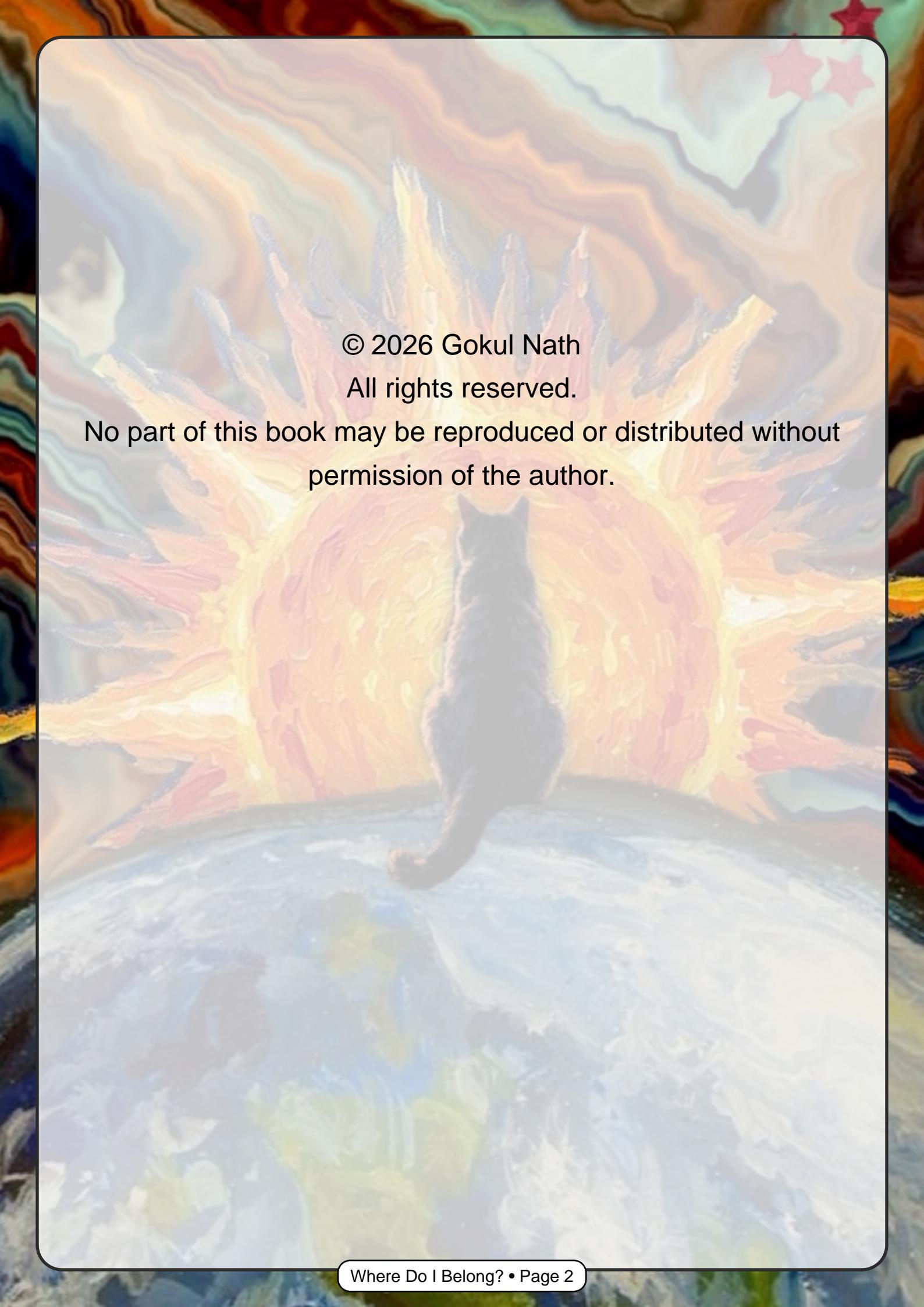


# Where Do I Belong?

A journey of belonging, history, and the Earth

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# Preface

This book is not written to divide people into new camps or to replace one slogan with another. It is written to slow us down long enough to ask a simple, stubborn question: Am I living in a story I chose, or a story I inherited? We inherit names, languages, and families. We also inherit beliefs, identities, and fears. Some of them help us live better. Some of them quietly ask us to stop thinking. The pages that follow are not a demand to abandon faith or to adopt a new label. They are an invitation to examine the labels we already carry. Cultures change. Histories get edited. Power prefers clean stories. This book looks at how belonging is formed, how it is used, and how it is sometimes rewritten—especially in the context of the Tamil past and the Sangam world. The aim is not to mock belief, but to remember roots, to separate history from marketing, and to make space for honest questions. If you finish this book with answers, that is fine. If you finish it with better questions, that is even better.

# Chapter 1 — The Need to Belong

Everyone wants to belong somewhere. A family, a city, a language, a country, a god. Belonging is older than logic. Before humans learned to ask whether something was true, they learned to ask whether it was theirs. Most people do not choose their first beliefs. They inherit them, the way they inherit a surname or a hometown. Repetition does the rest. A sentence heard often enough stops sounding like an opinion and starts sounding like a fact. Belief rarely begins in books; it begins in living rooms, classrooms, and sometimes in television shows. When you are young, you do not ask whether something is true. You ask whether it is normal. Then the world gets bigger. You see other cultures, other religions, other rules. You notice how often the same word—tradition—can mean comfort in one moment and control in the next. You notice who these rules fall on more heavily. You notice how identity is defended more fiercely than evidence. At some point a difficult question appears: Are we searching for truth, or are we searching for a team to stand with? Belonging is comfortable. Doubt is lonely. Most people choose comfort not because they are foolish, but because they are human. The problem is not wanting to belong. The problem begins when belonging pretends to be truth. That is how belief becomes identity, identity becomes armor, and questioning starts to look like betrayal. Somewhere in the noise, one line keeps waiting: Am I living in a story I chose... or a story I inherited? This book begins there.

## Chapter 2 — Where Is God? (And Is He About Belonging?)

God is everywhere in speeches and very quiet in emergencies. This is usually explained by saying that God works in mysterious ways, a sentence that explains everything and nothing at the same time. In theory, belief is about truth, meaning, and comfort. In practice, it often looks like a membership system. Believe this, stand here, repeat these words. Congratulations—you now belong. If God is one, why so many uniforms? If morality is real, why does it need so much performance? None of this proves anything about the universe. It proves something about us: humans are very good at using God. God is useful in politics, useful in building crowds, useful in turning complex problems into simple slogans. When God becomes identity, facts become optional and emotions become evidence. This does not mean faith is impossible or meaningless. It means we should notice how often belief is asked to do the work of belonging. The uncomfortable question remains: Am I searching for what is true, or am I just trying to make sure I am standing with the right group? And if God is mostly used to decide who is inside and who is outside, then perhaps the question is not only where God is—but where we are.

# Chapter 3 — Was This Always Our Place? (The Sangam Question)

Whenever someone says, “We have always been like this,” it is worth checking a history book. Slogans prefer simple pasts; history usually offers complicated ones. When we look at early Tamil society, especially what we broadly call the Sangam period, we do not find a civilization obsessed with fitting itself into a single religious template. We find poetry about land, love, war, trade, seasons, kings, journeys, and loss. In other words, we find life. The famous *tinai* system itself is organized around landscapes—mountains, forests, fields, coasts, dry lands—and the ways people live within them. Gods appear in these texts, but they are woven into life rather than placed above it like strict supervisors. The divine looks closer to forces of nature than to a daily surveillance program. This does not make the past perfect. No society is. But it does make the present certainty a little strange. If our cultural past was plural, local, and grounded in life, then when did it become this uniform, this rigid, this anxious about fitting everyone into one story? That question prepares us for the most uncomfortable part of this book.

# Chapter 4 — When Belonging Gets Rewritten

There was a time when God did not need a marketing department. No logos, no flags, no prime-time debates. Just rain, soil, forests, seas—and humans trying to survive. In that world, God looked a lot like nature, because nature decided everything. If the rains came, you lived. If they did not, you did not. God was not an identity card; God was survival. In the Sangam world, landscapes come first. Life comes first. Poetry talks about kings and wars, lovers and waiting, journeys and loss. Gods are present, but they are part of this living world, not placed above it as a moral scoreboard. Then, slowly, the story changes. Local gods get new names. Local stories get new frames. Different traditions are filed under one larger, cleaner label. Murugan becomes Skanda. Kotravai becomes Durga. Mayon becomes Vishnu. Not because ancient poets were waiting for this, but because later systems prefer uniformity. Diversity is complicated. Uniformity is efficient. After all this editing, we are told, very confidently, “We have always been like this.” That sentence does a lot of political work. It turns influence into origin and rewriting into continuity. This is how belonging gets rewritten—not erased, but reframed. Cultures influencing each other is normal. The problem begins when influence is sold as the original story and when history is cleaned up for convenience. The Sangam world did not worship a brand; it lived inside a landscape. Modern identity politics does not run on rain.

It runs on slogans. So God changes roles—from being the earth you depend on, to being a logo you defend. From being nature you respect, to being an identity you fight over. Once that happens, questioning becomes “disrespect,” and curiosity becomes “attack.” This is not how the past disappears. This is how it gets edited.

## Chapter 5 — A Quieter Time

There is a quieter way to imagine the past. Not as a golden age, not as a perfect world, but as a world closer to the ground. People watched the sky for rain, not signs. The earth was not a symbol; it was the thing that kept you alive. The sea was not a metaphor; it was a risk you negotiated with every journey. Belonging, in that world, was practical. You belonged to a land because you lived on it. You belonged to a community because you depended on it. Survival has a way of making conversations honest. Somewhere along the way, we traded that closeness for noise. We traded land for labels and questions for slogans. We called it progress. Maybe it is, in some ways. But something quieter was lost in the process.

# Chapter 6 — Where Do We Belong?

We were told to look up, so we forgot to look around.

We were told to be good because someone might be watching,  
as if kindness needs a camera, as if compassion needs a threat.

We built heavens to escape responsibility,  
and hells to control each other.

Meanwhile the earth kept burning quietly,  
and oceans kept swallowing names.

What is in our hands is running out: time, forests, species,  
patience.

Extinction is not new. What is new is how calmly we help it.

Be kind—not from fear, but because something alive stands  
before you.

Be gentle—not because a book tells you to, but because the  
world is tired.

So where do we belong?

To the earth we are breaking, or the stories we keep repeating?

Maybe we belong to a narrative we rarely question,  
and sometimes we disappear with it—  
like fools who mistook a story for a home.