹ Mahidol University, THAILAND

² University of Delhi, INDIA

*Corresponding Author: Sophana.sri@mahidol.ac.th

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the commodification of Hindu deities, faith, and belief on Thai digital platforms through the lens of Mutelu, a contemporary Thai syncretic spiritual phenomenon that blends Theravāda Buddhist merit-making, Hindu deity devotion, astrology, and local spirit beliefs. In recent years, Mutelu has expanded into a dynamic digital marketplace in which sacred symbols, ritual services, and devotional objects are circulated, personalized, and commercialized, particularly via social media. Drawing on qualitative netnography and desk-based research, the study analyzes content from 300 Facebook pages collected between June and July 2025, supplemented by one major e-commerce platform for triangulation of product types and pricing practices. The findings reveal a diverse ecosystem of commodified spiritual content, including consecrated Hindu deity images, amulets, ritual services performed on behalf of devotees, imported ritual objects from India, devotional sweets and offerings, smartphone wallpapers framed as “digital amulets,” deity-themed cards, and curated knowledge about worship practices and sacred sites. Hindu deities are signified within Thai cultural aesthetics and consumer logics, emphasizing accessibility, personalization, and practical benefits such as prosperity, protection, love, and success. The analysis demonstrates that digital platforms—especially Facebook—function simultaneously as marketplaces, ritual spaces, and sites of religious knowledge production, enabling new forms of spiritual entrepreneurship while reshaping traditional notions of sacredness and authority. Interpreted through the frameworks of hybrid cultures and the commercialization of the sacred, the study argues that the Thai appropriation of Hindu deities illustrates how global religious symbols are localized, aestheticized, and mobilized within a market-oriented digital environment. While raising ethical concerns regarding authenticity, inequality, and the dilution of sacred meaning, the commodification of Mutelu spirituality also contributes to cultural innovation, economic participation, and Thailand’s broader soft power strategy, with particular implications for Thailand–India cultural relations.

Keywords: commodification, digital platform, Hindu deities, hybridity, syncretism

Thai society is deeply rooted in a complex syncretic spirituality that integrates local animist beliefs, Theravāda Buddhism, and enduring Hindu influences introduced historically through Indian trade and cultural exchange. Although Thailand is predominantly Buddhist—with over 92% of the population adhering to Buddhism—Hindu concepts, rituals, and deities continue to shape royal ceremonies, the arts, and everyday spiritual life, blending seamlessly with local customs such as spirit worship and astrology. This layered syncretism forms the basis of a

uniquely Thai popular-spiritual phenomenon known colloquially as Mutelu. In this article, Mutelu refers to a contemporary syncretic spiritual culture that combines Buddhist merit-making, Hindu deity devotion, astrology, and local spirit beliefs, with a strong emphasis on seeking practical outcomes such as luck, protection, prosperity, love, and career success through rituals, consecrated objects, and mediated spiritual services (Tanabe, 2017; Pattana, 2018).

The Mutelu economy illustrates the significant contemporary economic dimension of these practices. In 2023, the global mystical or spiritual industry was valued at 493.2 billion baht, with projections estimating growth to 1.5 trillion baht within the next decade. In Thailand, the Mutelu-related sector is worth approximately 15 billion baht and continues to expand. A recent consumer survey found that 96% of Thai respondents spend money on fortune-telling or merit-making activities, with more than 75%—over 52 million people—believing in Mutelu practices. Generational differences further reveal that Gen Z exhibits the highest level of belief and consumption, with over 70% purchasing Mutelu-related products and services, often through online channels, surpassing levels observed in Gen Y and Gen X.

As of early 2025, approximately 91.2% of Thailand's population—about 65.4 million people—are internet users, with an estimated 51 million active social media accounts (Ramneeyanon, 2023; Digital 2025 Thailand, 2025). The most widely used platforms include Facebook (approximately 49 million users), TikTok (about 44 million users), and LINE, followed by Instagram and X. Within this digital environment, Mutelu practices have increasingly migrated online, where beliefs, rituals, and sacred symbols are circulated, personalized, and commercialized. Accordingly, the present study focuses primarily on Facebook as the main online data source due to its wide reach and continued prominence within Thailand's digital ecosystem.

Thailand's religious culture has long embodied deep syncretism, blending Theravāda Buddhism, Hindu practices, and local animistic beliefs (phii) into a resilient Thai spiritual identity (Ishii, 1986; Keyes, 1989). Historical scholarship traces these layered traditions back to the Dvaravati period and the Khmer Empire, when Hindu cosmology, Sanskrit, and Brahmanical rites became embedded within the royal court and popular ritual life (Swearer, 2010; Nepali Times, 2021). Rather than being excluded, Hindu deities were assimilated into Buddhist cosmology as protective spirits—a synthesis evident in cultural texts like the Ramakien and enduring symbols such as the Garuda (Wikipedia: Ramakien, n.d.; Nepali Times, 2021). Ethnographic accounts confirm that shrines dedicated to Brahma, Ganesha, and other deities, along with spirit houses and Brahmin-led ceremonies at sites such as Devasathan Temple, continue to reinforce these multifaceted traditions (Peepul Tree, 2024). Recent evidence suggests that these hybrid practices are increasingly reimagined through digital platforms, allowing syncretic beliefs to adapt alongside urban and online forms of Thai society (HD Asian Art, n.d.; OldThaiAmulets, n.d.).

By the 2000s and 2010s, scholars observed that Thailand's religious landscape was increasingly shaped by commodification, cultural hybridity, and digitalization (Agarwal, 2018; Meklalit, 2021). Early studies highlighted urban shrines as sites of spiritual commodification, offering practical blessings intertwined with everyday consumer life. More recent research reveals how youth subcultures, such as K-pop fandoms, merge devotional acts with consumerist identities, creating new hybrid forms of spirituality (Meklalit, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these trends, as digital platforms enabled accessible virtual rituals that redefined how Thais participate in and consume spiritual practices (Agarwal & Jones, 2022). Duangwises (2024) illustrates how marginalized groups reimagine Hindu deities, such as Ganesha, as symbols of social resistance, while Eamvijit (2024) employs the concept of “hyper-real religions” to analyze how youth integrate faith, pop culture, and digital aesthetics. Similarly, Skulsuthavong (2025) demonstrates how auspicious phone wallpapers and Instagram visuals now serve as digital amulets, highlighting the role of algorithms in contemporary spiritual consumption. Collectively, this body of work highlights a Thai spiritual landscape that is materialistic, consumerist, media-saturated, and fluidly hybrid—where the sacred and the commercial, the local and the global, increasingly converge.

Over the past two decades, studies on religion and digital media have traced an evolution from “religion online” to “online religion.” McKenna and West (2007) first observed how early online forums functioned as religious communities for the unaffiliated. By the 2010s, scholars such as Brubaker and Haigh (2017) had described “platformed faith,” demonstrating how believers utilized social media for ministry, storytelling, and extending spiritual practices into their daily digital lives. In the 2020s, research expanded to explore how digital environments reshape sacredness, authenticity, and authority. Polat and Tekdemir (2023) and Battista (2024) show how social media amplify diverse and often contradictory religious expressions, while Andok (2024) argues that digital networks decentralize traditional religious authority. Mattes and Novak (2025) introduce the concept of “translocal feeds of faith,” and Bisht and Parihar (2023) demonstrate how viral digital narratives shape collective perceptions of belief. Platforms like TikTok exemplify this commodification; Fianto and Ghofur (2023) demonstrate how spiritual content is increasingly prioritizing entertainment and profit. In Thailand, these dynamics are reflected in Gen Z's enthusiastic engagement with Mutelu spirituality on TikTok, where digital charms, livestream rituals, and playful aesthetics transform faith into viral, consumable content (Ratcliffe & Siradapuvadol, 2024).

In summary, two decades of research show that Thailand's syncretic spiritual heritage remains vibrant yet increasingly commodified, personalized, and reconfigured through digital networks. These developments demonstrate how local faith traditions adapt to global media environments while continuing to shape Thai cultural identity in the 21st century.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employs a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2002, 2015) combined with desk-based research to examine how Mutelu—a syncretic, market-oriented spiritual culture in Thailand—is articulated, circulated, and commodified on digital platforms. Secondary data were systematically collected through search engines, online databases, academic journals, websites, and documentary sources to contextualize contemporary digital practices within broader historical, cultural, and theoretical discussions.

The primary digital field sites comprise 300 publicly accessible Facebook pages, selected between June and July 2025. These pages were identified based on their explicit engagement with Mutelu-related content, including Hindu deities, ritual services, consecrated objects, devotional narratives, and spiritually themed commercial offerings. Facebook is the central focus of this study because, in the Thai context, it functions as a dominant multi-purpose platform where spiritual entrepreneurs, practitioners, and devotees simultaneously circulate belief narratives, interact with followers, publicize ritual activities, and transact goods and services. Its relatively stable and searchable content archives enable sustained netnographic observation and systematic qualitative comparison across a large number of field sites within a defined time frame.

In addition, one major e-commerce platform is included as a supplementary data source for triangulation. The purpose of this inclusion is to corroborate product categories, material forms, and price ranges observed on Facebook, rather than to conduct a comparative analysis of online marketplaces. Expanding the dataset to multiple e-commerce platforms or additional social media sites (such as TikTok, LINE, or Instagram) would introduce platform-specific logics and algorithms that require a different comparative research design and therefore fall outside the scope of this article.

Content analysis is employed to systematically examine recorded digital communications, visual materials, and textual descriptions to identify recurring patterns, symbolic forms, and thematic structures within Mutelu-related digital content. This method facilitates the interpretation—and, where appropriate, qualitative mapping—of meanings, representations, and relationships among sacred symbols, ritual practices, and commercial expressions (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, n.d.). All sources were critically assessed for credibility and relevance to ensure the reliability and contemporaneity of the data analyzed.

The analysis is guided by two key theoretical frameworks: the concept of hybrid cultures (García Canclini, 1995), which explains how religious symbols and practices are re-signified within local–global cultural intersections, and the commercialization of the sacred (Kitiarsa, 2008), which provides an analytical lens for understanding how religious beliefs, rituals, and material objects are transformed into commodities within market-driven and media-saturated environments.

The objective of this article is to present the dynamics of Hindu deities and other related elements as they are commercialized on Thai digital platforms.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented under the following topics: the historical development of Mutelu in Thailand; Hindu deities and related sacred elements as sources of psychological support on digital platforms; service-based worship of specific Hindu deities; the positioning of “India” as a marker of sacred authenticity, with particular reference to imported Hindu ritual objects and offerings in Thailand; sweets and grains as devotional offerings in contemporary Hindu practices among Thais; digital wallpapers featuring Hindu deities for smartphones; animals associated with Hindu deities; the availability of knowledge and ritual practices related to Hindu deities and other sacred beings; cards depicting Hindu deities; and selected Hindu deity worship sites in Bangkok

The historical development of Mutelu in Thailand

According to Jang (2024), the timeline of Mutelu reflects the integration of Buddhism, Hinduism, and local beliefs in Thailand is as follows:

-1960s: The Age of Sacred Temples — Spiritual life centered on Buddhist temples, merit-making, and respect for spirit houses and guardian spirits.

-1970s: The Era of Folk Beliefs — Continued household worship of Buddha images and spirits, reflecting strong local traditions.

-1980s: The Hindu Deity Era — Rising popularity of Hindu deity worship, especially Ganesha and Brahma; the Erawan Shrine became an iconic site.

-1990s: The Astrological Revival Era — Renewed interest in astrology, amulets, Feng Shui, and spiritual consultations for love and career.

-2000s: The Spiritual Adaptation Era — More accessible, everyday practices emerged, such as wearing auspicious colors and using personalized astrology.

-2010s: The Personal Power Era — Emphasis shifted to amulets, charms, and gemstones tailored to one's zodiac and personality for luck.

-2020s: The Customized Destiny Era — Spirituality became highly personalized, with lucky items and rituals matched to individual birth details, appealing to the young and tech-savvy.

-2030s: The Digital Divinity Era — Spirituality is expected to integrate with digital innovation through fortune-telling apps and smart wearables that deliver real-time, personalized astrological insights.

Since the 1980s, the popularity of Hindu deities in Thailand has grown steadily, reflecting the natural integration of Hinduism into the fabric of Thai Buddhism. This trend has been further amplified in the digital era, as social media and online platforms have transformed the way Thai youth access and engage with information. These digital channels have created expansive opportunities for the commodification of Hindu deities, turning faith and belief into consumable forms that resonate with contemporary consumer culture.

Mutelu in Thai society

The term Mutelu gained popularity in Thai society around 2021–2022 (www.Prachachat.net, 2023). Derived from “Mu,” meaning to perform rituals for luck or blessings, and “Telu,” signifying earnest devotion, the term reflects a deep commitment to seeking desired outcomes through various spiritual practices. Today, Mutelu or Mu goes beyond rituals to include the commercial sale of lucky charms—such as Hindu deity figures, amulets, auspicious oils, and fortune-telling services—all intended to attract customers and meet their spiritual needs (Atime, 2025).

Uitekkeng (2023) states that “The Mutelu’s trend is not just a belief held by a niche group—it has become part of pop culture. Whether you believe in it or not, everyone can sense that this trend persists...” Why is that? How are Hindu deities and related elements presented for commodification on digital platforms?

As mentioned earlier, Thai people have long been familiar with Hindu deities, and this connection has evolved into a popular trend. Additionally, there is a growing demand for spiritual support, with many turning to rituals like Mutelu to find empowerment and hope—practices that often inspire motivation and renewed energy to overcome life’s challenges.

Throughout history, people have faced uncertainty regardless of their religious beliefs. In today’s world, challenges such as illness, financial hardship, career difficulties, economic instability, political unrest, climate change, and toxic social environments contribute to widespread anxiety and insecurity. In response, individuals seek sources of comfort and support to renew their spirit and motivation, bless their endeavors, protect themselves, and sustain their drive forward. This search often centers on objects of faith and belief passed down through generations, rooted in a profound sense of sacredness. Various rituals—ranging from royal ceremonies to folk traditions—help cultivate and preserve this sacredness, imbuing it with value, nobility, and auspiciousness (Pramoj, 1967).

Hindu deities and related sacred elements as sources of psychological support on digital platforms

In the digital age, Facebook is one of the popular social media platforms for the commercialization of Hindu deities. It functions as a marketplace, a knowledge source, and an event-sharing site, as described below:

Selling Hindu deities and non-deity figures on Facebook

The following Hindu deities and non-deities are depicted and revered on Facebook pages:

Deities are gods and goddesses as follows:

Gods: Lord Brahma (Phra Phrom); Lord Vishnu (Phra Narai); Lord Venkateswara (Phra Narai Balaji); Lord Shiva (Phra Isuan); Lord Varahavata (the boar incarnation); Phra Phirab (Bhairava—Lord Shiva’s manifestation); Bhairava (Phra Pirab); Shiva Linga; Trimurti; Lord Ganesha (Phra Phi-kha-net or Phra Kha-net); Lord Indra; Lord Kartikeya (Phra Khanthakumān); God Kubera or Vaiśravaṇa (Thao Wessuwan); Lord Hanuman; Lord Saturn (Phra Sao); Phra Narasimha; Naga

Goddesses: Uma Devi (with nine manifestations); Goddess Parvati; Goddess Lakshmi; Goddess Mari Amman; Goddess Kali; Goddess Durga; Goddess Saraswati; Bahuchara Mata (worshipped in Gujarat)

Non-Deity Figures are (Phra) Rahu; Nandi (Phra-khoo-U-su-pha-raat); Mooshika Mouse (Lord Ganesha’s vehicle); Rishi; Ravana (Thot-sa-kan in the Ramayana and Thai Ramakien)

Forms, materials, and specifications of Hindu deities portrayed as commodities

Hindu deities and non-deity figures are commercialized in various forms and materials, with the following specifications:

Amulets are the most popular items sold on Facebook. They come in two types:

One-sided amulets: Feature depictions of a single goddess, such as Goddess Kali or Goddess Uma Devi.

Two-sided amulets: Feature combinations of gods, goddesses, and other elements. Examples are summarized in the following **Table 1**:

Table 1

Combinations of Gods, Goddesses, and other elements featured in two-sided amulets

Front side	Back side
Lord Shiva	Lord Ganesha
Lord Shiva	Goddess Uma Devi
Shiva Nataraja	Yantra of Wat Trai Mit Witthayaram Worawihan, Bangkok
Lord Shiva	Lord Ganesha on skulls
Lord Shiva and Goddess Uma Devi	Royal Emblem celebrates the 50th anniversary of King Rama IX's accession to the throne.
Lord Shiva and Goddess Uma Devi	Royal emblem
Goddess Sri Maha Uma Devi	Yantra in B.E. 2516 (1973)
Goddess Uma Devi and Ganesha	Three characters: Swastika, Om, and Shri
Goddess Uma Devi	Pet Phra Uma
Goddess Uma Devi	Yantra of universal power
Goddess Uma Devi	Lord Ganesha
Goddess Uma Devi on a tiger	Tamil Om
Goddess Uma Devi	Pet Phra Uma 2514 (1971)
Goddess Uma Devi and Phra Uma	100 million
Goddess Uma Devi	Lord Ganesha
Goddess Durga in colors	OM
Goddess Uma Devi	Yantra Sri Chakra
Goddess Uma Devi	Tamil Om
Goddess Uma Devi	Sri Chakra Yantra
Lord Narayana in Balaji manifestation	OM
Goddess Lakshmi with Lord Ganesha	OM
Goddess Lakshmi	lotus
Goddess Lakshmi	Yantra of cosmic power
Lord Ganesha	A gold takrud (sacred scroll) of Luang Phor Phae at Wat Phikulthong
Lord Ganesha	Sri Chakra Yantra
Lord Ganesh and Om (Hindi)	Ganesh and Yantra
Lord Ganesha	OM
Lord Ganesha	Kalash with auspicious words: Shubha Labha (Auspicious Prosperity)
Lord Ganesha	Yantra
Lord Indra (Phra In)	Ravana (Thot-sa-kan)
Bhairava (Phra Pirab)	Ta-phon (traditional Thai barrel drum represented the Revered Master of Musical Arts)
Rahu	sacred yantra

According to the examples above, beyond pairing deities with one another—such as gods with gods, gods with goddesses, and auspicious elements from Hinduism—Thai people have also integrated specific deities with uniquely Thai auspicious symbols. These include the Royal Emblem for special occasions like the 50th anniversary of King Rama IX's accession to the throne, the ta-phon (a traditional Thai barrel drum symbolizing the Revered Master of Musical Arts), sacred yantra, and even cultural events such as the inauguration of the first movie at Pet Phra Uma (named after the goddess Uma Devi) in B.E. 2514 (1971).

Materials used for producing Hindu deities

Hindu deities and non-deity figures are crafted using a variety of materials, including: 3K gold alloy; ancient cast statue with back inscription and sealed base; ancient casting with a rattle ball inside, made from a mixed metal alloy; cement with ink inscriptions; ceramic; cloth; copper; copper sheet; free-standing cast statue with sealed base plug stamped with a yantra; gold; gold with a gold frame set with diamonds; gold-plated medallion; gold-plated metal alloy; green jade, black jade, honey jade, Pong Kham (a Thai natural stone revered as a sacred mystical gem), and other sacred gemstones; green sacred powder; green stone; nickel-plated copper featuring a crescent moon on the back; polished silver; ritual card; silver casing with a split-rattan pattern frame; silver coated with gold; silver coin stamped with a code on its edge; silver with a gold mask; statue made of genuine silver with an oxidized antique finish; white resin adorned with pink gemstones; wood sourced from the Nan City Pillar and wooden sculpture.

The prices of Hindu deities made from these materials range from hundreds of baht to as high as 138,000 baht, with some silver and gold pieces priced at 129,000 baht each.

In addition to amulets, Hindu deities and non-deity figures crafted from these materials appear in various forms, such as statues, idols, cards, and yantras.

Service-based worship of specific Hindu deities

Some Thais follow specific gods and goddesses, constructing shrines or worship sites in their honor. They share these activities on social media, particularly on Facebook, with their followers and the public. These individuals regularly organize rituals and ceremonies for their chosen deities, as illustrated in the following examples:

Making offerings on behalf of absent devotees to specific gods and goddesses

Certain Facebook pages provide services to perform rituals and make offerings to deities on behalf of followers who cannot be physically present. For instance:

The Kamala Darshan Avarana Puja—a ritual involving the offering of a lucky lotus flower and prayers to Goddess Lakshmi—is available for 299 baht per set, with payment transferred to Foundation X (pseudonym).

Purpose: This special worship ceremony is intended to bring prosperity to oneself and one's family, bless them with beauty, encourage spiritual growth, fulfill personal wishes, and lead to a fulfilling life.

The page highlights the sacred qualities of Goddess Lakshmi, emphasizing her blessings related to wealth, career, business success, negotiation, love, health, charm, victory over enemies, and financial abundance.

Another page worships Lord Shiva every Monday. This page announces in advance the worship activities performed on behalf of absent devotees who have paid in advance for sweet offerings. The page then shares reports of blessings received after the ritual.

Performing rituals asking for wealth from goddess Lakshmi

Another Facebook page invites followers to make merit by offering sacred robes to Goddess Lakshmi. On the appointed day, participants receive a Goddess Lakshmi yantra plate (the same size as an ATM card, designed to be kept in a purse). The page provides a detailed description of the sacred plate's features.

In addition, the public is invited to participate in the Day of Great Wealth (Akshaya Tritiya 2025). Participants can join as sponsors by lighting the Millionaire's Victory Candle Lantern for 299 baht per person or choose to light the candle and make an offering for 1,080 baht, which includes receiving a "Millionaire Nine Gems of Royal Fortune" bracelet.

Ritual worship for Goddess Kali and Goddess Durga

One page features the veneration of the Goddess Kali, presenting her as a powerful deity who embodies transformation, the destruction of fear, and spiritual awakening. Kali pendants and yantras were distributed during the ceremony, reinforcing these symbolic meanings. Puja sets were offered in three tiers: 299 baht (small); 999 baht (medium); 1,999 baht (large). The page further elaborated on the sacred significance of the Kali pendant and yantra. For Goddess Durga, the page's owner invited followers to participate by purchasing puja sets for 299 baht or 999 baht (large set).

Worship seeking blessings and fortune from Lord Ganesha during Songkran festival

During the Songkran festival (April 13–15), one page invites devotees to participate in auspicious activities, including: Ritual bathing of deities, a grand Vedic New Year blessing ceremony aimed at attracting good fortune and professional success, and prayers to guardian deities and the city's protective spirits for a year of strength,

wisdom, and abundance. Participants are encouraged to wear red or attire that matches the festive New Year spirit. Special offerings are also available; further details are available via LINE contact.

The positioning of “India” as a marker of sacred authenticity, with particular reference to imported Hindu ritual objects and offerings in Thailand

India is widely recognized as the birthplace of Hindu deities, rituals, and associated material culture. As such, the invocation of “India” functions as a powerful marker of authenticity and sacred provenance. Many online pages and retailers serving Thai devotees strategically emphasize this connection by using labels such as “Made in India,” “Imported from India,” or “Consecrated through a Ritual in India” to highlight the spiritual legitimacy of their products and offerings.

Authentic deities from India

Numerous platforms offer detailed descriptions of the characteristics and sanctity of specific gods and goddesses, reinforcing their mystical aura by grounding it in the notion of sacred origin in India. For example:

- An idol of Goddess Tara may be specifically described as imported from Tarapith Mandir, a renowned temple dedicated to Kali worship.

- A statue of Goddess Lakshmi may be presented as originating directly from the Shri Mahalaxmi Temple in Pune, while a Kalighat Kali idol may be described as empowered through potent rituals performed at Kalighat Temple.

- Certain deities are said to be crafted from sacred substances ritually gathered and fused in India, blessed by Brahmins, and consecrated in a Shiva temple.

- A black marble statue of Goddess Durga, weighing over 70 kilograms, is highlighted for its precise adherence to traditional iconography and scriptures, underscoring its sacred value.

In contrast to locally produced statues, which are also available in Thailand, these pages often emphasize features that authenticate the items as “truly Indian.” Examples include noting that statues are cast using an Indian die, crafted according to traditional Indian consecration ceremonies, or made from silver and gold-plated in accordance with established ritual practices.

Embodying Durga’s sacred energy through celebrity devotion

Retailers employ a narrative marketing strategy that links divine energy with prominent Indian worshippers, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the late Indira Gandhi, cricketer Virat Kohli, and actor Amitabh Bachchan. Such examples suggest that the power of Goddess Durga is not merely about wish fulfillment but about embodying inner strength, resilience, and moral courage—qualities deemed essential for those who bear the burdens of leadership or fame. This evidence-based marketing invites devotees to compare themselves with these inspirational figures and, in doing so, to affirm the transformative potential of their devotional acts.

Imported ritual accessories and devotional items

Beyond idols, a diverse array of ritual accessories imported from India reinforces the material authenticity of Thai Hindu worship. For example:

- Ritual censers from India are available in four sizes (140–450 baht).

- Brightly colored marigold garlands, sourced from India, vary in length and price (259–359 baht), while miniature garlands cost as little as 49 baht.

- Holy water from the sacred Ganges River (44 grams with a bowl) is offered at 89 baht.

- Premium Indian incense and frankincense are marketed for their authentic, gentle fragrance, with 100-stick boxes priced at 100 baht or three boxes for 280 baht.

Devotional textiles are equally diverse, ranging from Indian silk saris (1,650 baht) traditionally draped over deities, to sacred cloths from Varanasi (190 baht) and large holy drapes (299 baht). More elaborate items include yellow deity cloths with Om patterns (350 baht) and complete goddess offering sets (999 baht), which contain saris, jewelry, bangles, bindis, and anklets for goddesses such as Uma Devi and Kali. Smaller draping cloths are offered in various sizes and fabrics, priced between 29 and 159 baht.

Additional accessories include a Tibetan-Nepalese beaded mask strap featuring the Om symbol (399 baht), a 108-bead Rudraksha necklace (250 baht), prayer bells shaped like Lord Ganesha (289 baht), and sacred brass tray sets for offerings (299 baht). Even candle holders and other ritual implements, such as gold-toned copper alloy candle stands (199 baht), are presented as imported from India to bolster their ritual significance.

Ritual services in India

Certain pages provide devotees with the opportunity to send devotional offerings to India, where spiritual masters perform rituals during four auspicious occasions:

- (1) Varalakshmi Muhurta — to invoke blessings for wealth, love, and professional success.
- (2) Ganesh Chaturthi Muhurta — to secure prosperity and success through the blessings of Lord Ganesha.
- (3) Navaratri Muhurta — to remove obstacles and attain victory with the grace of Goddess Durga.
- (4) Diwali Muhurta — to attract wealth and popularity through the blessings of Goddess Lakshmi.

For devotees unable to participate in person, these pages offer ritual service packages, typically ranging from 499 to 899 baht for each occasion. These packages may include individual chanting by Brahmins and supplementary ritual items, such as Metta-maha-niyom attraction bath gel. The Thai spiritual master performs each ritual on behalf of the devotees, ensuring that offerings and prayers are carried out with proper reverence and ritual precision.

Peripheral devotional products

Finally, a range of additional items complements the core ritual goods:

- Prosperity treasure chests for Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha (289 baht)
- Devotional perfumes in lotus and rose fragrances (229 baht for 30 ml)
- Sacred rose water, believed to attract wealth and love, available in sizes from 30 ml (29 baht) to 200 ml (69 baht)
- Glasses for offering water or milk (59 baht each)
- Sacred Panch-amrita sets containing ghee, honey, and rose water (125 baht each).

Overall, this practice demonstrates how “India” as a cultural signifier is strategically deployed to authenticate ritual objects, deepen perceived sacred value, and position these offerings within a transnational devotional economy that merges Hindu tradition with Thai spirituality and modern consumerism.

Sweets and grains as devotional offerings in contemporary Hindu practices among Thais

In Thailand, the offering of non-vegetarian food to Hindu deities is sporadic and generally considered inappropriate, especially in formal public or temple settings. Instead, the presentation of sweets—and, increasingly, grains and dry fruits—has become a culturally meaningful and artistically expressive form of devotion. Rooted in traditional Hindu ritual, this practice has gained renewed visibility and commercial vitality through digital platforms such as Facebook, where numerous pages now specialize in the sale and pre-ordering of these ritual items.

Within this emergent online devotional economy, producers and sellers differentiate their offerings by carefully emphasizing notions of authenticity and quality. Many vendors market their sweets with claims such as “prepared according to genuine Indian recipes” or “premium recipe, made with Indian ingredients according to legend,” while also highlighting freshness and health-conscious attributes like “always fresh daily,” “less sweet,” “scented using the traditional Thai method of candle-smoke infusion,” and “free from preservatives.” This form of marketing not only underscores the culinary distinctiveness of these offerings but also reinforces their perceived spiritual merit and cultural legitimacy. Importantly, sellers frequently remind devotees that these sweets, once offered, can be consumed as *prasada*, believed to convey divine blessings and good fortune.

Pre-ordering practices typically follow two main models. First, customers can place direct orders based on publicly listed varieties and prices shown through photos on the webpages. Alternatively, sellers may announce specific auspicious days dedicated to the worship of particular deities, accompanied by images and descriptions of the corresponding sweets, along with contact information and payment instructions—often without explicitly posting prices. These arrangements are generally communicated in advance, with estimated delivery times of two to three days. Sellers often update customers regarding their order status and delivery queues, fostering a sense of personalized service.

The diversity of sweets on offer reflects both devotional symbolism and local creative flair. Popular varieties include Ladoo, Modak, and *Khanom Alua* (a Thai jelly sugar candy), each shaped into motifs rich in symbolic meaning—such as flowers, gold ingots and bars, hearts, and sacred animals like Mushika (Lord Ganesha’s mouse vehicle) and owls (associated with Goddess Lakshmi). These confections are presented in a vibrant palette of colors—red, pink, yellow, green, white, black, purple, sky blue, and orange—and are often adorned with intricate decorative touches, such as delicate gold leaf. Certain Ladoos may bear the sacred OM symbol, further enhancing their spiritual significance. Black and white sesame Ladoos are offered especially to Lord Ganesha. Other creative variations include lotus-shaped Ladoos in eight colors (three pieces for 20 baht) and curated assortments like the “Prosperity Modak” set—nine assorted Modaks in flavors such as matcha, rose, strawberry, chocolate, purple potato, and jasmine (priced at 150 baht). Gulab Jamun, a classic sweet, is similarly offered (three pieces for 60 baht).

Pricing structures vary according to the shape, size, and packaging of each item, typically ranging from 20 to 200 baht. Modak and Ladoo sets adorned with gold leaf, for example, may be priced at 30, 39, 55, 78, or 119 baht per set. Special vow offerings, such as a set of 99 Ladoos (packaged in 11 packs of 9), are priced at 899 baht. A single large, one-kilogram Ladoo, accompanied by an offering tray, costs 799 baht. Colorful Ladoo mandala sets containing nine pieces are offered at 189 baht each, while the diamond-shaped kaju katli, traditionally enjoyed during Diwali, is sold at 45 baht for three pieces. Uniquely owl-shaped sweets are available in three sizes: 1.5 inches (119 baht per pair), two inches (170 baht per pair), and 2.5 inches (199 baht per pair).

In addition to sweets, some vendors provide complementary ritual items to facilitate more elaborate devotional practices. Packaged grains and dry fruit mixes such as *Panch Meva*—typically including cashews, almonds, raisins, dried coconut flakes, and sugar crystals—are common additions, often offered during *puja* and later consumed as *prasada* (Tyohar, 2025). Colored rice and grain bottles are similarly available at various price points (49, 79, and 85 baht). These goods are frequently bundled into curated sets at graduated price levels; for example, a “Size S” set includes rice and grains, one candle, one incense stick, and four pieces of Modak and Ladoo for 145 baht. More elaborate sets, such as “Size M” (499 baht), might include camphor, Kumkum powder, an Om altar cloth, gold-leaf-topped sweets, a sacred draping cloth for the deity, a Mushika mouse figure, and a pearl bracelet.

Special limited-time devotional packages further reflect the intersection of ritual innovation and commercial strategy. For instance, a recent promotion offered 20 exclusive sets (1,998 baht each) containing fresh-milk mango Ladoos, sugarcane juice, and a pair of Mushika mice. These offerings were ceremonially presented at Ganesha Park in Chachoengsao Province on behalf of devotees who were unable to attend in person, with prayers for blessings performed by ritual specialists serving as intermediaries.

Taken together, these practices demonstrate how the offering of sweets and grains is being dynamically reimagined and commodified within Thailand’s contemporary devotional landscape. Through careful attention to narrative framing, product presentation, and ritual significance, these offerings illustrate the syncretic blending of Hindu spirituality with Thai cultural creativity in the digital era, highlighting how traditional practices adapt to and thrive within modern consumer and social media economies.

Digital wallpapers featuring Hindu deities for smartphones

Several Facebook pages offer free downloadable wallpapers of Hindu deities for their followers, but certain conditions apply:

- Exclusivity and gratitude: These wallpapers are provided exclusively to page followers. Users are encouraged to follow, like, and share the original post to express gratitude to the guru, which helps sustain future blessings. Once these steps are completed, followers can download and use the images. Some devotees even request permission to use specific designs or choose to send voluntary monetary offerings as a gesture of thanks.

- Personal use only: These wallpapers are intended strictly for personal belief and practice. They have been blessed with chanting and should not be used for commercial purposes, copied, or redistributed. They are meant solely as personal phone screensavers. Public sharing is allowed only through the original post.

Examples of popular deity options include:

- Lord Shiva

- The Maha Deva trio: Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati, and Lord Ganesha

- The three goddesses: Goddess Lakshmi, Goddess Saraswati, and Lord Ganesha

- Goddess Kali

- Goddess Vasundhara (Phra Mae Thoranee in Thai)

- Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Ganesha together

- Goddess Lakshmi, God Kubera (Vaiśravaṇa), and Lord Ganesha

The most sought-after designs are of Lord Ganesha in various postures.

One page emphasizes that these are not ordinary wallpapers but “Digital Amulets”—a blend of science and art—believed to channel divine blessings. Four popular divine wallpapers with accompanying chants include:

- (1) Goddess Lakshmi — Fortune in All Dimensions: Unlocks fortune and blessings from all directions.

Chant: Om Jaya Lakshmi Mata

- (2) Goddess Lakshmi — Great Wealth: Attracts abundant wealth, new business opportunities, and lasting prosperity. *Chant:* Om Shree Mahalakshmi Namaha

- (3) Goddess Durga — Empowering Attraction & Protection: Ideal for those in customer service or client-facing roles. Draws kind clients, protects from negativity, and helps conserve energy for loved ones. *Chant:* Om Dum Durgaye Namaha

- (4) Goddess Lakshmi — Sustaining Business Partnerships: Strengthens long-term business partnerships, encourages mutual support and fosters sustainable growth. *Chant:* Om Shree Mahalakshmi Nitya Sampatti Pradaya Namaha

Followers can also request custom wallpaper designs based on their preferences.

In addition, some followers share success stories after setting the wallpapers as screensavers, which the page owner reads aloud in video clips. Examples include:

“Since setting the wallpaper, I’ve had a steady flow of work, and money hasn’t run out.”

“After using the wallpaper, I earned hundreds of thousands and got a Rolex.”

(Mutelu World, 2025)

Based on various sources, wallpaper prices range from 50 to over 399 baht, with specific prices at 100, 129–189, 199, and 249 baht. If the user wishes to have the wallpapers uploaded at an auspicious time on their mobile device, an additional 30 baht fee applies.

Animals associated with Hindu deities

Some social network pages sell figures of animals associated with Hindu deities, such as Ganesh’s *vahana* (vehicle), Musika. These figures measure between 3 and 3.5 inches and are priced at 115 to 169 baht, respectively. Goddess Uma Devi’s *vahana*, a tiger, measures 3.4 cm wide and 4.2 cm tall and is sold for 129 baht each. These items are often crafted as adorable dolls.

A calendar featuring a Ganesha cartoon is also available for 159 baht.

The availability of knowledge and ritual practices related to Hindu deities and other sacred beings

Many online pages go beyond mere commercial sales of ritual products or the facilitation of specific devotional services; they also serve as platforms for disseminating knowledge and practical guidance on Hindu deities and other sacred beings. By providing accessible teachings, mythological context, chanting, and detailed ritual instructions, these pages enhance their perceived credibility and reinforce the sanctity of the deities, their associated symbols, and the devotional acts performed in their honor. Such knowledge-sharing practices play a crucial role in deepening devotees’ understanding, maintaining ritual accuracy, and cultivating a more profound sense of personal connection and spiritual commitment.

Cards depicting Hindu deities

Within Thailand’s expanding online marketplace—particularly on platforms such as Lazada—various types of cards featuring Hindu deities have become readily available, with prices ranging from several hundred to over one thousand baht per set. Popular examples include:

-Ganesha Oracle Cards: A full-color deck comprising 32 cards, accompanied by a Thai-language guidebook (approximately 800 baht).

-Whispers of Lord Ganesha: Priced at 1,579 baht.

-Whispers of Lord Ganesha Tarot Card Deck: Includes 50 full-color cards, priced at 108.98 baht and 116.22 baht, depending on the seller.

Other “authentic” new arrivals, such as the Lakshmi Blessings Oracle, Ganesha Oracle, and Whispers of Lord Ganesha Tarot, are also offered at approximately 1,100 baht per set.

Among these options, Lord Ganesha consistently emerges as the most prominent and popular figure represented on such decks, reflecting his widely revered status as the remover of obstacles and patron of wisdom and prosperity.

In addition to the sale of these cards, some fortunetellers and spiritual practitioners actively promote readings using Hindu deity-themed tarot and oracle decks through their social media channels. For instance, certain Facebook pages advertise special reservation rounds for Ganesha tarot card readings, often highlighting exclusivity by limiting the number of available slots. One such example offers only ten booking slots per round; each participant receives a consecrated Goddess Durga pendant, ritually blessed at a temple in India and shipped to their home free of charge. The pendants are typically available in silver and gold-tone variants. Furthermore, some page owners may personally select and gift an additional special Ganesha pendant to a client deemed to have a karmic or spiritual connection, reinforcing the notion of individualized, spiritually resonant practice. Prices for these specialized tarot readings generally fall within the range of several hundred baht.

The selected Hindu deity worship sites in Bangkok

A list of the top Hindu worship sites around Bangkok is provided on various webpages, where people can pray for blessings in areas such as education, career, finances, love, or success, as shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 2*List of recommended Hindu temples and shrines in Bangkok*

Names of temples	Make a wish for	Offerings	Opening hours
(1) Sri Mariamman temple (Wat Phra Sri Maha Umadevi, or 'Wat Khaek'), Silom Road	a life partner, love, finances, and work	incense sticks (9 sticks), milk, fruits, and Indian sweets made from milk and sugar	Open daily from 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM
(2) Dev Mandir (Wat Thep Montien), Siripong Road	love and relationships, especially blessings from Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi	It's best to bring your own offerings, such as flowers, garlands, milk, water, sweet drinks, grains, and various fruits like bananas, sugarcane, pineapples, dragon fruit, apples, pears, grapes, or strawberries.	Monday – Friday from 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM, with a 3-hour break from 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM. On Saturdays, Sundays, and public holidays, it's open all day from 8:30 AM – 8:30 PM
(3) Wat Vishnu (Hindu Dharma Sabha Association), Charoen Rat Road	work, finances, love, studies, health, and general matters	There is a shop at the temple where you can buy offerings.	Open daily from 6:00 AM – 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM – 8:30 PM
(4) Ganesha Shrine, Huai Khwang, Ratchadaphisek Road	work, studies, exams, and achieving success	fruits (bananas, sugarcane, pineapples), sweets, fresh milk, red syrup, silk shawls, candles, chakra sets, and pearl necklaces	Open 24 hours
(5) Devasthan Brahmin Shrine, 268 Dinso Road, Sao Chingcha Subdistrict	work, studies, exams, and achieving success	There is a shop on-site that sells offerings.	Open daily from 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM.
(6) Goddess Lakshmi, Gaysorn Village, 4th Floor, 999 Ploenchit Road	love, good fortune, and success in what you desire	pink lotus flowers, sugarcane juice, plain water, milk, and mild-flavored fruits like coconut; it's also recommended to wear brightly colored clothing.	Open daily from 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM.
(7) Trimurti Shrine in front of Empire Tower, 1 South Sathorn Road, Yannawa Subdistrict	love, work, finances, studies, and health	flowers, incense sticks, candles, and sweets (do not offer sweets made with eggs, savory food, or flowers and fruits with inauspicious names)	open 24 hours
(8) Erawan Shrine (Phra Phrom Shrine), Ratchaprasong Intersection in Pathum Wan District	Worshipping and making wishes to each face of "Phra Phrom" (walk clockwise, starting from the front left) Face 1: Education, studies, work, competitive exams, and authority or influence (located at the very front entrance). Face 2: Land, real estate, and property. Face 3: Personal and family health, protection from illness, and safe travels. Face 4: Wealth, good fortune, luck in gambling or windfall gains, and blessings for children or descendants.	four flower garlands, twelve incense sticks, and four candles, or you can also bring auspicious fruits to offer, such as coconuts, bananas, and pears.	
(9) Ganesha Shrine, the Isetan building (CentralWorld)	work, studies, and success	incense sticks, candles, flowers, fresh milk, sweets, fruits, or grains as offerings	Open 24 hours a day.
(10) Trimurti Shrine (or Shiva in Sadashiva form), in front of CentralWorld	love	red incense sticks, red candles, red roses, and fruits: coconut, sugarcane juice, fresh milk, or sweets	Open 24 hours a day.

Cited: No. (1)-(7) Vanessa (2024); No. 8: NamfahPhupha (2020); No (9)-(10) Erng Eoi (2023).

According to the table, most sites support the worship of multiple Hindu deities simultaneously, illustrating the syncretic and inclusive character of devotional practices in these locations. Moreover, the presence of small vendors selling offerings—such as flowers, incense, and ritual items—demonstrates how these temples and shrines also function as informal economic spaces, enabling local traders to sustain their livelihoods through religious activity.

Many individuals, however, experience uncertainty and vulnerability that cannot be adequately addressed through conventional social or economic structures. In response, they engage with sacred beliefs and practices as sources of meaning, reassurance, and moral orientation. Within this context, holy goods and rituals function as forms of symbolic and cultural support: during periods of instability, devotees may acquire consecrated objects or participate in ritual services to reaffirm protection, auspiciousness, and continuity. Digital amulets, virtual puja, and auspicious wallpapers thus operate as culturally mediated objects of hope, enabling individuals to navigate uncertainty within an expanding digital spiritual marketplace.

Although most Thais identify as Theravāda Buddhists, Thailand's spiritual landscape reflects profound religious syncretism. As Keyes (1989) shows, Buddhism in Thailand has long coexisted with Hindu traditions and local animism. For instance, it is common to seek blessings from Hindu deities alongside Buddhist merit-making.

Within this syncretic context, Hindu deities function as accessible patrons of prosperity. Brahma represents protection, Ganesha is linked to education and success, Lakshmi to wealth, and Trimurti to love. These associations reflect what Kitiarsa (2008) describes as the “commercialization of the sacred.” The rise of online marketplaces has amplified this process, commodifying ritual items and digital services to meet spiritual needs through consumption.

Drawing on García Canclini's (1995) concept of hybrid cultures, this paper argues that the Thai appropriation of Hindu deities illustrates how global symbols are re-signified within local economies. Many Facebook pages now act as virtual shrines, blending astrology, spirit mediumship, and Thai ritual aesthetics. Digital platforms circulate and commodify these reimagined symbols, transforming worship into consumable forms aligned with the Mutelu phenomenon.

This commodification demonstrates that Thai syncretism is not static but responsive to media, market forces, and globalization. Online spiritual marketplaces and livestreamed rituals blend sacred meaning with commerce, supporting Canclini's view of hybridization as a creative strategy for navigating modernity.

Thai sellers often highlight “India” as a sacred origin, using Orientalist notions of authenticity (Said, 1978) to enhance value. This reflects a transnational religious supply chain in which material goods, ritual knowledge, and symbolic value circulate across borders. The network generates economic benefits for practitioners, small vendors, and organized groups, aligning with Kitiarsa's (2008) concept of the “informal sacred economy.”

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Thailand, the Mutelu phenomenon—a blend of Theravāda Buddhism, Hinduism, and local animism—shapes daily spirituality. The 2006–2007 Jatukham Ramathep craze in Nakhon Si Thammarat showcased this, combining guardian spirit worship with Hindu-Buddhist imagery. It led to significant pilgrimages, amulet speculation, and a booming market worth up to 40 billion baht (Suksomboon, 2008; Jatukham Ramathep, 2024), before collapsing over concerns about authenticity. During the post-crisis economic recovery and political instability, this “faith bubble” boosted local economies through the sale of amulets, donations, and temple construction. The episode illustrates how media, markets, and socio-political factors contribute to the commercialization of spirituality. In an era of hyper-social acceleration, individuals turn to auspicious and sacred forms of support to alleviate growing psychological and emotional anxieties, thereby reinforcing the enduring appeal of Mutelu in Thai society (Kitiarsa, 2008; Suksomboon, 2008).

In the contemporary digital context, individuals and spiritual entrepreneurs freely create and circulate content related to Hindu deities, ritual ceremonies, and associated elements, contributing to their commodification on platforms such as Facebook. This includes a diverse range of offerings and services, such as worship rituals dedicated to specific Hindu deities, sweets and grains as devotional offerings, deity-themed smartphone wallpapers, symbolic representations of deities' animals, the dissemination of knowledge and ritual guidance, deity-themed cards, and information about prominent Hindu worship sites across Bangkok. Together, these practices illustrate how Thailand's long-standing syncretic spirituality continues to adapt and thrive within a digital, market-oriented environment.

The commodification of Hindu deities on Thai digital platforms, especially Facebook, presents a complex academic challenge rooted in concerns about sacredness and commercialization. As sacred figures are transformed into consumer products through syncretic reinterpretation and algorithm-driven visibility, their deep ritual meanings risk dilution, authenticity becomes contested, and traditional religious authority is displaced by social media influencers. On platforms like Facebook, where engagement metrics shape visibility, spiritual content is frequently optimized for virality rather than reverence. This process not only simplifies rich and complex spiritual

traditions but also fragments communal worship into individualized, transactional experiences. Furthermore, the commercialization of faith privileges aesthetic appeal and economic access, thereby reinforcing digital inequalities and raising ethical concerns regarding the exploitation of sacred symbols for commercial gain (Skulsuthavong, 2025).

However, the commodification of Hindu deities, faith, and belief on Thai digital platforms also presents significant opportunities. It facilitates cultural innovation through hybridized spiritual practices and expands access to religious engagement for diverse populations, including urban youth, diaspora communities, and individuals in remote areas. The emergence of a digital faith economy has also fostered new forms of entrepreneurship, generating alternative income streams for small vendors, content creators, and spiritual influencers. Moreover, this phenomenon contributes to the preservation and revitalization of spiritual traditions, particularly by renewing interest among younger generations. It also enhances Thailand's soft power through cultural diplomacy, as the global circulation of spiritual goods and practices strengthens cross-cultural connections. Digital platforms further modernize ritual practices by enabling interactive and personalized experiences, while stimulating creativity across various artistic domains, including visual media, fashion, and design. Additionally, the availability of user data enables more targeted spiritual content and opens up novel pathways for scholarly inquiry into contemporary religiosity.

While ethical concerns remain, the digital commodification of faith offers meaningful avenues for spiritual expression, cultural continuity, and economic participation in Thailand's evolving digital landscape.

The findings of this study support the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand's estimate that merit-making activities have developed into a substantial and organized market sector (Julsawad, 2025), reinforcing earlier research on the commercialization of spiritual practices. Within this context, the Mutelu phenomenon illustrates how syncretic spiritual practices—combining Buddhism, Hinduism, and local animistic beliefs—are increasingly utilized as cultural capital under Thailand's 5F soft power strategy, which encompasses Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, and Festival (Nye, 2004). This alignment is especially clear in the promotion of faith-based tourism, with cities like Bangkok and Ayutthaya developing Hindu ritual spaces dedicated to deities such as Rahu and Ganesha. Digital media and celebrity influencers further boost this sacred branding to younger audiences and international visitors, expanding the reach of Thailand's spiritual products into translocal cultural markets (Kitiarsa, 2008). Overall, this demonstrates how the commodification of spiritual practices contributes to Thailand's broader objective of transforming soft power into a dynamic, creative economy (Nye, 2004; Kitiarsa, 2008). Furthermore, the Mutelu market, which focuses on Hindu deities, has strategic potential for promotion as part of cultural diplomacy, thereby strengthening Thailand–India relations.

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Biographical sketch

Sophana Srichampa. Current position: Advisor, the Centre for Bharat Studies. Affiliation: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand. Highest academic degree: Ph.D. in Linguistics. Key research interests: Southeast Asian Languages and Linguistics, Indian Studies, Southeast Asian multilingual and multicultural aspects, Indian Diaspora and heritage in Southeast Asia, Thailand in particular, and Migration

Amarijiva Lochan. Current position: Vice President of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR). Affiliation: Department of History, University of Delhi, India. Highest academic degree: Ph.D. in History. Key research interests: Asian history and the history of religions, South and Southeast Asian religious and cultural interactions, Buddhism and Buddhist heritage, Indian diaspora and heritage, and inter-Asian cultural exchange

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