

Erotic Spirituality of Women in Hinduism: A Study on Akkamahādevi

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Introduction

A feeling of respect, love and devotion are common phenomenon in religious life, which comes out from the heart of devotee that has taken a shape of devotional movement. As a full fledged devotional movement, it worked its way through India starting in the far south in the sixth century CE, spreading through the middle and the western region around the twelfth century, and flourishing in the north by the seventeenth century. Hindu women voices emerge in full force in this movement. Some bhaktas were passionate lover of God with attributes. Akkamahādevi, a twelfth-century Kanada saint who worshipped Śiva in his iconic form, where she alludes on her relational spirituality and accentuates what is more significant than Śiva. Akkamahādevi vacanas are generally considered to be the most poetic amongst Vīraśaivas. What is most characteristic of her vacanas is her desperate searching for Siva, simultaneously what she expresses her love toward her beloved Channamalikarjuna, and her spirituality is highly erotic, which have been delved into Vacana of Akkamahādevi.

Brief Sketch of Viraśaivism

The *Liṅgāyata* (“people of the Linga”) or *Vīraśaiva* (“Siva’s heroes”) are a South Indian group common in Karnataka. *Viraśaiva* also called *Charaṇas* (“wanderers”). Because they prided themselves on being moving temples,

itinerant, and never putting down roots.¹ In several important ways, *Vīraśaiva* stood and continue to stand over and against their larger social context of Brahminical Hinduism as a sharply defined and sectarian protest movement.

The *Vīraśaivas* are worshiper of Śiva. The Sanskrit term *Vīra* means “heroic” or “militant” that cause one to think the strength of their devotional encounter. The sectarian mark is made with ash in the centre of the forehead, with or without the horizontal lines of the Śiva devotee. Another term for the Śiva devotee is ‘Linguist (a)’ which means “bearers of *linga*’, the insignia of Śiva. The name is derived from the habitual wearing of a small stone *Śivalinga*. Those who receive a *linga* from the family priest at an initiation ceremony, usually on the day it is born. The *linga* is tied to the child’s cradle to symbolize the divine origin of the soul in the body; later it is strung on a thread and worn at the neck or on the arm, remove from its container only for the twice-daily worship.² While the term *Vīraśaiva* and *Lingayat* are often used interchangeably, there is a tendency for the former to describe the philosophical or

¹ Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus An Alternative History* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2015), 469.

² Julia laelie, “Understanding Basva: History, hagiography and Modern Kanada Drama,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 61/ 2 (1998): 229.

historical context while the latter denotes the modern social group.³

Origin of *Vīraśaiva* or *Lingayata* is difficult to trace the date but scholars like Dr. S. C. Nandimath traced its religious origin to the Śaiva sect before 12th century.⁴ Bhandarkar opines that “When it originated, it is difficult to say. But it was clearly in a militant condition in the time of Basava.⁵ It must therefore, have originated about a hundred

years before.”⁶ Eva-Maria Glasbrenner views that Basva was *Śaivite* mystic who revived an already existing religion and transformed into a new, powerful, morally and socially engaged spiritual movement.⁷ Ben-Herut sees that claims regarding the historical origins of *Vīraśaivism* are traditionally divided between two factions. The first harks back to an orthodox, Sanskrit, pan-Indian, and Brahminical antiquity, while the second points to the local, Kanada speaking movement that was led by the local leader named Basava during the 12th century in North Karnataka.⁸ Yet *Vīraśaivism* or *Lingayatism* was given totally a newer radical form by Basava and his other socio-religious economic revolutionaries known as the *Vacanakāras* (composers of verses) and *saraṇas* in the 12th century and their number was two hundred and ten including thirty five women from different castes and profession to compose *vacanas* at Kalyan (a place in the northern part of Karnataka) to popularise their new concepts of socio-religious and economic equality for all irrespective of their castes, culture and sex.⁹ On account of these views it is conceivable that there is no point, which

³ laelie, Understanding Basva . . . , 229.

⁴ S. C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Veerasaivism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 1.

⁵ Basava was born in a Brahmin family, whose were the devotees of Śiva. He was reared up in a Brahminical teachings and practices he had different perception toward it rather than traditional way. He resisted against wearing the sacred thread, even it is said that he rejected the *Upanayana* ceremony and preferred personal relationship with God. Consequently he reached to *Kudalasangama*, a sacred place where two rivers meet. He found guru and learned the scripture and had many year of spiritual experience. Lingayat community remembers him as *Bhakti* Bhandari (treasure of devotion) Basavanna. Basava was a Śaiva Brahman at the court of King Bijjala, the king of *Kalyana*. He was a social and religious reformer. He expressed his devotion in poetry and founded a new community. Basava was vehemently against the caste system and ritualistic religion. He began a community at *Kalyana* which emphasized egalitarianism, including caste-free marriage, and developed an ethos of what Victor Turner has called *communitas* or ‘communion’. Basavanna preached that the devotion of people to God was a direct relationship and did not need the intervention of the priestly class. Temple building is generally not practised among Lingayats. His egalitarian philosophy and reform movement attracted large numbers of people. Saints like Allama Prabhu, Akka Mahadevi and Channabasavanna also played pivotal roles in the growth of the Lingayat tradition. Gavin Flood, *An introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 172.

⁶ Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Virasaivism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995), 190.

⁷ Eva-Maria Glasbrenner, “Cakra System and Tantric Ritual in Virasaivism,” *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 10/22 (27 June, 2015): 180.

⁸ Gil Ben-Herut, “Figuring the South Indian Siva *bhakti* Movement: The Broad Narrative Gaze of Early Kanada Hagiographic Literature,” *Journal of Hindu Studies* 10/25 (2015): 274.

⁹ S. H. Patil, “Impact of Modernization and Democratization on a Dominant Community: A Case Study of Lingayat Community in Karnataka,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* LXVIII/4 (October-December, 2007): 665.

state that the founder of *Vīraśaivism* is Basava rather he is developer and made remarkable contribution to the *Vīraśaivism* along with other contemporaries. However, it seems there are historical connections the Kanada Śaiva *bhakti* tradition with the earlier form of Śaivism.¹⁰ Moreover, during the time of Basava, *vīraśaivism* reached its zenith and became more organized along with its objectives to achieve it. It was the time Akkamahādevi, who was the youngest saint of *Vīraśaivism*.

Both male and female poets construct several models of relationships between the subordinate devotee and the powerful deity. In devotion the deity is sought not only as a husband, but also as an errant lover (who is scolded, berated, and teased, and not just treated with formal respect), and other times is referred to as the father and as the mother. Sometimes, a male poet identifies himself as the mother of the incarnate deity and sings poems about the mischievous child. In the case of Akkamahādevi, Siva is the lover and innermost soul, her relationship excludes others, and the very unique nature of the divine-human relationship is such that no models of an earthly relationship completely describe it or exhausts it. And it has been vividly expressed by Akkamahādevi in her

vacanas, which can be termed as *madhura*¹¹, or instead of *madhura*, theologians' talk of the mood of śṛṅgāra, or romantic love that is sometimes erotic. This mood is seen in the *vacana* of Akkamahādevi that is highly demonstrated.

Life of Akkamahādevi

Akkamahādevi was born in the early half of the 12th century at Udatadi village, (present district of Sivamogga) in Karnataka.¹² Her father Nirmalshetti, and mother, Sumati, were ardent followers of Siva. It is said that Akkamahādevi displayed her religious proclivities even as a little girl. There is a popular legend that *Rudrakanika*, by the order of *Paraśiva*, took birth on the earth as a human being, who was Akkamahādevi.¹³ As she grew older, her piety and devotion to her God, Chenna Mallikarjuna, grew stronger. Even when she had reached the age of sixteen she was not married, a practice rare in those days. The reason for not marrying could be "she considered herself betrothed to her Lord and refused human loves"¹⁴

However, Akkamahādevi could not avoid marriage too long. According to legend, when King Kausika was returning from the hunt, he saw her standing near her house, watching the

¹⁰ The earlier form of Śaivism we can see in South India in the Tamil speaking area, and they are known as Nāyanmārs (leaders). The hymns of the nayanmars were preserved in several collections that were finally combined in the tenth century. P. S. Daniel, David C. Scott, G. R. Singh, eds., *Religious Traditions of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 142.

¹¹ *Madhura*, which denotes the sweet love that a woman feels toward her beloved.

¹² Andrew Schelling, ed., *The Oxford Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.

¹³ Chandra Y. Mudaliar, "Religious Experiences of Hindu Women: A Study of Akkamahadevi," *Mystics Quarterly* 17/3 (September, 1991): 139.

¹⁴ Schelling, ed., *The Oxford Anthology of Bhakti Literature* . . . , 42.

royal procession, and fell in love with her. When the royal proposal was brought to her, she rejected it. Her parents pleaded with her to accept the proposal, for it became clear that her refusal endangered their lives. Akkamahādevi agreed to marry the King, but on conditions detailed in one of her *vachanas*:

I shall engage in the worship of Shiva, as I like it;
I shall spend my time in the company of Maheswaras, as I like it;
I shall be with the prince as I like.
I shall forgive only three violations of these conditions.¹⁵

King Kausika readily agreed to the conditions and the marriage was performed. However, there are two opinions regarding Akkamahādevi's marriage.¹⁶ Some sources, among them Harihara, who wrote the life story of Akkamahādevi, held that the marriage did take place, while others, including Camasara, author of *Prabhulingalile*,¹⁷ mentions that the marriage did not take place. After her marriage, Harihara says, she would spend as much time as she wanted in prayers and in the company of the devotees of Siva and sing freshly composed *vachanas*. Life continued on this note, but not long. Her *vachanas* relate her devotion, her anguish, as well as her anger at being compelled to flit between devotion to

God and the worldly life. In one of her *vachanas*, she expresses her desperation:

O, Lord, listen to me if you will,
listen not if you will not;
I cannot rest contented
unless I sing of you.
O, Lord, accept me if you will,
accept not if you will not;
I cannot rest contented
unless I hold you in my arms.
O, Lord, look at me if you will,
look not if you will not,
I cannot rest contented
unless I gaze at you
in overpowering longing.
O, Lord, Chenna Mallikarjuna
I worship you and revel
in the thrill of pleasure.¹⁸

Having agreed with the condition of Akkamahādevi Kausika got married but he desecrated Mahadevi's conditions. Therefore, she left the palace, taking the *Linga* nothing else. She bade farewell to her parents and left the town. Her departure from the confines of domesticity gave her freedom to search her dear one Siva, God and lover. Even the pangs of thirst and hunger also did not affect her spiritual life since she has found her Lord.

For hunger,
There is the town rice in the
Begging bowl
For thirst,
There are tanks, streams, wells

¹⁵ Swami Ghanananda and Sir John Stewart-Wallace, eds., *Women Saints of East and West* (London: Ramakrishna Vedanta Center, 1955), 33.

¹⁶ Sarojini Shintri, *Akka Mahadevi* (Dharwar, 1983), 5.

¹⁷ Sir John Stewart-Wallace, eds., *Women Saints of East and West . . .*, 35.

¹⁸ Sir John Stewart-Wallace, eds., *Women Saints of East and West . . .*, 34.

For sleep,
There are the ruins of temples.
For soul's company
I have you, O Lord, white as jasmine.¹⁹

Completely relinquished for the sake of Lord Siva and on her way, "clad only with sky," to the Śrisailam Mountain abode of her Lord, Chenna Mallikarjuna. She threw even the cloths and moved with the love of Siva but she has not left without criticizing by people and in response to this she writes:

People
Male and female,
blush when a cloth covering their shame
comes loose.
When the Lord of lives
lives drowned without a face
in the world, how can you be modest?
When all the world is the eyes of the Lord,
on looking everywhere, what can you
Cover and conceal?²⁰

Throwing away cloths is a throwing away of concession to social conventions, defences, and investments. Nakedness signifies being open to the experience of God. It is one of the common phenomenon in Hindu religious sects. Having given up everything, on the way she visited Kalyana, the seat of Anubhav Mantap. Although she had gone to the Anubhav Mantap for spiritual guidance, the elders realized that Akkamahādevi, though young, was already much advanced on the spiritual path. Yet Akkamahādevi seemed to have been very happy at Anubhav Mantap

and appreciated the communion with the devotees, as expressed in one of her *vachanas*:

Except through contact, fire
cannot be kindled; nor seed sprout;
Nor body be born, nor yet
Can any happiness come to be.
O, Chenna Mallikarjuna Lord, because
of thy Sarana's mystic companionship
I was made supremely happy and was saved.
O! Prabhu.²¹

While she reached at the Anubhav Mantap, Akkamahādevi delved the guidance of Allama Prabhu²² and Basaveswara to find her Lord, Chenna Mallikarjuna. Allama Prabhu counselled her "to first disengage herself from 'I-ness and thou ness,' and that she would then see with the eye of knowledge, the Infinite Light and the Absolute Void,

²¹ Ramanuja, Speaking of Siva . . . , 12.

²² Alma Prabhu is respectfully called Prabhu, the Lord. He was the son of a master musician in a temple, as a student of music trained percussion instrument; Prabhu as falling in love with a girl and marrying her, and upon her death becoming recluse; Prabhu meeting his Guru Animisha in a cave doing various spiritual practices and wandering all over the land conversing and teaching, criticizing and guiding various disciple; another narrative states that Allama was courtier of Siva, born on this earth because of a course but born perfect, conquering the trap of love and sex, and teaching the whole world the proper way of spiritual attainment; during the sixteen century the *Soonyasampadane* collections accorded him the status of undisputed leader of Virasaivism. Moreover *Soonyasampadane* give the information that he was a person of intelligence and rare intuition, frank and fearless in his expression, always protesting against the order of established religion and upholding the value of personal experience against learned theology. O. L. Nagabhusana Swamy, ed., *The Sign: Vacanas of the 21st Century* (Prasaraupa: Kanada University-Hampi, 2007), 57.

¹⁹ A. K. Ramanuja, Speaking of Siva (London: Penguin, 1973), 132.

²⁰ Ramanuja, Speaking of Siva . . . , 184.

completely rid of all form.”²³ Akkamahādevi left the Anubhav Mantap after her short visit and reached to the Śrisailam mountains, and settled down to the uninterrupted worship of her Lord Chenna Mallikarjuna. It is said she would be found roaming and singing near caves and streams in the forest. Shadows of her former life, however, pursued her. Her parents came and were full of grief at her hard ascetic life in the forest. King Kausika, after embracing Vīraśaivism, also came and fell at her feet, pleading with her to be kind to him. Seeing this unexpected turn of events, Akkamahādevi uttered the famous *vachana* on the ways of God:

Oh! Lord your Maya does not give me up
 Even when I have given it up.
 In spite of my resistance it clings to me
 And follows me.
 Your Maya becomes *Yogini* to the *Yogin*.
 It becomes a nun to the monk;
 it becomes a herald to the saint.
 It adapts itself to each according to his nature.
 When I climbed up the hill,
 your Maya too came up; when I entered the
 forest,
 your Maya too entered behind me.²⁴

Lo, the world does not take its hand off my
 back even now!
 O, Lord of infinite mercy, your Maya
 frightens me.
 O Lord Mallikarjuna, bestow your grace on
 me.²⁵

²³ Sarojini Shintri, *Akka Mahadevi* (Dharwar, 1983), 14.

²⁴ Ramanuja, *Speaking of Siva* . . . , 112.

Akkamahādevi, it is said, had in fact conquered Maya (illusion); there was no going back. Thereupon both her parents and King Kausika left the forest. She spent the rest of her life in the mountains, singing her *vachanas*, which detail for us her rich spiritual experiences.

Akkamahādevi's Erotic Spirituality

Many human beings recognize the existence of level of reality that exceeds the limit of ordinary human experience. The spiritual person believes in the more that what is seen is not all there is but experiences. Experience of the transcendent is the vital element in spirituality, suggesting that “spirituality involves a personal quest to find meaning and purpose in life and relationship to the Mystery/God and the rest of the universe.”²⁶ Walsh defines, “Spirituality an overarching construct refers more generally to transcendent belief and practices.”²⁷ Frederick says, “Spirituality is more concerned with lived individual experience.”²⁸ For Helminiak, “Treatments of the matter usually understand spirituality in terms of religion and one's relationship with God.”²⁹ However, spirituality concerns our human

²⁵ Sir John Stewart-Wallace, eds., *Women Saints of East and West* . . . , 37.

²⁶ Lawrence L. Lapiere, “Model for describing Spirituality” *Journal of Religion and Health* 33/2 (summer 1994): 157.

²⁷ Walsh F., ed., *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy* (New York: Guilford, 1999), 6.

²⁸ Thomas V. Frederick, “Discipleship and Spirituality from a Christian Perspective,” *Pastoral Psychol* (8, July, 2008): 554.

²⁹ Daniel A. Helminiak, “Sexuality and Spirituality: A Humanist Account,” *Pastoral Psychology* 47/2 (1998): 119. 119-126.

awareness of and relationship to those aspects of life that are intangible, something greater and powerful than us, yet we cannot touch and see. These definitions suggest the relationship of spirituality to the human experience of awe and wonder. But it is not clear whether or how the quest for meaning or purpose is connected to the search for a relationship with the mystery or God. It generates our sense of unity with and a reverence for all existence. Akkamahadevi has adopted a method of love to quest for relationship with Siva. Her erotic spirituality was an attempt to achieve spiritual depth, and ideally perfection or it was the practice of attempting to achieve contact with Siva. It also portrays her religious self-image. Therefore, her way of devotion was emphasized a particular aspect of devotion that is related to love. It is called *viraha*, the experience of separation. From the prism of A. D. Coffey we can trace that Akkamahādevi's spirituality is within the marriage and family therapy domain it was a relationship dimension.³⁰ In the context of Akkamahādevi's spirituality it is necessary to note that her experience is more to do with sexuality as Helminiak opines, "the sexuality is thought to foster or hinder one's spiritual growth to the extent that one's sexual behaviours accord with religious belief and ethical requirements and thus enhance one's intimacy with God."³¹ It is the picture which we see in her *vacanas*, where she has brought

out her enhancement of spirituality and intimacy with Cennamalikarjua.

Phenomenon of Akkamahādevi's spirituality

When she was to enter the mantappa Prabhudeva gives her a test, not to test her, but to show her purity to the others present. Who, he asks, in a beautiful poem, is your husband? Akka replies: they wed me to a groom by name Cennamalikarjuna.

Guru was the kinsman to officiate
Linga the bridegroom, I the bride;
This all the world do know.
My father and my mother were
The innumerable saints.
Behold they gave me to groom becoming
Prabhu's house
Therefore Cennamalikarjuna is my Lord
No other husbands in the world
Are taught to me, Prabhu.³²

Once she accepted into the mantappa Akkamahādevi longs to see her divine mate to unite with him. It was her long desire to see with the eye of knowledge wide open and she will come to the experience of the infinite and absolute one. Subsequently as she meets her divine lover she sings:

The hunger of my eyes is now appeased
Seeing the radiant form...
I have been saved
I call it not touch,

³⁰ T.D. Carlson and M.J. Erickson, eds., *Spirituality and Family Therapy* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth, 2003), 35.

³¹ Helminiak, *Sexuality and Spirituality* . . . , 119.

³² R. Blake Michael, "Women of *Śūnyasampādane*: Housewives and Saints in *Vīraśaivism*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103/2 (April-June, 1983): 363.

Nor yet absence of touch...
I call it not Thou or I
Once I have become one
With the absolute linga...
Drained of all wish to say aught more-
I am.³³

However, as she goes along with her destiny she reaches there. Having encountered with her Lord she experiences the erotic moment in her spiritual journey as she expresses in her songs, her love for her beloved is that of wife for husband, sensual, even erotic:

Wellbeing was the bed, glances ornaments,
Embraces for clothes, and
Kisses nourishment;
Love talk was betel leaves,
The ardour of passion the unguents;
The union with Cennamalikarjuna, jasmine tender,
Is supreme felicity, O mother.³⁴

Further, we see in her songs that it is explicit about her love toward Siva, where she has brought out the inner spiritual urge which she had in her spiritual life. She compares Cennamalikarjuna with the husbands of the world and comments that the husband of this world is nothing to her. Presumably it could be the utmost devotion how well she expresses her love as,

O Sir, I love the beautiful one,
The formless one
Who is beyond death and dissolution...
Cennamalikarjuna is my groom;

³³ Michael, *Women of Śūnyasampādane* . . . , 54.

³⁴ Vinay Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva: Vacanas of Akkamahadevi* (Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 118.

All other husbands in the world
Are naught to me.³⁵

Akkamahādevi challenges the conventional ideal of *pativrata*. One may argue that they substituted the divine lord for their human husbands, but there is a significant difference in that the divine husband is not seen as a patriarchal monarch. Akkamahādevi have opened up an alternative path for women who may not want to follow the traditional *pativrata* ideal and condemns the physical body, as,

Why do you damn yourself for love of this body!
Think of Chenna Malikarjuna, you fool...³⁶
So Chennamalikarjuna the beautiful is my husband
Take these mortal husbands that decay and throw them into the furnace!³⁷

Spirituality of Akka: The Image of Marital Union or that of Adultery

The idea of Akkamahādevi's poetry is the devotion to God in the form of a love relationship. On the one hand it was a separation from her lover and she expresses her anguish, not because that God does not love her in return but because the God is apparently occupied elsewhere, which was unbearable. The unbreakable relationship of Akkamahādevi with Siva was constituted by her people as she expresses in her *vacana*:

³⁵ Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva* . . . , 129.

³⁶ R. H. Lesser, *Lesser Known Saints and Sages of India* (Delhi: ISPC, 2000), 51.

³⁷ Swami Muktirupananda, "*Akka Mahadevi*" *Saints and Mystics* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2005), 241.

Before my breasts had grown
before I had begun to feel shy
my people had got me married
before I could feel I was a woman
my people had got me married
to Channamalikarjuna of Srishaila.³⁸

At the same time she also got married with Kausika, it seems that dual marital status. But married with kausika is being regarded as the marriage rather than with Siva. However, it is being identified that she married with Siva later on but her *vacana* makes explicit that Akkamahādevi married with Kausika later. On the other hand it is remarkable that she used in this respect both the image of marital union and that of adultery. Her *vacana* give a picture of the tension between her married life with Kausika and her longing for union with the Lord of jasmine. Being absorbed in devotion next to family life is regarded as a kind of extramarital relation: “inside my husband, outside my lover.” However, most poems in this category express the happiness that Akkamahādevi experiences in the relationship with the God who is to her the real husband. One of the clearly erotic verses in her oeuvre may illustrate this point.

Blissful is the bed, his looks are my jewels,
his embrace my clothing,
His kisses are my food, his sweet words my stimulant.
Yes, passion is my perfume.
The union with the Lovely Lord of the Jasmines is really supreme pleasure.³⁹

This form of devotion is called *satipatibhakti*, devotion as the love of a woman for her husband. Akkamahādevi also express her faithfulness and says to her Lord,

You are my husband
And I your wife
There is none other
In love have I followed you
When strange men lusted after me and held my hand
How could you
My husband
Bear it.
Tell me Channamalikarjuna
When other men were dragging away the woman
who should have been your arms
lord of kindness
was it right for you to stand watching.⁴⁰

The mystical union with the deity is described in a figurative language that is derived from experience with marital happiness. Love life supplies the images by which spiritual achievements can be brought into sight. Akkamahādevi regards the lord of the jasmines as her real husband. Just as intimacy and lovemaking with a human lover give happiness, so the bond with the divine husband brings about the highest enjoyment. Akkamahādevi is not the only *bhakti* poet who employed this special type of spiritual language. Particularly women mystics had a preference for this kind of devotion.

³⁸ O. L. Nagabhusana Swamy, ed., *The Sign: Vacanas of the 21st Century* (Prasaraupa: Kanada University-Hampi, 2007), 30.

³⁹ Vinay Chaitanya, *Songs for Siva: Vacanas of Akkamahadevi* (Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 107.

⁴⁰ Swamy, ed., *The Sign: Vacanas of the 21st Century* . . . , 35-36.

Assessing the Erotic Spirituality of Akkamahādevi

By physicalising the mind heart union through body there is radicalising of classical Kanada conventions in order to challenge religious and social gendered expectation. Particularly in the ways Akkamahādevi utilises the image of body she can be interpreted as utilizing common gender assumption to subvert them. She argues that it is her male God who fulfils her biological, social cultural identity as woman. At the same time it also shows that as a woman she is quite dependent on male God to achieve the desire of her heart. The ideal womanhood is ultimately fulfilled in relationship to Siva, a male God. Moreover, woman hood becomes the lens which the divine human relationship is viewed and is the basis for Akkamahādevi.

Based on the biography her marriage was distasteful to her, we are told, as inwardly she was married to Siva, and Kausika's carnal desire distressed her. Siva was babe magnet for Akkamahādevi, with whom she wanted to be united and her only desire was for Siva. For her, Siva was dream boat, where she was longing to reach. She recognized the alluring features in Siva, therefore she made up of her mind to be unite with Siva than human. This demonstrates her infatuation, which contains her intimacy with Shiva that was unrequited. Though her adoration was pretty much ardour and thus its uncanny but frequently addressed in a way that we found Śhiva was a compatible partner.

The world and human was body blow to Akkamahādevi to her spiritual journey and

readily she left all. By leaving entire relative and dear one she has not feel bummed to them. Simultaneously, it is human tendency to express that her detachment was crestfallen to her parents and husband and failed to be responsible person. The disconsolate and gutted parents and husband are vividly express of her erotic spirituality. The pinnacle of emotional bhakti of Akkamahadevi can be said that female voice is reduced to emotion, which played vital role in her spirituality. But emotion or feeling is not only in woman but men as well especially in religious affairs. Her emotion was extremely relational and separation from beloved as he is hijacked by someone. At the same time it shows that he is far and trying her best to reach him with her all effort, here the vehicle, love and emotion is being used to obtain him. Her emotion was so intense in her devotion, she has not disturbed with any forces like society, people and worldly things. There is complete attachment to the Lord Śiva and it is explicit that she has emotionally, spiritually and psychologically attached that she has chosen Śiva as her beloved. The relationship is used as hook to become more attached; on account of this she was ecstatic about her attachment.

She was besotted with the lord Śiva and her love was not crush love. She had great love for Śiva and complete loyal to the Lord Śiva as ardent Hindu woman who is loyal to her husband. Śiva was idolized by Akkamahādevi and her love toward Śiva was moonstruck, therefore, she was obsessed with love and emotion. Moreover, she was possessive that she will be requited as well as she was completely smitten by Śiva. She worshipped

him from afar, which is surprised, because it seems very unlikely. Effervescent love of Akkamahādevi is unfathomable that constitute of the positive emotions and feelings are embedded.

Akkamahādevi was engrossed in her devotion and persuading incessantly was remarkable in the devotion of women, which is recognized in the life of Akkamahādevi. She piqued others to be devotee of her Lord even Kausika accepted Virāṣaiva and linga. Her interest on Śiva was so mystery and enigma it was due to her experience and from her young age as she was unaware of any God than Śiva. She was intrigued by knowing him through the constant devotion, which provided her incredible experience, thus she was chuffed by Śiva. Therefore, she preens even today through her vacana to the devotee to follow Śiva. It seems she was absolutely riveted by Śiva's greatness.

Some Concluding Reflection

The process of defining the term spirituality is quite relevant and at the same time it is difficult to trace out the method of spirituality. Akkamahādevi has used the method of love between her and Śiva. It is her ultimate way for knowing God and experiencing the divine human relationship. Her spirituality is beyond common people knowledge, she left the entire world including cloths and there is complete detachment. Therefore, she could be the fervid lover or *bhakta* par excellence. She stigmatized human body, dear one and entire world and accentuated the inner being, relationship and

union with Śiva. Her ultimate goal was to attain Siva in her life and adopted way through which she can reach. Thus, her spirituality was affiliated to Śiva and well accepted as well as highly mystic amalgamated with erotic devotion. Erotic spirituality is the best way of expressing her unperceivable spirituality. However, there is prospect to explore more from her *vacanas*, which provides an understanding of God and epistemology. Her experience is the source from which knowledge is generated, though it was the erotic spirituality. Her spiritual experience has related dimension and it was sacred than mundane and temporal. Therefore, women's experiences are vital category in feminist religious studies and theology. Experiences also can be used as source and norms for theology but experience cannot be taken as individualistic or exclusively one person.

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